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## How small and medium-sized family enterprises in the tourism sector develop inter-organisational relationships: a case study<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** The purpose of this article is to identify factors influencing the way small and medium-sized family enterprises in the tourism sector form and maintain inter-organisational cooperation and evaluate their importance. The study is based on qualitative data collected during 19 standardised in-depth interviews with representatives of family businesses operating in the Podhale region, one of Poland's major mountain destinations. The study's conceptual framework is based on Christine Oliver's determinants of relationship formation, which affect the way businesses establish inter-entity cooperation and achieve extended social embeddedness. Factors identified by the author include resource disparity, reciprocity, efficiency, stability, and formal elements. The study contributes to the literature on inter-organisational relationships by providing insights about the determinants of inter-entity cooperation in the SME sector and the functioning of family firms in Poland.

**Keywords:** inter-organisational relationships, family enterprises, tourism, small- and medium-sized enterprises, Podhale

**JEL Codes:** L14, L83, Z13

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## 1. Introduction

Since the legalization of the privatization system in 1989, there has been an increase in family entrepreneurship in Poland. A large part of businesses has operated to this day and achieved success. Most of these are micro-enterprises with a local scope, 10-20 years old (Lewandowska et al., 2016). In the meantime, in the tourism industry, the move towards cooperation developed relatively quickly and turned out to be a success factor for destination development (Selin & Beason, 1991). Small and medium-sized family enterprises (SMFE) cooperate in tourism due to the complexity of the industrial offering, which causes individual entities to be unable to meet the expectations by themselves (Selin & Chavez, 1995). Managers must be equipped with some entrepreneurial skills, be aware of what reserves they have at their disposal, and consider the network approach to meet the needs of the local market. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the mechanisms for establishing inter-organizational relationships within the tourism sector. However, this topic has still been under-researched, especially in the context of small and medium enterprises (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020a; Peters & Kallmuenzer, 2018).

This research question concerns which factors influencing establishing and maintaining inter-organizational relationships are recognized among SMFEs in the tourism industry to be most crucial. Accordingly, a literature review and qualitative research in the form of interviews with representatives of family businesses in the Podhale region (Poland) have been carried out. The research contributes to national and international research by highlighting the family, cultural and business ties that make up the tourism economy. The structure of the paper is as follows. Firstly, characterizes and gives the motives for the establishment of inter-organizational relationships (IOR), based on the literature review; secondly describes the small and medium-sized family enterprises in the tourism industry; thirdly chapter describes the methodology and the results of the qualitative research; then the findings from the interviews are confronted with the theory from chapter two and discussed.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Small and medium-sized family tourism enterprises (SMFEs)

The family business is the oldest form of doing business in the world and is also a vital driving force for the development of each country's economy (Sulkowski

& Marjański, 2009). Under this term, a range of companies that differ in size and industry can be founded. Family businesses are still developing as a business structure when the new generation takes the wheel. The complexity of family enterprises as research objects and their external environment requires researchers to apply a broader research perspective, as the research methods used so far are insufficient (Leszczewska, 2016).

A “family enterprise” is a sophisticated socio-economic unit identified based on legal, social, and economic features. In determining its essence, the ownership structure, rights to exercise control, a form of management, survival, and succession, relations between owners and employees, and relations with the environment are essential. According to Joseph H. Astrachan, Sabine B. Klein and Kosmas X. Smyrnios (2002), there are three directions of family influence: power, experience, and culture. They represent the components of the F-PEC scale.

Tourism offers many opportunities for family businesses, often embodying direct host-guest interactions at the family home or property (Getz & Carlsen, 2005). The existence of small and medium-sized family tourism enterprises (SMFTEs) in tourism has not yet been thoroughly studied. SMFTEs have a significant share in economic production and create jobs for the local community, especially in rural areas (Buhalis & Peters, 2006). According to Donald Getz and Jack Carlsen (2005), the expression “family business” is rarely used in tourism. No single line universally describes what SMFTE is (Morrison, 2000). However, it did not deny that the industry is currently dominated by them (Middleton, 1998).

Family businesses in the tourism sector offer services to people visiting their region (Kallmuenzer & Peters, 2018). The activities of these companies are primarily embedded in the province (Gibson, Lynch, & Morrison, 2005). It can even be noticed that these companies’ significant commitment to better promotion of the region (Garcia-Ramon, Canoves, & Valdovinos, 1995). One of the aspects that distinguish SMFTEs from other tourist enterprises is the reason for their establishment (Getz & Carlsen, 2005). Like family founders of companies, entrepreneurs seek to fulfil their ambitions and independence (Gibson, Lynch, & Morrison, 2005). However, when children or employees appear, the strategy changes. Mike Peters and Andreas Kallmunezer (2018) examine the hotel industry’s entrepreneurial orientation of family businesses. As a result of their surveys, it turned out that the most important for SMFTEs are innovation, being proactive, and autonomy. They attach the most negligible value to risk-taking and competitive aggression.

Family-owned enterprises have an influential position in the hospitality sector in many regions, itemizing rural areas (Andersson, Carlsen & Getz, 2002). Belonging to SMFTEs hotels, they accumulate about 80% of the service potential in Europe (Sala & Castellani, 2009). These include units with less than 25 rooms (Dominik, 2017). Joe Singer and Casey Donoho (1992) distinguish two types into which

they can divide. The first type is a family-centred business – where the company is a way of life, while the second type of business-centred treats marketing as a means of survival (Andersson et al., 2002). The essence of SMFTE is the presence of their dominant members (Chua, Chrisman & Sharma, 1999). The business goals of family businesses are different from the classic maximization of earnings (Andersson et al., 2002). In the first stage of the company's life cycle, the goal is to check whether this dream is fulfilled or will work (Aronoff, Astrachan, & Ward, 1991). Another thing typical for family businesses is the desire to achieve many goals, and not one as in the case of non-family companies (Tagiuri & Davis, 1992).

Agnieszka Sokołowska (2004) emphasizes the critical role of small enterprises in creating economic potential, generating new jobs, rationalizing resource allocation, and increasing the economy's competitiveness. They are characterized by high involvement on the part of the owners, which impacts the implementation of social responsibility. The social responsibility of small enterprises consists of three elements: honest communication, fair conduct, and relations with suppliers (Dominik, 2017).

## **2.2. Factors shaping and maintaining inter-organizational relations**

Inter-organizational relations are transactions and connections among or between organizations (Oliver, 1990). Barbara Gray (1985) defines this kind of collaboration as the voluntary pooling of resources between two or more parties to achieve a common goal. They can be concluded by a formal contract or informal, e.g., verbal contracts (Miller & Ahmad, 2000). Cooperation between entities can occur at various levels, from the smallest one between two SMEs to one where collaboration between large organizations concludes. It is also considered a process of joint decision-making by partners regarding the future (Gray, 1985). Various terms exist in the literature, such as cooperation, collaboration, interfirm relations, and alliances (Jamal & Getz, 1995).

There are many reasons why companies decide to enter into cooperation with other entities. In their work, Tazim B. Jamal and Donald Getz (1995) refer to two factors influencing it. The first is the exchange perspective. According to them, the relationship is formed when both sides perceive mutual benefits or profits from working together. The second factor is the resource dependency approach, which controls limited resources better. Nevertheless, it would be hard to find institutions that match one of these two theories because companies prefer mixing them (Schmidt & Kochan, 1977). Besides, introducing such relationships blurs the differences between suppliers and demand (Pechlaner & Raich, 2012).

Organisations wishing to maintain their market position and remain competitive are forced to cooperate (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). Especially in the case of SMFEs, because they cannot compete without other companies' support (Etemad, Wright, & Dana, 2001). Unlike non-family businesses, SMEs cannot obtain such monopoly power (Baum, Calabrese, & Silverman, 2000). These companies cooperate because they want to develop their business and accelerate innovation (Gnyawali & Park, 2009; Kim, Sexton, & Marler, 2022). The potential partner opens access to new skills, knowledge, and information necessary for the organisation's development (Miller & Ahmad, 2000). Both sides cooperate because they know their client's needs and how their environment works, what is risky and what is not (Kim & Parkhe, 2009).

Christine Oliver's study (1990) presents six factors influencing the formation of the partnership. The first speaks of the need to meet the requirements of law or regulation set by the government. In this case, the organization was forced to cooperate, which may not have occurred in other circumstances. The second factor refers to limited resources and which company has more control over the relationship (Boje & Whetten, 2016). Another deals with reciprocity, emphasizing collaboration and coordination between parties instead of domination or control (Oliver, 1990). Such action aims to achieve collective intentions, which cannot be accomplished when the positions are unbalanced. It is where the theory of exchange comes into play, from which the very essence of inter-organisational relationships (IOR) arises (Emerson, 1962). The author also draws attention to operability. However, she categorizes it as an internal factor. It bases on multiplying the ratio of raw materials used for production with finished products. This factor considers the transfer of transaction operations to the broker. Depending on how many assets pass between the partners, the transaction costs and their amount may increase (Oliver, 1985).

The last factor in Oliver's (1990) study is legitimacy. According to her, the environment influences organizations to justify their actions. This motivation motivates SMEs to create relationships with other companies on specific standards and principles to prove their legitimacy. If the partner is a company with a recognized brand, this combines prestige, reputation and how the company is perceived (Crawford & Gram, 1978). Most of these possibilities are formed by external factors, except for productivity (Oliver, 1990).

SMFEs can establish different types of inter-organisational relationships (IOR). The most basic is the vertical relationship, the agreement between buyers and suppliers (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). In the research of Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos (2011), IOR is examined, paying particular attention to the existence of co-exploration and co-exploitation features. The first form, co-exploration, represents flagship cooperation aiming to conceive new know-how and

operations (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). The prime concern is innovation and knowledge. It assumes learning from and about the partner (Inkpen, 2002). Based on the co-exploration spirit, the relationship lasts long or short, depending on how long it will take to terminate the learning process (Khanna, Gulati & Nohria, 1998). However, innovation and a turbulent environment cause this form to be risky (Thompson, 1967). Mutually-exchanged knowledge occurs between partners (Thompson, 1967). It results in continuous communication between parties that engage a few people (Nonaka, 1994).

Nevertheless, such contact requires private relations because it facilitates reacting to variations (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). Co-exploitation is described as a crucial collaboration that uses knowledge already gained by the parties, the same with operations contrasts with the first one (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). The core focus is on their own experience and expansion. Assets are of the highest value, mainly when they are responsibly managed. As a result, partners feel more relaxed and engage more in conjoint activities (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). Such efficient resource management may cause enterprises' developmental slowdown, a gamble of co-exploitation. As opposed to co-exploration, partners decide idiosyncratically, hence the mutual dependence waves (Thompson, 1967). It bases on already settled norms and knowledge, and more people might conduct the communication process because it does not demand closer relations.

The literature review revealed that IOR possesses either some drawbacks. Jamal and Getz (1995) identified the problem of legitimacy and power. The difference in value orientation might be the obstacle to achieving the conjoint solution (Brown, 1991). On the contrary, opportunism and learning asymmetry could decrease the benefits of cooperation (Arnold et al., 2019). To benefit from collaboration, both parties should engage and give something to each other. Primarily it concerns the flow of information. Among companies those scholars have surveyed, some pointed out that trust and shared common values are inevitable in IOR because it opens up people and fosters the information-sharing mechanism. The complexity of managing IOR is connected with aims, trust, structure, leadership, autonomy, and accountability (Vangen & Huxham, 2003). For that reason, the skills and experience of managers may influence the outcome of collaborative work (Vangen & Huxham, 2003). According to scientists, partnership directors may manipulate the opinion of other members and decide without asking them. This issue may also affect networking, as managers choose who is sufficient to be informed (Vangen & Huxham, 2003).

Factors supporting the maintenance of IOR are summarised in Figure 1, together with the positive and negative aspects of the collaborations.

Regarding tourism destinations and operating business activity, it is worth mentioning the phenomena of social embeddedness. Katarzyna Czernek-Marszałek (2020a) defines it as a stable and complex relationship between the



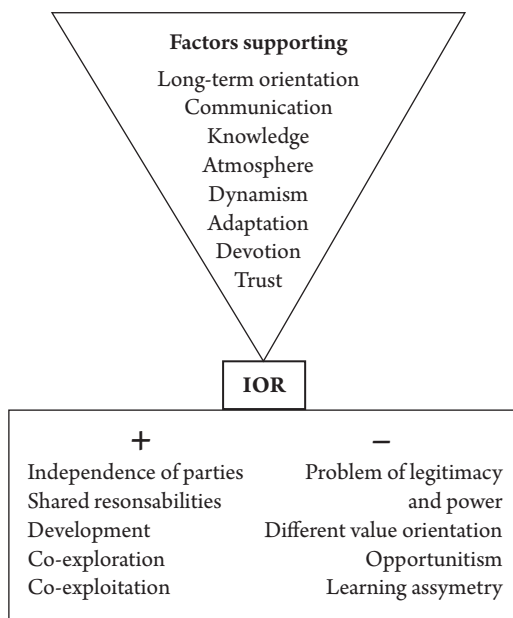


Figure 1. Positive & negative aspects of IOR and factors supporting it

Source: own elaboration based on Arnold et al., 2019; Boje & Whetten, 2016; Emerson, 1962; Inkpen, 2002; Nonaka, 1994; Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011.

entity and the social community based on tradition. Moreover, many sources explain it by comparing social embeddedness and its antonym (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020b; Dubini & Aldrich, 1991). However, the elements of this phenomenon emerged in different articles, like trust, information transfer, and mutual problem-solving (Hadjielias et al., 2022; Hurtado-Palomino et al., 2022). The core benefits of social embeddedness are connected with trust in the IOR context.

Nonetheless, socially embedded relationships unfold due to local standards (Czernek & Czakon, 2016). According to Katarzyna Czernek (2020a), when partners feel that the link will not be a short episode, they are more compliant to keep investing in it. Enterprises with a developed network of relationships are perceived as reliable and outstanding (Czernek & Czakon, 2016). Arent Greve and Janet W. Salaff (2003) state that trust causes the exploitation of the already built cooperation rather than seeking new partners.

The Oliver (1990) model was chosen as the primary basis to determine factors affecting the establishment and maintenance of an agreement. The author presents general motives that suit the purpose of the study, but they lack ones addressed to the tourism industry. Nevertheless, the case study approach focuses on the researcher's attention to a specific place, so it is vital to consider the details that

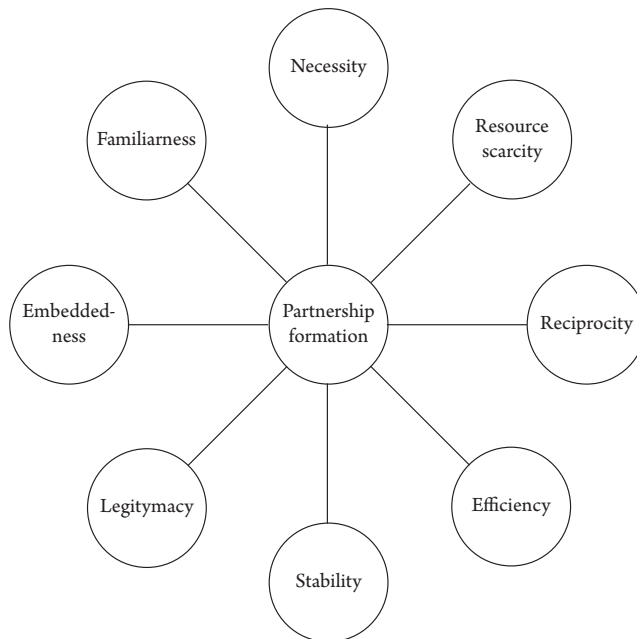


Figure 2. Conceptual framework

Source: own elaboration based on Czernek-Marszałek, 2020a; Oliver, 1990.

determine the uniqueness of the investigated relationship. Czernek-Marszałek's (2020b) research into the phenomenon of embeddedness has proved useful here (Fig. 2).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. The study context

Podhale is a geographic and historical region located in the southern part of Poland (Kruczek & Krauzowicz, 2017). The basin lies between Tatra mountains and watershed of rivers Orawa, Dunajec and Białka (Górz, 2003). The most important cities of Podhale are Zakopane and Nowy Targ (Kruczek & Krauzowicz, 2017). The name of the region comes from the local dialect and forges to the location, "under mountains," verbatim (Kruczek & Krauzowicz, 2017). Previously it was dominated by agriculture and breeding, mainly pastoral life (Górz, 2003). The Podhale became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century together with the development of tourism. Nowadays, this region attracts more visitors each year due to dynami-



cally developing tourist infrastructures, like accommodation facilities, gastronomy and attractions (Myga-Piątek, 2011). The unique folklore also constitutes the attractiveness of this region (Górz, 2003). Podhale was officially named a cultural region concerning the cultural distinctiveness of its residents (Kruczek & Krauzowicz, 2017). Inhabitants called Górale Podhalańscy are firmly embedded in this area, which translates into growing local traditions in everyday life (Górz, 2003).

### 3.2. The method

For this article, the interpretivism paradigm has been chosen because of the social and cultural aspects investigated in the research (Hansen, 2004). This approach requires the personal meeting and interaction between participant and researcher, which results in joint reality creation by contributors (Ponterotto, 2005). Furthermore, James T. Hansen (2004) describes this fact as not homogenous because it can be as many of them as perceivers. Next, the study applies the qualitative research methods perceived as an umbrella concept, covering all the elements of IOR establishment among SMFTEs (Nordqvist, Hall & Melin, 2009). The qualitative approach pertains to the number of different processes aimed at creating schemes necessary for analysing the experience of contributors (Ponterotto, 2005). Finally, the case study approach is the specific method chosen for this article. This tool can embody interpretive fieldwork (Nordqvist et al., 2009). Moreover, this approach allows studying within a particular procedure and context of change, bringing detailed penetration (Nordqvist et al., 2009). The researcher has the chance to allocate new ideas which might emerge during the study, together with identifying patterns (Orum, Feagin & Sjöberg, 1991).

The research was premised on the interviews, which were semi-structured and open-ended. Open-ended interviews encourage “knowers” to talk, even to start a discussion (Ponterotto, 2005). The questions are constructed to stimulate a more in-depth analysis of phenomena than following the yes/no answers format (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011). The purpose of this study was to capture the elements connected with establishing IOR between SMFTEs.

The sample of the article consists of 19 conducted personal interviews with the owners or representatives of tourism enterprises operating within the Podhale area (Table 1). The enterprises were selected based on earlier criteria (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011). The targeted group was family-owned enterprises with confirmed IOR. Assembling interviews lasted from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July to the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2019. The information about the respondent was checked in advance by doing a background survey or checking the webpage (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011). The main criterion that had to be met by them was the ownership structure. It means

Table 2. Sample description

No.	Gender	Age	Location	Type	Founding year	Generation	Active family members	No. of employees
A	F	47	Zakopane	Accommodation	1997	1	3	3
B	M	53	Zakopane	Retail outlet	1992	1	2	3
C	F	23	Zakopane	Gastronomy	1999	3	3	11
D	M	47	Zakopane	Retail outlet	2015	1	4	18
E	M	23	Bukowina Tatrzańska	Tour operator	2016	2	4	34
F	F	39	Zakopane	Accommodation	2008	1	4	4
G	F	43	Zakopane	Accommodation	1996	1	2	12
H	F	34	Zakopane	Accommodation	1996	2	4	5
I	F	30	Zakopane	Accommodation	2017	1	2	2
J	M	32	Zakopane	Accommodation	1999	2	6	240
K	M	52	Poronin	Accommodation	1996	2	3	45
L	F	25	Zakopane	Accommodation	2011	2	3	6
M	M	62	Zakopane	Tour guide, ski instructor	1990	1	3	3
N	M	55	Zakopane	Sport equipment rental, retail outlet	2007	1	4	7
O	F	27	Białka Tatrzańska	Accommodation	1991	2	3	6
P	M	52	Bukowina Tatrzańska	Accommodation	2012	1	6	26
R	M	50	Zakopane	Consulting agency	2015	1	3	6
S	M	58	Kościelisko	Gastronomy	1927	3	5	80
T	F	48	Zakopane	Accommodation	2009	1	4	4

NOTES: F = female, M = male.

Source: own elaboration.

that at least 50% of the share should be in the hands of the family, and the management sphere ought to be wholly composed of family members (Ponterotto, 2005). The searching method combined both snowballing techniques (Ponterotto, 2005) and activating contacts with local inhabitants, who were considered “knowers” or insiders (Ponterotto, 2005). Moreover, they could pass the number to other tourism enterprises they knew very well.

The interview guideline is divided into four main blocks and eleven subparts. Each part possessed the main questions and sub-questions for more in-depth analysis taking into consideration diverse perspectives.

Template analysis was selected to complement the content analysis (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015). The layout was created based on Oliver's (1990) and Czernek-Marszałek's (2020b) factors. The content of analysis has been shared into sections and main themes (Turner, 2010). Right after conducting the first five interviews, the initial template was created, which, in the following phases of data collection, was reorganised, extended, and rearranged. The themes were formulated based on the interview scenario and conceptual framework. Motives in the template are expressed as a general idea, which comes from analysing the repeating messages in the text, due to the researcher's perception, the themes are structured subjectively.

## 4. Results

Starting with necessity, most of the informants stated that there were no pushing incentives from higher organisations, but it was solely their own decision to create IORs. One informant specified: "[...] the decision to cooperate always resulted from an autonomous decision of the company founder" (Informant L).

The next one is resource scarcity implying access to other companies' resources, which are essential for conducting business operations. Most informants claimed that the partner's resources or services were crucial for their businesses and, often, translated into the ability to exist on the market. It was because they could not produce everything or perform specific tasks by themselves. For example, one informant running a pension said: "Because otherwise, we could not exist. A practical example - is a bakery. It brings us bread. We just have to have this bread. Laundry, well, we are a little bigger, so we cannot wash everything ourselves, so they have to help us a little bit too" (Informant H).

Informants, in terms of reciprocity, pertained to mutual goals, balanced linkages, and information exchanges and have more advantages than objections. It did matter whether the partner had the same aim regarding shared goals. This concerned not only the monetary objectives, like an increase in revenue but also the willingness to develop. As one informant said: "Common goals are important because we both want to earn" (Informant B). Nearly all the informants said there was no dominating side in the relationship. A few stated that it depended on the size of the partner. Informants are mostly informants. "There is equal cooperation" (Informant O). According to informants, the exchange of knowledge happens naturally in cooperation. "If they have any offers, they call. It does not happen regularly, but only when there is a need" (Informant I).

Furthermore, the results showed that efficiency was a motive for establishing IOR for SMFTEs. Through the response, informants meant service cost reduc-

tion, transaction cost reduction, saving time, sharing valuable resources, reaching more customers, outsourcing to partners, flexibility, and increased revenue. One informant stated that economic “issues are important, but this is not the only factor we consider. In a nutshell, it is about the price/quality ratio” (Informant L); “The advantages are that enterprises can reach more clients” (Informant E).

Stability often was mentioned when respondents referred to the sense of security, long-term oriented relationship, shared responsibility, and trustworthiness. Informants said: “Yes, because they are people you always turn to when something starts to crash. When you need help, they usually help you” (Informant E). “If we see that the quality of goods and services provided is adequate and allows us to provide services at such a level that we do not have to worry about customers, they will be dissatisfied. We will not be looking for new partners because of why” (Informant L). “There is trust. The fact that we know each other around here and the fact that we know if we are solvent, well, that is a big plus” (Informant H).

Informants indicated either legitimacy as the motive for agreeing. These motives included having a prestigious organisation as a partner, reputation, and social responsibility. Cooperation with a well-recognised company translated into the transparency of the owner: “Important are references or a favourable opinion after talking to another entity that already cooperates with this entity” (Informant J). Moreover, each informant tried to build its brand and sought a partner to facilitate or improve its work. One informant stated: “It certainly works both ways. As I said in the example of suppliers, reliability goes hand in hand with a recognised brand. Reputation is rarely on the outgrowth” (Informant J).

Social embeddedness forms the next broader category of motives that, in the case of this research, has a significant influence on relationships established by SMFTes. Respondents underlined a secure connection with the region and local culture during interviews. Due to cultural differences, this environment was closed and building a strong sense of affiliation. The social embeddedness translated into trust towards local partners. Owners stated that only partners from other parts of Poland demand formal contracts, as in an example: “For the most part, I will speak. Frankly, it is informal. [...] There are companies whose owners are from outside, not of highlander origin, and then, they are treating us differently” (Informant A). The majority of respondents underlined that the partner’s location was crucial in terms of short-time delivery, so the products were fresh and reachable. “It is easier to cooperate with those closest to you than with far-distant companies” (Informant B).

The main partners of the respondents could be divided into three main categories: buyers, suppliers, and business service providers. From the buyer side, there were all those entities to which respondents sold their product or service, among them tourists and other organisations pointed out: “These are whole various types: food, construction, some technical products, cleaning products, bakeries, distribu-

tors of various products” (Informant K). Also, many respondents established the IOR based on personal relationships. They underlined that the society of Podhale was closed, and everybody knew each other, which was very helpful in cooperating. One respondent said: “We have a family that does business too. That is our family too, but further. Anyway, cooperating with them is a default state. In the local culture, if it is a family member, it defaults to work with them. Alternatively, maybe that is how it affects” (Informant E).

The final part of the results refers to the respondents’ familiarity because they are a research subject as well. While describing the features of the family-owned companies, nearly all respondents said that ownership structure was crucial. One informant said: “Family is determined primarily by ownership. It is concentrated in the hands of our family” (Informant S). The next feature is relational management. Among the responses, family influence on management is higher sensitivity and empathy. “Another aspect is a slightly different way of doing business than the corporation – more relational and less exclusively profitability oriented [...]. We show more concern for building relationships and creating a positive image because, in the local environment, the company is identified with the family itself” (Informant J). Informants underlined that most families cared more about the business they do and the quality of service. It could also be observed in the IOR among companies owned by members of the same family. “There is trust and much support from the family. Family is important” (Informant I).

## 5. Findings and discussion

This research question was which factors influencing establishing and maintaining inter-organizational relationships are recognized among SMFTEs in the tourism industry to be most crucial. According to the question, research analysis verifies that Oliver’s (1990) resource scarcity constitutes an essential factor for SMFTEs to establish IOR. Through support from the partnering firms, the businesses can perform business activities and stay competitive in the market, which approves the statement of Hamid Etemad, Richard W. Wright and Leo P. Dana (2001). This theory also confirms one of the reasons for resource dependence, as mentioned by Jamal and Getz (1995). The aim is to control the limited resources better and complement them by the partner. This aspect proves the words of Jooheon Kim and Arvind Parkhe (2009) about the inhibition of the company’s operations due to limited resources.

The second is reciprocity which is meant for family-owned companies operating in the tourism industry. Findings confirm the other factor mentioned by Jamal and Getz (1995), which is the exchange perspective. It means the perception of

collaboration, bringing both parties benefits. This motive is also related to the social embeddedness introduced by Czernek-Marszałek (2020a). In terms of mutual gains, respondents mentioned the relationship between the community and local companies. As a result of social affiliation, SMFTEs count not solely on the development of their business but also on the local partner.

The influence of social and cultural dimensions and family elements on mutuality is also connected with the exchange of information. The reason for cooperation is that both parties know customers' needs and work environment (Parkhe & Kim, 2009; Miller & Ahmad, 2000). This motive reflects the concept of co-exploration presented by Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos (2011). From this perspective, collaboration among SMFTEs allows for learning from each other to build something new or rely on already created operations and know-how. It involves exchanging knowledge that leads to innovation (Grey, 1985; Kim et al., 2022). In the findings, the change did not directly state that one of the respondents implemented an innovative form of business activity thanks to the support of IOR.

Efficiency is likewise an essential factor for establishing IOR by SMFTEs. Most respondents saw the benefits of collaboration in improving the efficiency of business operations, which translated into both tangible and intangible benefits (Oliver, 1990). Just as Parmigiani et al. (2011) state, organizations wishing to stay competitive are somehow pushed into collaboration. For respondents, the possibility of reducing costs is significant. It is also connected with social embeddedness. Trust, created by the relationships in society (Czernek & Czakon, 2016), affects the form of contract signing, mainly in the way of a handshake (Inkpen, 2002). This formula results in transaction cost reduction (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020a).

One of the main findings of this research is the trust between partners. It is the essential base for each IOR to continue and be beneficial (Inkpen, 2002). Faith gives both parties the stability to conduct business, and in terms of problem-solving, it is a factor that influences every part of the IOR. Respondents had no objections to being dependent on suppliers because of the trust. The exchange of information among partners takes place because partners can be trusted – the pure form of the contract is preferred due to faith. The built relationship will last as both sides engage; the cause is the awareness that they are entrusted by the partner (Greve & Salaff, 2003). It is confirmed in the words of Alison Morrison (2000) that the trust in the alliance is the glue among partners that allows for economic interactions.

Stability is also essential for establishing and maintaining IOR (Oliver, 1990). The findings confirm that cooperation is a kind of security for the SMFTEs. It is connected with resource scarcity and other factors presented by Oliver (1990) because a partner was sharing his resources with the organization to help it survive in the market. According to Gray (1985), partners solve problems together and face the consequences. A few respondents said they could count on their partner



in a hard time. Both sides have to trust each other to achieve stability. It is another connection with social embeddedness. The findings show that with developed relationships and trust, the respondents are not willing to establish new IOR but prefer to exploit the one they had already (Greve & Salaff, 2003). Such an approach is consistent with the theory of Czernek-Marszałek (2020a).

Legitimacy was mentioned several times. However, it was not that much important as efficiency or reciprocity. Respondents cooperated with companies with a good reputation in the local or national market, but it was not a priority at the beginning of establishing the IOR. Quality of product and service offered indicated as main conditions. In numerous cases, the reputation of a particular company resulted from the social network. The size of the Podhale community, and the fact that they all know each other, facilitates the exchange of information and, consequently, allows for spreading “word of mouth” (Komorowska, 2003). According to Oliver (1990), cooperation with companies that have built reputations translates into better transparency of the SMFTEs. Unfortunately, none of the respondents confirmed that.

The last element of Oliver’s (1990) framework that will discuss is a necessity. This term stands for meeting the requirements of higher institutions. In the case of Podhale, this element did not indicate. None of the respondents felt forced, by the government, to create IOR. It was solely their voluntary decision. What is more, the structure of the local government did not offer any incentives to stimulate cooperation among SMFTEs.

While analysing the findings in Oliver (1990), the social embeddedness factors interweaved. This study underlines the strong influence of the culture, like trust and social affiliation, on how the SMFTEs establish and maintain IOR. The findings match all the observations of Czernek-Marszałek (2020a); trust constitutes the core benefit of setting the IOR. It influences communication positively, boosting efficiency, extending operations, and building the company’s recognition. In turn, social affiliation impacts the perception of the surrounding of the company.

The owners underlined their strong linkage with the Podhale region and the local community. They saw the strength of the social network based on people, not the revenue. It means they preferred to invest more time and effort in creating a solid relationship with their neighbours rather than being self-centred. It proves what Oliver (1990) and Czernek-Marszałek (2020a) published in their research, that having a secure connection with society creates more empathy, which leads to more altruistic behaviour. In the case of Podhale, it is visible that the SMFTEs are more into working with other local companies because of a better understanding due to cultural standards than with foreign organisations.

Familiarness constitutes another field of study about motives for establishing and maintaining IOR. The findings show that family-owned companies have the traits to build a strong brand that can become a loyal and trusted partner. Such



companies are perceived as more engaged and reliable (Andersson et al., 2002; Chua et al., 1999; Kallmuenzer & Peters, 2018). What was highlighted often in interviews is that family-owned companies create a unique atmosphere for family members and employees, in the case of the tourism industry, to the customers. The findings present that familiarity possesses more advantages than disadvantages. The family members can rely on each other, which is also caused by the flexibility of the working hours. They pointed out some challenges each family-owned company has to face, which confirm those presented in the literature, like disturbed work-life balance or changes between generations (Andersson et al., 2002; Kallmuenzer & Peters, 2018). SMFTEs characterise fairness, trustworthiness, sensitivity, and empathy for others' needs and feelings. At the beginning of searching for potential partners, respondents did not attach value to familiarity, but later on, they found it beneficial in cooperation with allies.

The results of this research may have practical implications for ameliorating the regional, national, and EU authorities' programmes to strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs in the tourism industry. What is more, it should also focus on strengthening familiarness and social embeddedness.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings match the framework Oliver (1990) presented, which includes necessity, resource scarcity, reciprocity, efficiency, stability, and legitimacy. However, this general approach misses the element that distinguishes companies operating in the tourism industry from others which is social embeddedness. Amidst all factors, resource scarcity, efficiency, and stability were the main reasons for establishing the IOR. While necessity, reciprocity, and legitimacy are indicated as the findings meet elements that support maintaining IOR, not all of the conditions that Oliver proposes. As the results indicated, social embeddedness played a crucial role by influencing both the private and work sphere of the respondents.

According to the literature, SMFTEs create and maintain IOR due to different motives. Six motives relate to Oliver's (1990) approach and one to Czernek-Marszałek (2020a). Therefore necessity, resource scarcity, reciprocity, efficiency, stability, legitimacy, and social and cultural dimensions motivate SMFTEs to create and sustain IOR with other companies. The location is significant regarding the region and the influence of the highlanders' culture. It also influences their need to develop the territory and strengthen its competitive advantage. Familiarness of companies has received a positive response from society regarding IOR and translates into better enterprise transparency.

According to the results, Oliver's (1990) six factors comprise an appropriate basis for investigating the motives to establish and sustain IORs. Results showed that the correspondence of interviews to the model varied, and some elements were more important than others. In this case, all factors could be applied to the companies operating in the tourism industry, with social embeddedness as an extension. Hence, the results correspond with the literature and enrich these findings with the individual perspective of the enterprise owners. This study contributes to the current knowledge about the family business concerning the incentives to create and maintain relationships by SMFTEs.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the literature on IOR in tourism by complementing Oliver's factor list with the social and cultural dimensions because they also impact IOR. This study contributes to the previous research of family enterprises with the qualitative form introducing a distinct perspective. The new motives that arose from the study are trust, a social affiliation that turns the attitude of SMFTEs from self-centred to relationship-centred, which translates into more altruistic behaviour aimed at developing the destination.

This study also possesses some objective limitations. The sample consisted of firms from a particular destination, i.e., Podhale region, and it was diverse in terms of the size and the scope of business operations. Perhaps, it could be elaborated on by investigating more similar firms. Moreover, as Podhale covers two distinct administrative units, choosing only one, i.e., urban or rural areas, could be more beneficial. Additionally, the term IOR covers many forms of cooperation. These forms address the different sizes of business activities. Hence, limiting the sample to one specific model would be more relevant. Therefore, the results could provide precise outcomes. The results could be more generalised if the sample size were more significant. Some questions prompted the answer, and some were difficult to understand for the interviewees.

According to the research findings and discussion, there is still space for further research. They would focus on the specificity of IOR in urban or rural areas and how the motives differ among them. Also, investigating the factors influencing a formation of a specific type of IOR, like supply chain agreements, strategic alliances, and new ventures, would draw a more colourful picture of the subject. From the cultural impact on IOR, further research could consider other destinations and compare the results with this study. Also, the structure of the questions could be improved to be more open but understandable.

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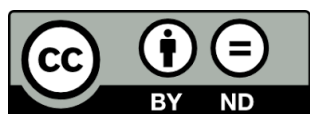
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## Rozwój relacji międzyorganizacyjnych z perspektywy małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw rodzinnych w sektorze turystycznym: studium przypadku

**Streszczenie.** Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja i ocena istotności czynników wpływających na sposób, w jaki małe i średnie przedsiębiorstwa rodzinne w sektorze turystycznym kształtują i podtrzymują współpracę międzyorganizacyjną. Badanie opiera się na danych jakościowych zebranych w trakcie 19 pogłębionych wywiadów ustrukturyzowanych przeprowadzonych z przedstawicielami firm rodzinnych działających na terenie Podhala. Koncepcja badania opiera się na modelu zaproponowanym przez Christine Oliver, który określa czynniki wpływające na sposób, w jaki przedsiębiorstwa nawiązują współpracę międzypodmiotową i zakorzeniają się społecznie. Czynniki zidentyfikowane przez autorkę to: dysproporcja zasobów, wzajemność, wydajność, stabilność i elementy formalne. Uzyskane wyniki stanowią wkład do badań w dziedzinie relacji międzyorganizacyjnych, dostarczając informacji na temat uwarunkowań współpracy międzypodmiotowej w sektorze MSP oraz funkcjonowania firm rodzinnych w Polsce.

**Słowa kluczowe:** relacje międzyorganizacyjne, firmy rodzinne, turystyka, małe i średnie przedsiębiorstwa, Podhale



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