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Fields of synergy - theory and practice of cooperation between social enterprises and business

1. Introduction

The issues of cooperation is one of the hot topics and issues of civilisation nowadays. On the one hand, it is rooted in the complexity and diversity of the social and economic environment, which is most often expressed in the number and diversity of co-existing structures and organisational and legal forms. On the other hand, there is the need to achieve objectives and maximise effects, i.e. to operate efficiently and effectively. The common denominator becomes an access, exchange and sharing of technical, organisational, economic and social potential. The context of managing, multiplying and improving resources and developing the skills and competences of cooperating organisations is also not without relevance. As well as the achievement of synergistic effects beyond the values developed on an individual basis.

In the social sciences, the role of inter-organisational relationships and linkages in a multi-sectoral environment is particularly emphasised. Creating, sustaining and developing relationships and networking between organisations is considered crucial to functioning in business and civil society

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(Thorelli, 1986; Cleland and Gareis, 2006). Pursuing and achieving efficiencies even requires active collaboration and cooperation between different entities (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). The inclusion of different partners from various sectors in the local networks of collaboration and cooperation is reflected in the business models (Prescott and Filatotchev, 2020). In turn, organisational proximity in the collaboration and cooperation networks enables the achievement of synergistic effects, as well as stimulating mutual learning and exchange of experiences (Boschma, 2005).

Considering the dimension of the organisational field, collaboration and cooperation occurs in institutional space at the level of communities of organisations. Referring to the basic interpretation of the organisational field, collaboration and cooperation goes beyond the organisational frameworks and governance systems of single entities. It encompasses communities of organisations contextually distinguished by certain peculiar characteristics and discernible and identifiable dimensions of co-existence in the institutional space (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, pp. 148-149). This perspective, as it were, breaks the previous stereotypes about collaboration and cooperation by creating a new space for the search for areas of synergy for mutual active engagement and inclusion in collective action. That is to say, it is not about institutional, organisational or subjective synergy, which may cause a natural reluctance and fear of actors potentially interested in collaboration and cooperation to lose their integrity or subjectivity in the socio-economic environment. Yet, it is about community in action, where a factor of cohesion is business partnerships, the common good, creativity and inclusiveness, built and developed in a complex and diverse environment.

In general, collaboration and cooperation in a broader sense connote the possibility of including and involving different entities from the different sectors in the joint initiatives (Sakarya et al., 2012). In a semantic sense, the terms can be considered to be related to some extent. Their basic meaning allows them to be used in describing various phenomena while maintaining the logic and reasonableness of the characterisation carried out. It is worth noting that collaboration and cooperation can be seen as a method or process. However, a certain ambiguity should be noted. Admittedly, the literature recognises collaboration as a method, while at the same time the interpretation of cooperation strongly emphasises the reality of working towards a common objective (Kozar, 2010). The basis for the implementation of the collaboration process is formed by shared ideas and perceptions. The cooperation takes place in the layer of common tasks and undertakings (Baker, 2015). Viewed from this

perspective, collaboration is a certain form of cooperation. Further, given the dynamics of the socio-economic environment, it becomes to some extent a purely philosophical concept. In turn, practicality, understood as utility, rationality or economy, naturally emerges from the essence of cooperation. The cooperation reflects acting together, functioning together, assisting and supporting. At its core, it is about mutual commitment, learning and sharing of resources.

Today, it is difficult not to agree with the statement that the cooperation in a multi-sectoral environment is gaining in relevance. The contemporary picture of a world struggling with economic, social, environmental and civilisational problems needs a joint action by entities from different sectors on the global and local level (Gigauri et al., 2022). While a global cooperation can be burdened by many political, economic or financial difficulties. The cooperation in the local environments appears to be a more accessible process, conditioned by a community of objectives and values, the openness of governance structures and the configuration of benefits, as well as the willingness and readiness of citizens. Moreover, it contributes to local development and fosters problem solving and tangible benefits for local communities.

The context of solving social problems and meeting the needs of local communities fits strongly with the essence of social entrepreneurship (Weaver, 2019). At the core of the general description of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial behaviour is identified. The literature highlights entrepreneurial behaviours aimed at achieving social objectives and those that serve economic objectives (Leadbetter, 1997; Zahra et al., 2009). Social entrepreneurship reflects a holistic approach where special importance is attached to local communities, the environment, local communions, etc. It combines social and economic objectives and strives to achieve tangible social benefits and economic efficiency that meet the needs of the local community groups concerned. However, social entrepreneurship needs a balance of social and business orientation. The fulfilment of the social mission, the achievement of objectives and the creation of value to serve society should be accompanied by the creation of competitive market value (Weerawardena and Mort, 2006, pp. 31-34). It is considered desirable to design innovative solutions that respond to needs and solve problems in the areas of social inclusion and reintegration, dysfunctional behaviour and socio-economic development (Chell et. al., 2010). Yet, enhancing competitiveness and developing the capacity to achieve economic objectives is also not insignificant. In this dimension, there is a growing emphasis on the need to strengthen the contemporary social entrepreneurial environment through networking with for-profit business.

Practice confirms that a collaboration between the social enterprise and business communities is possible. As examples of good practice one may point out, inter alia:

- a partnership model based on including social enterprises in the supply chain - an example of cooperation between Kompania Piwowarska and Zakład Aktywności Zawodowej from Piła (Muzińska, 2012),
- a partnership model based on mentoring and mutual exchange of services - an example of collaboration between Paged S.A. and the 'Być Razem' Foundation (Muzińska, 2012),
- a cross-sector partnership model: public, cooperative and private sector - an example of mutual collaboration between public employment services, social cooperatives and business in the Italian province of Trento to scale the benefits for social entrepreneurs and business and groups at risk of exclusion (by including social entrepreneurs in supply chains, sourcing employees, activating people at risk of exclusion and supporting their return to the open labour market) (Cibor, 2014, pp. 10-13, 28).

Given the above examples, it seems desirable to look for areas of real cooperation between social enterprises and for-profit business. Facing contemporary social, economic and environmental challenges, it is hard not to agree that social entrepreneurship and civic activation play an important role. The cooperation between social enterprises and business becomes all the more necessary in view of the current multicrises. This is not only a way of strengthening potentials or scaling up benefits. It may be a harbinger of a change to come, as a sign of evolution in entrepreneurial philosophy and the role of social enterprise and business working together in the development of the local socio-economic environment. The practice of cooperation between the social economy sector, especially social enterprises and the commercial business sector is a relatively new emerging area of social and economic practice and a new field of research exploration. Addressing this topic seems to be a contribution to a new field of research related to management science and research of an interdisciplinary nature.

The need to build sustainable, stable and long-term relationships between social business and for-profits business prompts the recognition of a multidimensional space for the cooperation. This multidimensionality is primarily due to the diversity and dynamism of the socio-economic environment and the complexity of the problems and needs of the local communities. The preparedness and possibility of real involvement in joint activities is also not insignificant. It can be assumed that the boundary conditions for cooperation are partnership relations,

voluntary and conscious involvement, mutual benefits and synergistic effects. It is difficult to cooperate effectively on the basis of 'unhealthy' subordination, unequal treatment or a lack of willingness to take risks and responsibility. It seems necessary to develop clear principles of cooperation, where social enterprises step out of their often naturally assigned role of 'needy' and business does not take on a purely supportive attitude.

The practice of collaboration between business and social enterprises provides many examples of initiatives involving, for example, the lending of unnecessary resources, charitable actions or occasional material and financial support. Such initiatives are directly in line with the idea of corporate social responsibility - CSR (for more on CSR see: Hopkins 2006; *EC Communication - A renewed EU strategy 2011-2014 for Corporate Social Responsibility*, 2012; Asemah et. al., 2013; Leoński, 2019; Riano and Yakovleva, 2020; Haski-Leventhal, 2021; Dathe et al., 2023). They respond to the needs of particular groups of local communities and also solve, to some extent, social, economic or environmental problems at the local level. However, the cooperation involving real collective action still seems to be not fully recognised. Especially when it comes to building sustainable and long-term relationships in a network of local cooperation based on a community of objectives and values, partnership, inclusiveness and synergy. The objective of the study is to conceptualise a viable cooperation between social enterprises and business. The research assumed the possibility of implementing the following research question, it is possible to define a model of cooperation between the social economy sector and commercial business based on synergy? It can be assumed that carrying out considerations in the direction of searching for areas of cooperation for the identification of conditions conducive to the implementation of effective and efficient joint activities fills the existing research gap.

2. Fields of cooperation between social enterprises and business - theoretical research

One naturally emerging area for the cooperation of social enterprises and business is the provision of services. The search for high quality services as well as the need to optimise and rationalise operating costs encourages outsourcing. Outsourcing is one concept widely used in particular in the private sector. Organisations are now integrating outsourcing into their business management practices and risk models. They are commonly developing effective tools for analysing and evaluating service processes to determine outsourcing potential (Taponen and Kauppi, 2020). Outsourcing occurs in a networked environment

between partners. Hence, it becomes necessary to pay attention not only to the organisational and environmental dimensions of outsourcing, but above all to the complexity and dynamics of the social processes that are taking place (Marshall et al., 2005).

In the wake of synergies, outsourcing becomes not only a specific form of sale and purchase transaction where a highly specialised entity takes on services outsourced by a business partner. However, above all it allows the hiring and use of unique competences, which leads to increased efficiency. It emerges from the nature of outsourcing that cooperation between social enterprises and for-profit business is possible. The perspective of professionalisation of services and the development of specialised competencies encourages reflection on the role of social enterprise and for-profit business in outsourcing.

Apparently, it may seem that it is primarily commercial business that will provide services to social enterprises. The rationale for such an presumption can certainly be the need to compete in the market, to improve internal potential or the rationality of resource management. As well as seeking a partner rooted in the local environment due to, for example, the need to shorten supply chains. Social enterprises strongly pursue external contracts, which usually results in low-budget offers. Although it is worth noting that cost is not always the main rationale for outsourcing (Wilding and Juriado, 2004).

Role reversal when social enterprises outsource service processes is hypothetically possible. However, it is worth highlighting that in outsourcing, competence is important (Wilding and Juriado, 2004). Meanwhile, social enterprises are striving to integrate resources and operational capabilities. They are investing more and more boldly in competences, skills and knowledge and improving their production capacity (Roelants and Bajo, 2002). Which leads to strengthening their position as a reliable and strong business partner. Such a perspective not only opens up opportunities for increasing transaction volumes. It also becomes feasible to integrate social enterprises into value chains created at the local level. Whereas outsourcing serves to co-create value and maximise the utility of services (Luo et al., 2022). It is worth emphasising that engagement in joint activities stimulates processes of knowledge and skills transfer and mutual learning. The cooperation is increasingly becoming a business and social justification. The image of the social enterprise as a weak link in the supply chain is slowly falling into oblivion.

In turn, given an access to modern technology and know-how, outsourcing of services enables the improvement of operational techniques and technologies. For social enterprises and for-profits businesses working together, this is often

an opportunity to enrich the array of competences with a minimised investment risk. Which in turn promotes optimisation of employment. Whereas for a social enterprise, the opportunity to increase employment of people at risk of exclusion responds to the need for social and occupational integration and reintegration. In outsourcing, the cost of service processes is analysed already in the planning phase, after all, the impact on employees, customers and communities is calculated (Marshall et al., 2005).

The perspective of service outsourcing corresponds closely with resource management - another potential area of cooperation. Outsourcing theory highlights the possibility of lending resources of the organisation to an external entity (Greaver, 1999, pp. 3-4). Which, in the case of social enterprise-business cooperation, means that a mutual access to key resources such as knowledge, skills and experience can contribute to synergistic effects. It is worth emphasising, however, that at the core of cooperation in outsourcing is the integration and efficient allocation of internal and external resources (Luo et al., 2022). The creation of conditions conducive to the use and multiplication of the material resources and social capital of the cooperating entities is also not without relevance. In particular in the context of improving management systems where there is a mutual feeding of potentials and organisational culture with new values.

The cooperation of social enterprises and for-profit business in the area of resources fits strongly into the trend of the sharing economy. It is common for the sharing economy to be recognised as a new e-commerce business model (Chang and Wang, 2018) in which previous stereotypes such as, for example, only owning resources on one's own guarantees their availability, the use of resources only by the owner confirms their usefulness, etc., are broken down. The literature highlights the important economic, social and environmental impacts of the sharing economy. For example, Mokter Hossain's (2020) research based on a systematic literature review made reference to the creation of innovative business models and the search for unique revenue streams against the background of the practical application of sharing economy ideas in accommodation and transport services. The analysis of sharing economy business models was reflected in the research of Minttu Laukkanen and Nina Tura (2020). Creation of sustainable value as minimising negative environmental impact, increasing social well-being and achieving economic benefits was considered an interesting reference.

The cooperation of social and for-profit enterprises requires the design of modern business models based on the flexible sharing of resources. The roles

of resource provider and resource user are assumed interchangeably by the cooperation partners. That is, social enterprises and for-profits can both provide and receive resources. It is important that they dispose of resources jointly for the duration of the activities. Admittedly, the specificity of the joint activities and the resources mainly determine the role of the partners. Still, the cooperation implies joint and temporary management of pooled resources. However, it is worth bearing in mind that the sharing of resources can take the form of non-profit, for-profit or barter.

When it comes to non-profit sharing, it becomes necessary to refer to the experience of NGOs. These organisations fit naturally into the trend of the sharing economy. They focus on the collaboration and networking using the attributes of cross-sectoral, sectoral and community networks (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013). The context of resource sharing corresponds strongly with their pursuit of sustainability and the creation of environmental and social value. Importantly, sharing in this case correlates strongly with the efficiency and sustainability of their activities which are, after all, primarily oriented towards the local community (Zbucea et al., 2018). When cooperating, social enterprises and business make resources available for the duration of the shared activities. That is, the unpaid form is rather more frequent in the case of aid initiatives involving the donation of resources that are unnecessary or currently unused to entities in need.

The sharing of profit resources most often occurs in commercial business. Although it can also apply in typical social practices when stimulated by consumerism (Filipek, 2022). However, from the point of view of business practices, it arises not so much from materialism but from the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the capacity management systems of organisations. In the cooperation between a social enterprise and for-profit business, the profit-making provision of resources takes the form of a transaction cost (more on transaction cost theory in: Williamson, 2010) rather than constituting a classic burden for one of the partners.

Barter, on the other hand, is an interesting issue. It refers to the bilateral exchange of goods and services without using money. In practice, however, it fulfils important social and moral functions for equality and social justice (Valenzuela-Garcia, 2018). With this in mind, the cooperation between social enterprises and business can provide an alternative to resource sharing. When cooperating locally rooted entities exchange the resources necessary for the implementation of joint activities on the basis of partnership, mutual trust and responsibility. However, it seems that such a form of exchange could result in

an irreversible voluntary surrender of key resources and further e.g. transfer of their ownership.

When social enterprises and business cooperate, the problems inherent in the idea of sharing should not be overlooked. A key one is the context of resource sharing as a form of temporary sharing (Belk, 2010). As opposed to sharing when there is a transfer of property rights. Sharing resources could pose a threat to social enterprises and business working together. Other important issues in the practical application of the sharing economy include security, privacy, trust and risk (Chang and Wang, 2018). It is hard not to agree that similar problems although in a decidedly different dimension and context may also apply to the implementation of sharing activities. Entrepreneurs face the difficulties of acquiring tangible and intangible resources from outside on a daily basis. Insufficient relationship-building skills in the inter-organisational networks further hinder an access to resources. As part of the cooperation, business partnerships require a communion of objectives and values, openness of the organisational environment, mutual trust and accountability. However, the search for technical, organisational, information, financial and social resources externally will always be accompanied by risks.

Underpinning the recognition of the cooperation between social enterprises and business is also the practical implementation of an innovation approach. Admittedly, the literature strongly emphasises the need for social enterprises to adopt an innovation orientation. In particular, as a response to the need to effectively solve complex social problems (Perrini et al. 2010, p. 515). However, it is worth noting that innovation strongly correlates with the development and improvement of cooperating organisations, as well as fostering grassroots initiatives by citizens. In a far simplified way, the innovative approach in the field of social entrepreneurship can be expressed by discovering new, non-stereotypical and non-standard ways of recognising, identifying and solving social problems. From a business perspective, on the other hand, it involves designing new products and services, technologies and organisational and management systems. It can be assumed that cross-sectoral cooperation fosters the development of solutions that are both business and socially useful.

The perception of cooperation between social enterprises and business creates an opportunity for real strengthening of the innovation potential accumulated in the joint activities. At the same time, the synergistic effects achieved feed the development potential of each partner. With local communities in mind, the design of innovative solutions stimulates the scaling of social benefits, the

satisfaction of needs and the creation of significant values. Entrepreneurial activities therefore become a source of both product, process and organisational innovations, as well as social innovations.

The development of innovation is about change that brings benefit. Citing research on small businesses by Luamba et. al (2021), it is important to prepare the social environment, adapt technical and organisational systems, develop a marketing strategy and invest in technology development for increased productivity and profitability. As a result, positive changes can be expected in the local socio-economic environment in the form of, for example, increased employment and income. The cooperation of social enterprises and business in the area of innovation will require some organisational effort. However, the incentive should also be a potential increase in income as an opportunity for development as well as socio-professional integration and reintegration.

The conceptualisation of cooperation, where innovation enters into the joint operational activities, leads to the stimulation of innovation-oriented entrepreneurial activities. The cooperation of social enterprises and for-profit enterprises can represent a form of a temporary integration of internal and external potentials. Effective integration is not only achieved by making potentials available, but above all by enriching and multiplying their value as a result of the diffusion of knowledge and skills. This means that the essence of cooperation in the field of innovation includes the creation of inter-organisational partnerships and the disintegration of traditional knowledge and skills flow streams. Only multi-directional and multi-layered free flow streams allow new value to emerge. Indeed, one of the key conclusions of the analysis of the impact of innovation on business performance is to design innovations more effectively by acting together in the networks of partner relationships (González-Benito et al., 2016). As a result of the free access to know-how, production capacity and distribution channels, market opportunities are increased and the costs of innovation are reduced.

Considerations of service outsourcing, resource sharing and innovation conducted so far encourage attention to the common welfare. The interpretation of the common welfare is burdened by certain difficulties naturally arising from the moral and political choices of humans as individuals, members of the communion and society. De facto understanding of what constitutes the common welfare is only possible at the stage of analysing concerns and consequences (Simm, 2011). Which is not to say that cooperation involving joint activity between social enterprises and business does not generate added

value. The implementation of the common welfare fosters collective benefits in the sense of the wider community. Which, in the case of cooperation, means communion in the broader sense and values that are shared and beneficial to all (Finnis, 2011).

When approaching the issue of the common welfare more generally from the perspective of social enterprise and commercial one, some differences can be highlighted. The case of social enterprise implies the need to consider investment in social capital and the creation of civil society. A for-profit enterprise, on the other hand, enlarges intellectual capital by acting for the benefit of the communion of employees and, in a broader sense, society as well (Marek et al., 2023). It is worth noting that, in principle, for-profit enterprises are accountable to investors. The realisation of the common welfare, on the other hand, requires extending the optics to other stakeholders. Nevertheless, the cooperation between social enterprises and business can contribute to increasing the impact on the common welfare. That is, increasing the effects of joint activities serving the wider community. Also, it is likely to develop and multiply the common welfare to achieve even greater effectiveness together.

The concept of common-pool resources is also present in the literature (Ostrom, 2010). Forests, lakes, rivers etc. are identified as examples. The cooperation between social enterprises and business is intrinsically socially and ecologically oriented. That is to say, it should foster the protection of 'common pool' goods and counteract their thoughtless and excessive consumption in the scope of the joint activities implemented. On a broader dimension, preventing negative impacts on goods from the common pool is extremely difficult and goes beyond the scope of typical inter-organisational cooperation. While it may set a good example for the practice of other users.

3. Methods

The research on social entrepreneurship should be complex, multifaceted and interdisciplinary (Murphy and Coombes, 2009; Spear, 2006; Dacin et al. 2011). The following research procedure was developed to conceptualise real-world cooperation between social enterprise and business:

- theoretical research,
- assumption and research problem,
- selection of the sample and the research method,
- specific research.

Theoretical research enabled the identification of potential areas of cooperation. Outsourcing of services, resource sharing, innovation and the common welfare were subject to a characterisation. The highlighted areas were characterised against the background of the possibilities for social enterprises and business to implement joint activities. A deductive method was used. The interpretation of the theory and selected views from the literature allowed for a multi-faceted inference.

Conclusions from the theoretical research were used at the empirical exploration stage. An attempt was made to describe the practical dimension of the cooperation between social enterprises and business. The empirical research involved a detailed exploration of the potential for the implementation of joint activities. The following research assumption was made: it is possible to identify factors shaping the real cooperation of entities from different sectors for the achievement of synergistic effects. The research problem was to analyse the potential for cooperation between social enterprises and business in the areas of service outsourcing, resource sharing, innovation and the common welfare. The research question was: what conditions are conducive to the implementation of joint activities?

Empirical research was carried out with a group of 30 entities representing the social enterprise and commercial business sectors. The selection of the research sample was a purposive selection (non-probability sampling) and resulted directly from the declaration of willingness of commercial enterprises and social enterprises to cooperate with each other. Thus, such a research sample was selected by the research author's identification of entities declaring their readiness for practical joint cooperation in both commercial and social enterprise groups. The possibility of identifying the research sample was related to the author's participation in special networking meetings organized by social economy support centre in 2023.

The data analysis method consisted in developing the obtained answers in the form of a qualitative approach involving content analysis. Simple quantitative analysis was also used. However, the qualitative research approach was the basic form of analysis of the obtained primary data.

Social enterprises were overwhelmingly in the form of social cooperatives. Only three of the fifteen were associations conducting economic activities. Business was represented by fifteen enterprises in the SME sector, i.e. 3 micro, 3 small and 9 medium enterprises. The objects of the business included manufacturing and services. The research concerned enterprises with experience in the intersectoral cooperation (in this case understood as joint activities carried out by social and

commercial enterprises). The research was carried out in Poland, in the northern part of the Silesian Voivodeship. The research involved representatives of enterprises directly involved in the implementation of joint activities.

A categorised open-ended interview was used as the research method. The research was conducted in the third quarter of 2023 based on an interview questionnaire composed of 16 specific questions. The questions were asked according to an established order. They related to the practice of joint activities and were categorised according to the highlighted four areas of cooperation. That is, they covered the topics of service outsourcing, resource sharing, innovation and fulfilment of the common welfare.

4. Results

In the studies of cooperation in the area of service outsourcing, the following were taken into account: objective, quality, benefits and a change in the organisational and management system. Representatives of social and commercial enterprises determined the extent to which the objective of outsourcing was achieved. They were asked to take the perspective of the organisation they represented. Similarly for service quality and benefits. They described the impact of outsourcing on the organisational and management system as a positive, indifferent or negative change. The detailed results of the study are shown in the figure 1. In the group of social enterprises, all representatives declared the cooperation with business in the area of outsourcing. Among the commercial enterprises studied, three had no experience in this area.

The study confirmed that the cooperation in the area of outsourcing mostly consisted of outsourcing to the social enterprises. Businesses outsourced service processes achieving tangible benefits. However, the quality level of services provided by social enterprises was not always satisfactory. Seven business representatives were satisfied but for three, however, the quality of services was too low. Among the thirteen entities cooperating with social enterprises, all had outsourced services. None of them experienced the acceptance of service delivery from a social enterprise. Social enterprises were generating benefits from the services provided to business. Thirteen respondents indicated a high level of benefits. All unanimously observed an increase in service quality. Only three of the fifteen social entrepreneurs declared that they had handed over services to commercial enterprises for implementation. This case concerned the cooperation with micro enterprises. Overall, the entrepreneurs rated the effectiveness of these activities as high.

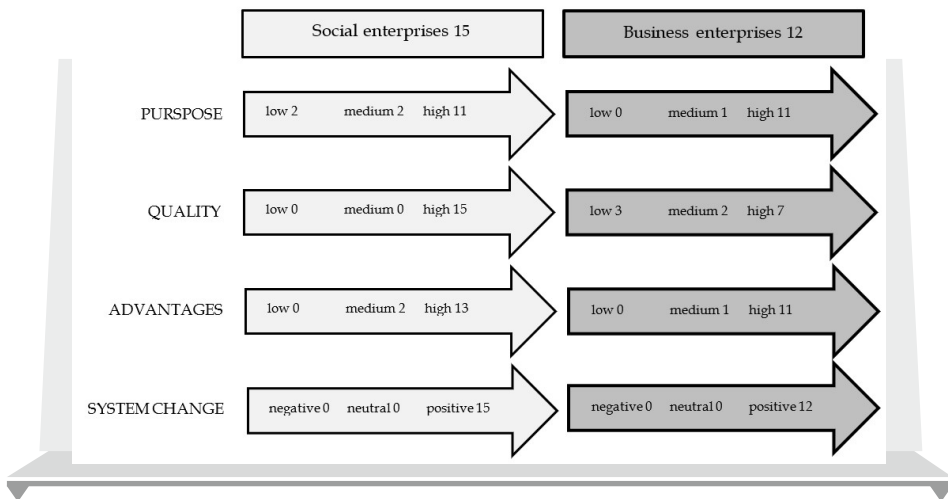


Figure 1. Service outsourcing research - first field of cooperation between social enterprises and business

Source: own study based on empirical research

As a result of outsourcing, there was a positive change in organisational and management systems in all companies having experience of outsourcing or taking on services for implementation. Social entrepreneurs highlighted the structuring and improvement of processes. Business, in turn, on the simplification of structures and procedures.

The study of synergies in the area of resource sharing included an access (i.e. temporary lending of resources for the implementation of joint activities and mutual disposition), management (towards rationality through a temporary allocation of resources to optimise benefits), creation of new knowledge and skills and refinement for future activities. The results of the social enterprise and business studies are presented in the figure 2.

The research confirmed that the implementation of joint activities required the sharing of own resources belonging to the partners of the cooperation. The majority of social enterprises (13) and commercial enterprises (11) under research declared a temporary communitisation of resources. Communitisation consisted of the open but not indefinite, free and unlimited use of resources. Commercial enterprises particularly emphasised their

own contribution of key and unique resources to the common pool. Social entrepreneurs, on the other hand, declared the lending of specialised resources in their view rare.

A slightly different distribution of responses was obtained in relation to resource management. All business representatives confirmed rational management. Which was no longer so obvious for the five social entrepreneurs. For whom the allocation of specialist resources did not quite translate into the expected benefits.

The vast majority of social enterprises, on the other hand, increased the potential of their resources and skills. Entrepreneurs actively participated in the processes of creating new knowledge. From a point of view of business, the cooperation was a source of resource improvement, in particular of an intangible nature.

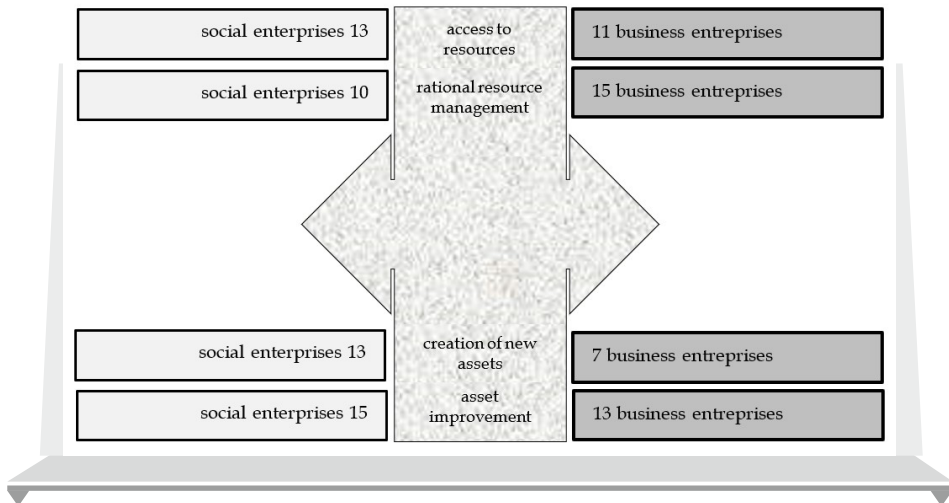


Figure 2. Resource sharing research - second field of cooperation between social enterprises and business

Source: own study based on empirical research

Innovation as another area of cooperation was expressed through innovation potential, modernity of products and services, unique competences and relational environment. The first three elements characterised the effects of joint

activities. The fourth concerned the ecosystem of the cooperation network. The following forms were used to describe the relational environment:

- centralised with a strong hierarchy and defined rules,
- chaotic without a clearly defined hierarchy and rules in place,
- ordered as to hierarchy but unpredictable and random as to rules, principles and activities.

The innovation research carried out showed a diversity in the evaluation of the effects from the implementation of joint activities. Representatives of social enterprises and business were mostly consistent in characterising the relationship environment. The detailed distribution of the responses is shown in the figure 3.

Participants in the study pointed to the strengthening of innovation potential. While in the group of representatives of social enterprises, the vast majority identified a cause and effect relationship between cooperation with business and the development of innovation design capacity. They unanimously confirmed the development of unique competences. Commercial enterprises, however, were more restrained in this assessment. Most of the responses obtained on innovation potential were of a status-quo. Only three commercial enterprises observed a development in terms of the design of social innovations. In these entities, there were also positive changes in organisational and management systems. The remaining majority paid attention to technical and technological innovation. Hence, they were accompanied by an opinion indicating the neutrality of the impact of joint activities. In their opinion, the technical and technological solutions created as a result of cooperation were admittedly innovative in nature. However, they reflected the innovative capacity of the business and did not significantly change in the potential.

Similarly, in terms of the modernity of products and services. Activities which were common to social enterprises were a source of improvement in the degree of novelty of the offer. Only three social entrepreneurs did not notice the expected change and two noticed a decrease in the innovativeness of organisational solutions. In contrast, representatives of commercial enterprises noticed a strengthening of social potential with new values, which translated into the development of unique competences and an increase in the innovativeness of social services. However, according to the majority, the modernity of products and services aimed at economic efficiency did not change.

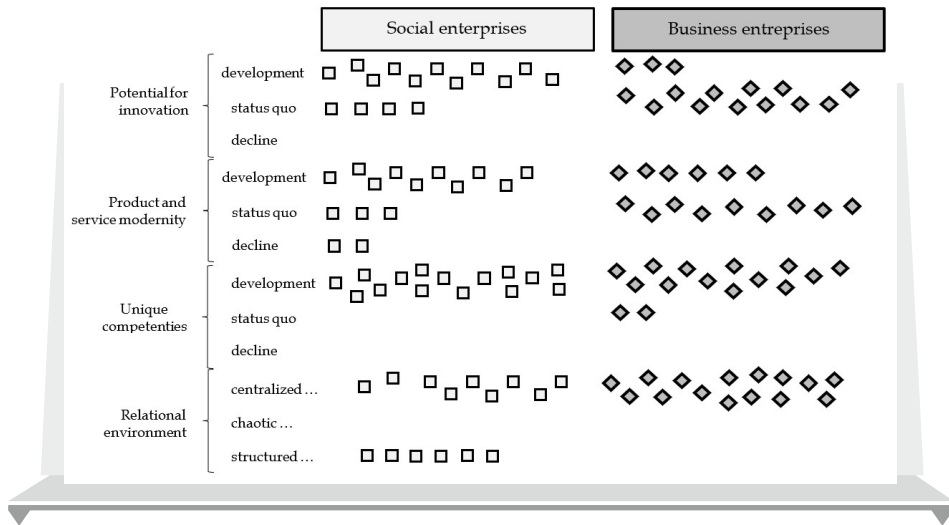


Figure 3. Innovation research - third field of cooperation between social enterprises and business

Source: own study based on empirical research

When viewed from a business perspective, the research confirmed a centralised and hierarchical environment of cooperation in the area of innovation. The majority of social enterprises formed relationships of subordination. Representatives declared cooperating with a 'stronger' partner and learning from 'better' ones. While commercial enterprises acted as a central hub based on leadership in the joint activities. The six social entrepreneurs experienced the cooperation in a slightly different environment. Although they were also accompanied by a strong hierarchy but there was a lack of clear rules and principle and the implementation of joint activities often resulted more from a coincidence than from careful planning.

In the research on the cooperation in the area of pursuing the common welfare, the focus of social and commercial enterprises was on achieving social benefits. The entrepreneurs interviewed were concerned with organisational culture, socio-professional activism and relationships in the socio-economic environment. Organisational culture against the background of achieving social benefits was presented as an attitude towards difference, behaviour towards

community needs and problems and a value system. Social entrepreneurs and business unanimously declared a positive change in the organisational culture. The context of activation was reflected in inclusiveness and strengthening the potential for socio-professional integration. The research confirmed that relationships are the basis for the cooperation aimed at achieving social benefits in the local environment. The detailed results of the research are presented in the table 1.

In most of the companies studied, an increase in acceptance of otherness was declared. The survey covered a wide spectrum, i.e. cultural, religious, linguistic differences, social norms and values, etc. Two social entrepreneurs reported a concern about insufficient tolerance of vulnerability in their view. In the group of commercial enterprises, dissonance was evident towards the acceptance of selected characteristics such as: strong sensitivity of socially oriented people, atypical view of the world, unrealistic treatment of phenomena and different ways of thinking than in business. Hence, nearly half of the business representatives did not perceive a change.

Table 1. Common good research – fourth field of cooperation between social enterprises and business

Elements	Charakteristics	Social enterprises	Business enterprises
Organizational culture	acceptance of diversity	13	8
	increased activity on community needs and problems	15	15
	enrichment of values	15	15
Socio-professional activation	development of inclusiveness of organizational structures	15	7
	increase in activity on the development of the potential of people and groups at risk of exclusion	15	10
Relationships in the socio-economic environment	permanent and continuous relationships	11	3
	occasional relations	4	12

Source: own study based on empirical research

In the group of respondents, all agreed that the joint implementation of activities resulted in an increase in the scope and scale of activity for local communities. Similarly, they all declared that structures were enriched with new values. Social enterprises highlighted e.g. technological values and further the need to ensure the usefulness of their potential. Business, on the other hand, has 'socially sensitised' organisational and management systems. It has added new social values to the culture.

As a result of the cooperation, all studied social enterprises increased their potential for professional integration and reintegration. Through the implementation of joint activities with business, they launched new jobs for people at risk of exclusion. They also increased training and vocational training

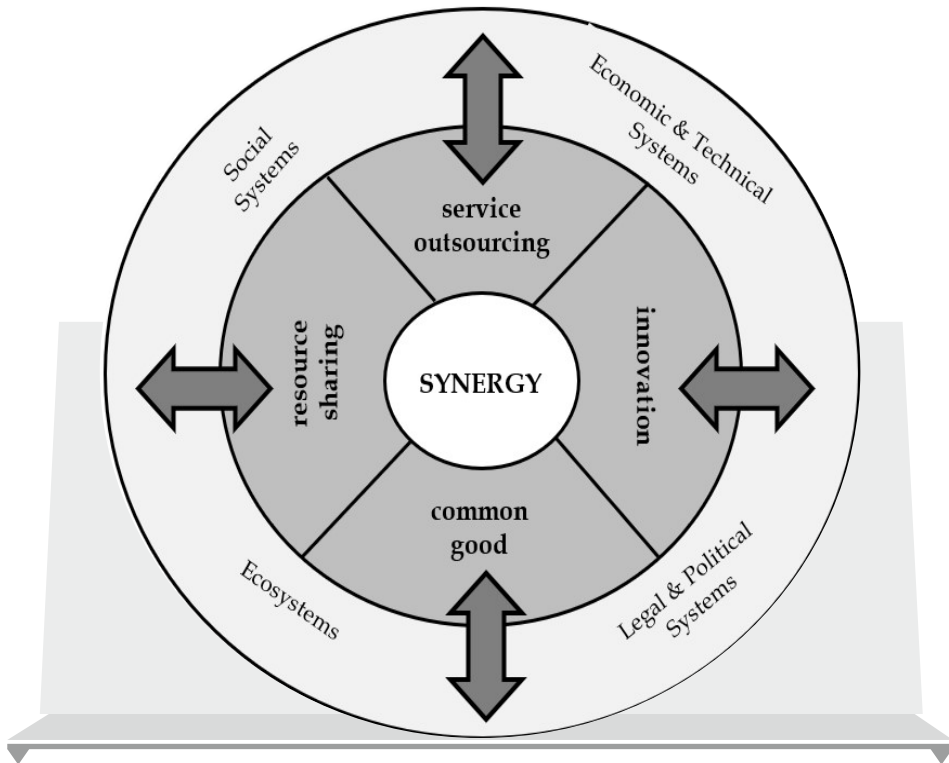


Figure 4. The 2-dimensional SE-BS cooperation model

Source: own study

workshops. The research also confirmed the active involvement of business. Ten representatives indicated the organisation of courses for people in need of occupational support. As well as reimbursement of training costs and support for self-employment. However, much less activity was observed in relation to the development of inclusive business organisational structures. The experience of social enterprises indicates that the cooperation with business is based on the permanent and continuous relationships. For four entrepreneurs, they were mostly of an occasional nature. The opposite response structure was obtained in the group of representatives of commercial enterprises. Three out of fifteen confirmed the development of relationships aimed at strengthening links with the social enterprise sector. However, the vast majority opted for rather uncertain and irregular connections. Moreover, the result of the research was the formulation of the following model: "The 2-dimensional SE-BS cooperation model" (figure 4).

The research results presented here (figure 4) allow to arouse reflection on the practice of operating in cooperative arrangements between the social economy sector and commercial business. Thus, they can contribute to increasing the effectiveness of activities, which can be associated with the achievement of social and economic benefits.

5. Discussion

The research confirmed the practice of social enterprises and business working together. And at the core of the implementation of joint activities were readiness and commitment, the creation and development of inter-organisational relationships, social and economic benefits and the improvement of development potential. Nevertheless, when viewed from the perspective of synergistic effects, not all the enterprises surveyed were satisfied with the cooperation. It can be assumed that the main problem on the one hand is due to the specificity of the entities. On the other hand, the internal organisational and management system, the organisational culture or the pool of experience may jeopardise the partnership, the commonality of objectives and values. Hence, partnership, awareness of potential benefits and risks, active involvement, mutual trust and responsibility can be regarded as key conditions for the cooperation.

In the area of outsourcing, social enterprises have overwhelmingly stepped into the role of contractors of services commissioned to them by business. After all, a wide range of institutional, financial and material support is

conducive to investment in the social enterprise development. Thus, it might seem that providing quality services is the hallmark of the sector. However, the research only partially confirmed the high quality of services. Given the small size of the research sample, it is difficult to make general conclusions about the reasons. Although it is worth exploring the usefulness of investments made by social entrepreneurs and the effectiveness of the support offered.

The scale of the positive impact of social enterprises on the local communities is enormous. Increasing business activity leads to the creation of new jobs and the retention of existing ones. What is the justification for the high activity of social enterprises in the implementation of business outsourcing. It is worth noting that the literature considers an excessive focus on the economic aspects of outsourcing to be a certain research limitation. For it is also important to create value for service providers and customers (Luo et al., 2022). From a perspective of cooperation, it also seems desirable to outsource when the business takes over the services to be provided. Research has confirmed this possibility. Which could result, for example, in reduced maintenance costs for technical facilities or improved organisation and management. As well as delivering value that is important to the customer.

Cooperation promotes sharing and better management of resources. In fact, research confirmed rational management. As well as the possibility of temporarily commoditising the resources needed to carry out activities that are shared and key to creating sustainable value. Admittedly, the literature points to research conducted to determine the potential for creating sustainable value in relation to the sharing economy (Laukkanen and Tura, 2020). However, in a way, the result of the qualitative study conducted is surprising due to the fact that the cooperation for most commercial enterprises was based on uncertain and irregular inter-organisational relationships. Social enterprises indicated permanent and continuous relationships which significantly increased their development potential.

However, it is difficult to categorically state that only permanent relationships are valuable and lead to significant positive social change. After all, one-off inter-organisational relationships can also appear valuable and useful to the local communities. However, as a rule they are unlikely to fit into the context of cooperation. For the development of innovative potential, the outsourcing of services or the implementation of the common welfare are embedded in a broader time horizon.

Participants in the study indicated that innovation and unique competences could be improved. At the same time, this situation occurred mainly in the social enterprises. However, this may be due to the nature of inter-organisational relationships. This is because it is difficult to effectively develop innovation in an environment of uncertain and irregular relationships. It seems, therefore, that still in the business space, social enterprise is considered a less 'attractive' entity. Hence, investing in permanent relationships is not considered beneficial for the development of innovation. Such an opinion, however, may seem misconceived. Indeed, research has confirmed the development of business competencies and the infusion of new values into organisational culture. What seems relevant for the design of social innovations involving commercial enterprises. Some doubts arise with regard to the description of the cooperation environment in the area of innovativeness. The experience of most entities indicates a centralised nature with a strong hierarchy. Although on the surface such a situation may seem comfortable for a social enterprise. Indeed, cooperating with a stronger partner is secure, encourages learning, acquiring new skills and competences. However, too strong a domination by business can threaten subjectivity and weaken autonomy. This is because imitation and adoption of models stifles creative thinking. Enriching the organisational culture of business with new social values seems promising for the pursuit of the common welfare. Otherwise, it is difficult to perceive the needs and problems of local communities on a broader scale. In turn, new technological values are conducive to improving the functioning of the social enterprise. Increased economic activity in the long term can lead to new jobs. The active involvement of business in occupational support for those in need is also a positive dimension of cooperation. Although when it comes to expanding the scale of socio-professional inclusiveness, social enterprises still show the most commitment. For business, this form of support still remains difficult, mainly because of the legal conditions. The model "The 3-dimensional SE-BS cooperation model" presenting the fields of cooperation, synergy and spatial dimensions is presented below (figure 5).

Implications for theory and practice arising from the results of the research can be the adaptation of synergistic thinking and action in the institutional system supporting the development of the social economy and the activities of business environment institutions, local governments, third sector organizations. It can also occur recommendations for regional and national programs supporting the development of the social economy and socio-economic sustainability (see figure 5).

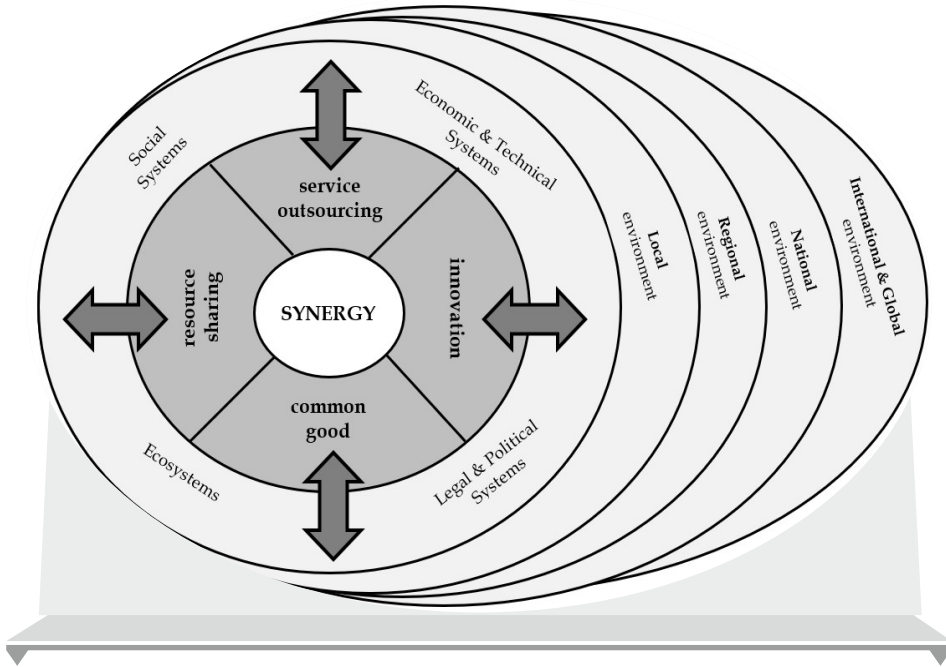


Figure 5. The 3-dimensional SE-BS cooperation model

Source: own study

6. Conclusion

Theoretical and cognitive considerations enabled the identification of areas of cooperation between social enterprises and business. Empirical verification confirmed the practice of the implementation of joint activities in the areas of service outsourcing, resource sharing, innovation and the pursuit of the common welfare. During the research, the issues included in the question about the possibility to define a model of cooperation between the social economy sector and commercial business were addressed. It can be seen that partnership and the creation of sustainable inter-organisational relationships, voluntary and conscious commitment, mutual trust and responsibility, and a community of objectives and values condition the

effective and efficient implementation of activities. Furthermore, they foster mutual benefits and synergistic effects. As well as strengthening the development potential of the organisation.

Exploring the phenomenon of cooperation allows conclusions to be drawn about the possibilities of developing the social entrepreneurship sector and socially responsible business. Particularly in view of the need to include representatives of various communities in the processes of identifying and meeting needs and solving social problems. Most often, the cooperation between social enterprises and business takes place in the local space. Territorial rootedness and social affiliation naturally place cooperating enterprises in the local value chains.

The research carried out in a cross-sector environment allowed the results to be presented in the form of an analogue-representational model (figure 4). The graphic form was inspired by the Doughnut Model (Doughnut Economics) developed by Kate Raworth (Raworth, 2012, 2017). In the two-dimensional model, the cooperation between social enterprises (SE) and business (BS) is embedded in an architecture of Social Systems, Ecosystems, Economic and Technical Systems, Legal and Political Systems. The interplay of systems creates space for the implementation of collaborative activities in the areas of service outsourcing, resource sharing, innovation and the fulfilment of the common welfare and synergies. Research limitations can be linked to the small representation of social enterprises in relation to the number of commercial business entities. In addition, the activity of state and local government institutions seems to be crucial in this area (Gigauri and Damenia, 2020). However, it seems that the key problem to be addressed in future research is the issue of trust development and shared awareness of the possibilities of achieving synergistic effects associated with cooperation. It seems that theoretical research and empirical recognition in different research programs are needed.

An interesting direction for further exploratory discussion is to embed the cooperation in a three-dimensional space (figure 5). Then, the implementation of joint activities enters the environment of local, regional, national, international and global influence. In the proposed approach, the cooperation environment becomes multi-layered. The research approach and conceptual model presented in this article is universal and does not preclude its implementation in other sectors, regions and cultural contexts.

Abstract

Face of social, economic, environmental challenges and proliferation of multi-crises - a development of social entrepreneurship, involvement and civic activism become very desirable. A need for interactions and cooperation between various groups of actors present in the local spaces is often seen as the contemporary paradigm. The aim of the study is to conceptualize the cooperation process between social enterprises and business. The presented results of empirical research constitute the basis for identifying potential areas of cooperation to increase the potential of social entrepreneurship. The research is based on a case study conducted in a local environment. Theoretical research was conducted using the deductive method. Empirical research methodology was used in the form of interviews and business modeling techniques. The phenomenon of cooperation was explored against the background of opportunities to develop social entrepreneurship, strengthen the potential of cooperating enterprises and achieve benefits for local communities. The result of the research is the discovery of the basic dimensions of practical and effective cooperation between social enterprises and business in the form of an analog-representational model. In the proposed research approach, mutual involvement in joint initiatives based on active involvement, lasting and interactive cooperation and sharing was considered crucial. The research covered the context of creating innovation potential, outsourcing services, implementing the common good and sharing resources. It seems that the presented approach may be universal and can be extrapolated to other regions and cultural contexts.

Keywords: *social entrepreneurship, social enterprises, business, cooperation.*

JEL

Classification: H110, M210,0210.

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