



## MANAGERS' ACTIVITIES WITHIN CULTURAL AND CREATIVE CLUSTERS: AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT FOR CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT IN THE VISEGRÁD COUNTRIES

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Despite the fact that extensive research devoted to cultural and creative industries spatial clustering has been conducted, studies dealing with institutionalised clusters as official entities are rare. Thus creative clusters organisations are weakly theorized compared to industrial clusters due to their project-oriented (non-standardized) production. Consequently, the aim of the paper is to gain insight in benefits of institutionalised cultural and creative clusters and determinants as well as barriers of their development based on cluster managers' activities in the Visegrád countries. To achieve the stated aim semi-structured interviews with cluster managers were conducted for data collection. Subsequently grounded theory approach and network maps were employed to draw results. Hence, the key benefits for cluster members are reflected in utilizing access to cluster internationalisation activities, knowledge sharing within local creative milieu, and collaborative projects to increase their competitiveness as well as commercialisation of their products. Furthermore, knowledge of cooperation, level of openness, approach to life-long learning, amount of time for cluster activities, previous experience, communication skills, and involvement in mutual cooperation were identified as predominant determinants of cultural and creative cluster development.

Keywords: cluster development, cluster management, creative industries, cultural industries, grounded theory, Visegrád countries.

### Introduction

Concentration of businesses referred to cluster is diverse phenomenon that might be perceived from different perspectives – regional economies (see Fischer, Nijkamp 2014), policy interventions and practices (Dervojeda *et al.* 2013), or knowledge

management (Liao 2015). Michael Porter (1990) is often mentioned as the author of the “cluster” concept, due to his initial identification of clusters as a geographically proximate group of interconnected companies, suppliers, service providers and associated institutions in a particular field that cooperate in order to gain advantages of externalities of industry and region they are located. This means cluster is a group of independent companies and associated institutions, which simultaneously voluntarily cooperate and often at the same time compete with each other. Furthermore, they can be geographically concentrated in one or more regions and they do not have to be necessarily institutionalised (as legal entities).

Cluster activities enhance regional economic integrations and specialisations and human resources development among members (Pešić, Panić 2012). Tsai-Ju Liao (2015) mentions that regional clusters tend to increase the amount of regional knowledge spill over if they actively engage in research and development (R&D) activities. It means that companies operating in a cluster are capable to deliver innovation rapidly compared to rival firms which are not in the cluster. Additionally, clustered companies maintain more efficient flows of knowledge as they have closer links to universities (Huang, Rice 2013). Moreover, cultural and creative clusters as a cluster of companies related to cultural and creative industries can influence the image of the region or a city and influences its positioning (Chernikova *et al.* 2015). Cultural and creative clusters support investments and development projects, with opportunities to gain access and diverse funding schemes through favourable lending, rather than individual companies (Mičić 2010).

With further development of digital media, cultural and creative industries (CCI) gain recognition as they are being more discussed. CCI is defined as “activities related to the creation, production and/or distribution of creative goods and services as well as with the integration of creative elements into wider processes and other sectors” (Dervojeda *et al.* 2013: 13). Interestingly, research carried in the United Kingdom by Caroline Chapain, Phil Cooke, Lisa De Propriis, Stewart MacNeill and Juan Mateos-García (2010) revealed “the creative industries are more innovative than many other high-innovation sectors, for example professional and business services”. Additionally, recent study by Marc Lhermitte, Bruno Perrin, Solenne Blanc, Vincent Raufast, Hugo Álvarez, Joséphine Druésne, Mehdi Echiguer, Danielle Attias, Bonnie Olivier, Louisa Melbouci and Gtaee Harrison (EY 2015) with data from 2013, identified revenues in CCI of approximately US\$709b and employment of 7.7m people in Europe, which means CCI is an important part of business. Additionally, CCI define cultural identity of the place and its community (Martinaitytė, Kregždaitė 2015; Reimeris 2016), and serve as a tool for territorial and urban renewal processes, especially in formally industrial places (Tremblay, Battaglia 2012).

Even though there is a broad range of research focused on clustering, there is less studies dealing with specifics of institutionalised cultural and creative clusters. According to Caterina Branzanti (2015) “creative clusters are weakly theorized and have not been the object of as much attention as industrial clusters”. The aim of the paper is to gain insight in benefits of institutionalized cultural and creative clusters and determinants of its development. Results could help in modifying cluster policies,

in further support of cultural and creative clusters, and to practitioners in CCI. Thus, the paper is based on the perception of motives of cluster formation, key factors and initiators in the process, barriers, opportunities, and cluster activities. Semi-structured interviews with cluster managers and grounded theory were employed to draw results. To reinforce the results, the findings are compared with results of an analysis of the literature about clusters.

## Literature review

In order to support the results of this research, this section looks at the literature relation to: benefits of being a member of a cluster, typical cluster activities, cluster initiatives, and cluster policies. Generally, cluster benefits occur in the following forms that relate to institutionalised cultural and creative clusters likewise:

- The growth of productivity and quality of products, through the exchange of information and the use of shared resources;
- the easier access to specialised suppliers and qualified human resources;
- the reduction of production and transaction costs, by reducing costs through networking with other agencies for providing of specialised services;
- the growth of innovation, especially where there is a “local innovation system” supported by nearby universities and research centres (see Europe Innova Cluster Mapping Project 2008).

Moreover, companies associated in a cluster often represent greater impact on policy-making process and similarly on authorities and their activities (Mičić 2010). Furthermore, additional benefits for members is reflected in cluster cooperation networks that enable small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to create and develop competition to large companies and thus, to invest more in innovation of products and processes and to diffuse information, and to reduce transaction costs (Mohannak 2007; Belás *et al.* 2014).

As Jo Foord (2013) argues, institutionalised cultural and creative clusters support collective learning, because the cluster serves as an information platform. The flow of information within cluster often reflects on needs of buyers, as the picky customers are often a component of cluster. Additionally, some conditions in a cluster allow companies to have access to an implicit knowledge of peculiarities of the production process among others, which if properly used, improve the competitiveness of a company (Oprime *et al.* 2011; Martinez, Potluka 2015). Activities of institutionalised cultural and creative clusters are focused on collaborative projects, receiving funding, development of human resources, networking, and internationalisation (Kind, Meier zu Köcker 2012; Pavelková *et al.* 2015). Specific focus is put on educational programs and social events within public spaces (festivals, workshops, showrooms and exhibitions).

The organised actions carried out to launch, develop and manage clusters with the involvement of private industry, public authorities and/or academic institutions are called “cluster initiatives” (Coletti 2010). They often entail a “cluster organisation” with at least on “cluster facilitator/manager”, governed by a board, and financed by

a combination of public funding, member fees and consulting services (Sölvell *et al.* 2003). Cluster managers should facilitate the establishment of strategic alliances and networks, identifying core people with already established mutual trust, attracting potential partners and helping them to create relationships which will bring enhanced cooperation (Coletti 2010). Cluster initiatives are often supported by cluster policies to enhance competitiveness in regions (Bialic-Davendra 2011). Cluster policy can be defined as an intervention of government or public authorities with focus on development of cluster and improving competitiveness (Andersson *et al.* 2004). Drahomíra Pavelková, Libor Friedel, Eva Jirčíková, Adriana Knápková, Karel Skokan and Petra Škodáková (2009) argued the essential part of cluster policies is reflected in a series of specific activities, strategies and programmes focused on overall development of clusters. These activities are often associated with investment policies that focus on strengthening innovation potential through financial and economic instruments to promote cluster formations.

### Creative clusters in the Visegrád Group

Visegrad Group (V4) partnership is an initiative of Central European countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) with the aim to pursue mutual socio-economic development towards European integration. Furthermore, the partnership was instituted in 1991 by countries that share similar historical and economic conditions with an impact of previous political regimes. Effects of a communistic era are reflected in the lack of support for creative industries compared to Western Europe, as this concept is often neglected. Consequently, countries of the V4 are different stages of the overall support towards creative industries affected by “low road” development strategies (Tripl, Tödtling 2008), and they are currently being recognized as an opportunity for economic development and competitiveness (Kramoliš 2015). Furthermore, as Magdalena Bialic-Davendra, Pavelková and Eva Vejmelková (2014) aptly noted, countries of the V4 adopted cluster-based policies in different time periods. Various national initiatives and programmes to support clustering were implemented in the last decade.

A considerable share of creative industries in the Central European countries still relies on the public support (Mitkus, Nedzinskaitė-Mitkė 2016). However, certain limitations in public support were identified, e.g. restricting other than manufacturing and technology industries. The research of the CCI and clusters in V4 is primarily focused on geographical aspects, performance, and specifics in Poland (see Stryjakiewicz, Męczyński 2010; Stryjakiewicz *et al.* 2014), Hungary (see Rittgasszer 2009; Györi 2011), the Czech Republic (Kloudová, Chwaszcz 2013; Slach *et al.* 2015), and Slovakia (Murgaš, Ševčíková 2011; Rehák, Chovanec 2012). Furthermore, we acknowledged primary documents concerning creative clusters in the V4, i.e. *Clusters in the Creative Industries – Motor Development of Cities and Regions* (Szultka 2012) and *Creative Incubators in Europe* (CreativeIncubators.eu 2016). Hence, active clusters in the V4 were identified in accordance with the conceptual definition of creative and cultural industries by Dominic Power and Tobias Nielsén (2010).

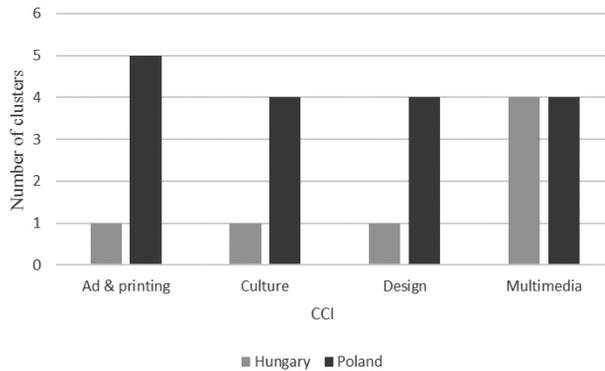


Fig. 1. Types of clusters participating in the study (source: created by authors, based on own research of cultural and creative clusters in the V4)

Altogether, 24 institutionalised cultural and creative clusters were identified in the V4, through desk research (analysis of on-line databases, official documents and web pages) and discussions with practitioners. Main criteria for cluster identification was reflected in their cultural and/or creative concept (with respect to NACE specialisation), along with legal form (entity and cluster management). Overall, the research discovered 18 active clusters in Poland and 7 (6 active) clusters in Hungary. None were identified in Czech Republic and Slovakia, as cultural and creative clusters were absent throughout the research period. From the sample, 6 Polish and 2 Hungarian clusters agreed with participation. The summary of creative clusters (V4) participating in our research is reflected in Figure 1.

## Methodology

Cluster managers participating in our research were both genders and with experience in the field of management. All managers were approached in their respective offices to avoid time pressure and distractions. Semi-structured interviews with cluster managers and coordinators were conducted (11 informants), and subsequently recorded and transcribed to a document as a source for the data analysis and interpretation. Informants were selected due to their engagement in cluster management and counselling activities in cultural and creative clusters. All interviews ranged from 1 to 1.5 hours in order to address all key areas in cluster management. This step was based on analysis of primary documents and publicly accessible web databases concerning selected creative clusters in the V4, to capture development and current status of this specific area.

Furthermore, open questions were included within the interviews to provide the adjustment of a particular question to the interviewee (see Abadie *et al.* 2010). Totally, thirty-four questions were given to interviewees. Questions were aimed at the cluster establishment (key initiator, motives for cluster establishment, obstacles connected

with cluster establishment), experience connected with cluster activities (failures, successes, type of activities which the cluster did), and cooperation among cluster members and with institutions out of the cluster and at factors which influence cluster development. Moreover, all criteria were set to determine the factors affecting formation and development of creative clusters in the V4.

The grounded theory was applied for the data analysis within this qualitative research and the *Atlas.ti* software was used for graphic representation of findings. Coding and subsequent categorization of codes were employed to evaluate the data obtained from the interviews. Semantic units (sections of notes from field research) were identified as bearers of information. Assigning of codes (the key words) to the semantic units followed next. The given codes marked the core of the information (the topic) and were implemented as a categorization tool of the semantic units. Codes were grouped into more general subcategories according to their similarity whereupon the subcategories were grouped into general categories. A network map was elaborated for the visualisation of thereon subcategories as well as general categories using the *FreeMind* software.

Specialized network maps were constructed in order to deliver comprehensive outline. Furthermore, the power of network information modelling allows the user to understand related information and relationships among codes (Busch *et al.* 2001). The codes and relations among them were discussed by team members to ensure data validity.

## Results

The first part of the interview is devoted to what precedes to an establishment of creative cluster. Results of analysis are presented in Figure 2.

Cluster outputs which is related to reasons of cluster establishment are in Figure 3.

First of all, formation of institutionalised cultural and creative clusters is usually initiated by a legal entity. Four different types of subjects were identified among analysed clusters – registered companies, individuals (i.e. designers), non-profit organisations and associations.

– Quote from the interview: “Main motive was to come up R&D and innovation project”.

Specific entity (or entities) must have a reason to initiate cluster formation. Three main motives were identified – to increase competitiveness (individual motive), to support development of the industry in which the entity operates (social motive), and to receive European Union or local funds for cluster formation (objective motive).

– Quote from the interview: “Design cluster has brought designers and their work from workshops directly to people, public and private sector, by raising attractiveness and awareness of design and trendy production”.

Support for development of the industry is divided into two streams. The first stream is raising awareness about creative industries and trends between stakeholders via communication (i.e. raising awareness about the importance of the creative industries, discussing trends in the industry).

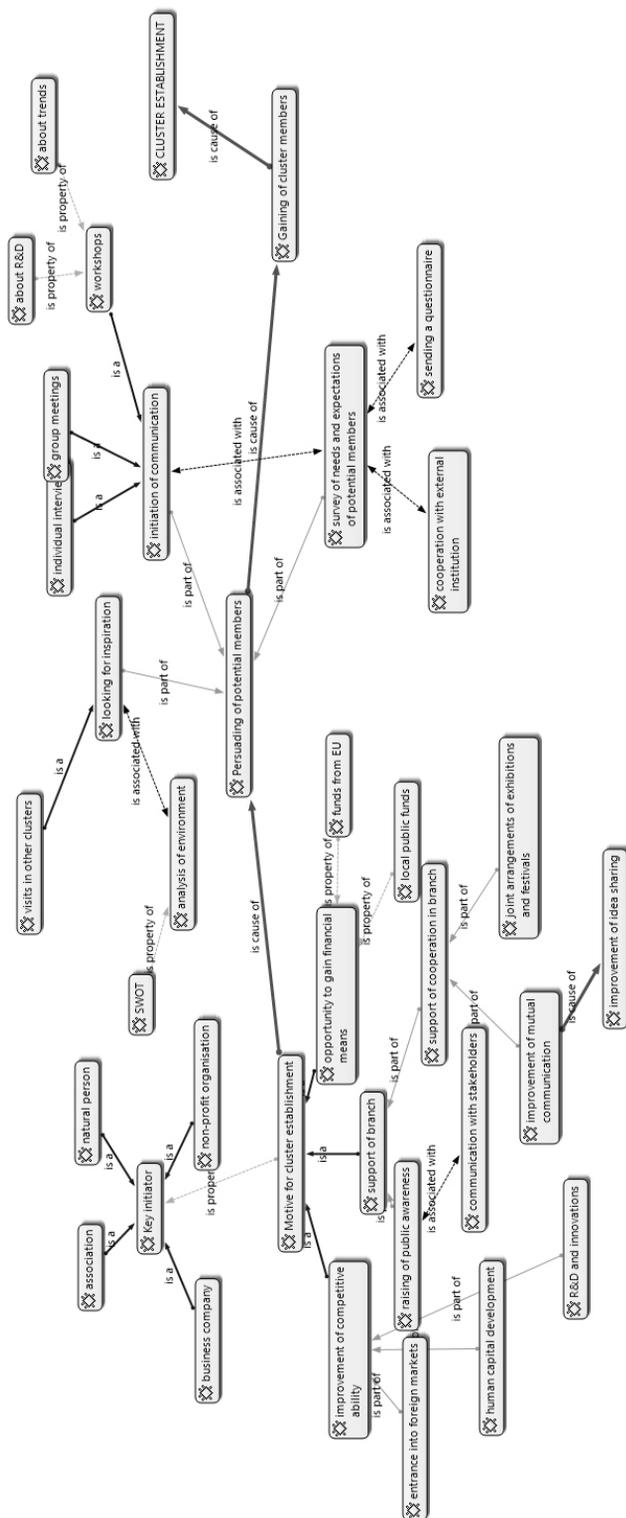


Fig. 2. Establishment of a creative cluster (source: created by authors, based on own research in Atlas.ti)

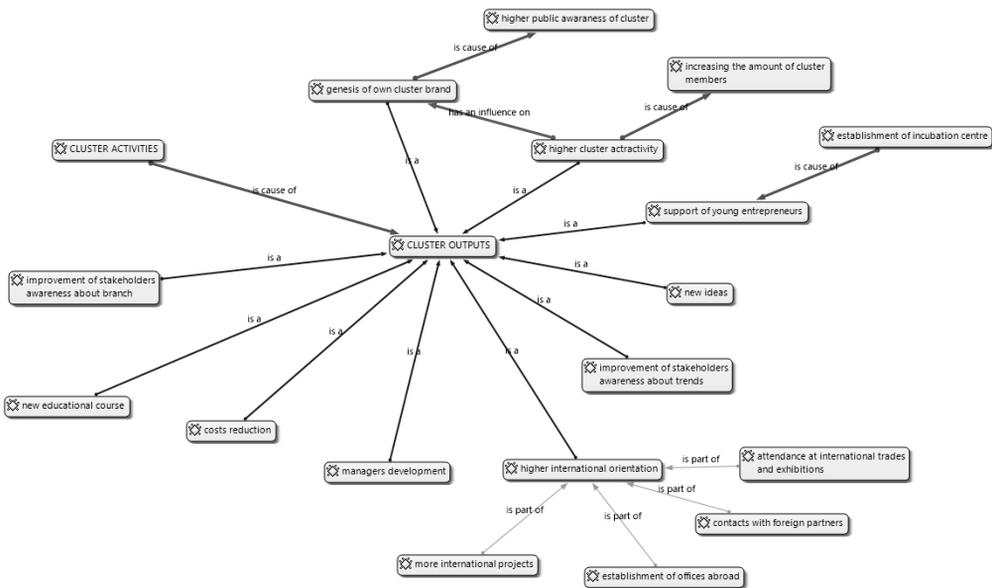


Fig. 3. Cluster outputs (source: created by authors, based on own research in *Atlas.ti*)

- Quotes from the interview: “The main motive was to communicate and bring design closer to public, commercial entities and NGOs”<sup>1</sup>; “The main motive was to form a network of companies and NGOs with the aim of sharing ideas in communication and media”.

If the cluster is active as it should, it increases the overall attractiveness and reputation among stakeholders and it further develops the overall identity (market value). The second stream is focused on promotion of cooperation among current competitors in the industry. Another aspect of cooperation among cluster members is international orientation of cluster members (internationalization) which in some cases lead into development of own cluster brand.

- Quotes from the interview: “There were various visits in creative clusters not only in Poland, to get knowledge and experiences of other creative clusters”; “Everything was analyzed by external organisation”.

The key initiator must convince other stakeholders to collectively form a cluster. Some clusters have approached this phase more analytically. Firstly, they analysed the environment, gathered experience of others and specifically surveyed the needs and expectations of potential members.

- Quotes from the interview: “Various workshops were carried out with these topics before forming the cluster, so potential members could mention and speak about their needs”; “We have not evaluated any needs; cluster was developed gradually”.

<sup>1</sup> NGO – non-governmental organization.

Communication between potential partners played an important role in process of formation. Communication was realized through targeted interviews, group meetings, and informal communication during participation on various workshops or occasional meetings. If the key initiator convinced potential partners about the benefits of the cooperation, the cluster can be formed. After establishment, the cluster starts to be active and offer some activities for members.

- Quote from the interview: “There are thematic workshops, where members can promote their work and to receive feedback from other members”.

Primarily, workshops are focused on collective sharing of ideas (i.e. joint workshop, seminars and mentoring for members), implementation of various projects (i.e. joint participation on fairs, exhibitions, conferences and educational events), the establishment of incubation centre, collective promotion, and organizing various events that lead to commercialization of outputs.

- Quote from the interview: “It is necessary to provide services on various levels – developed designers have different needs”.

Cluster activities should be continuously modified to individual needs based on the interviews.

- Quotes from the interview: “There are thematic sub-groups specialized specifically in promotion and fundraising”; “There are mostly special sub-groups working on particular projects”.

Furthermore, formation of different subgroups is a common practice. These subgroups are sometimes temporary for implementation of certain projects or events, or they have different geographic focus (i.e. international centres). The second part of the interview dealt with cluster development and factors which can influence such process. Factors that may affect cluster activities and simultaneously also promote or limit cluster development can be divided into internal and external. Figure 4 summarizes the factors that affect activities of the cluster based on data analysis.

Following internal factors were mentioned during interviews.

- Quotes from the interview: “Designers are not entrepreneurs, they perceive themselves as artists. Therefore, critical point was to make them understand basic market functions”; “The biggest critical point was the mutual trust”; “Joint meetings of members are often difficult to organize/push through, because companies are often very busy and do not have enough time to participate”.

Cluster members (their knowledge, openness of mind, access to lifelong learning, amount of time to spend for cluster activities) and their involvement in cluster activities (communication and willingness to cooperate).

- Quotes from the interview: “Financial resources are always the biggest barrier”; “The most important thing for creative cluster is to become self-sustainable with no reliance on the European funds”.

Amount of funds that cluster possess for its activities is critical, along with following external factors that were mentioned during interviews.

- Quote from the interview: “Public sector should pay more interest to creative industries, because they are still under-estimated”.

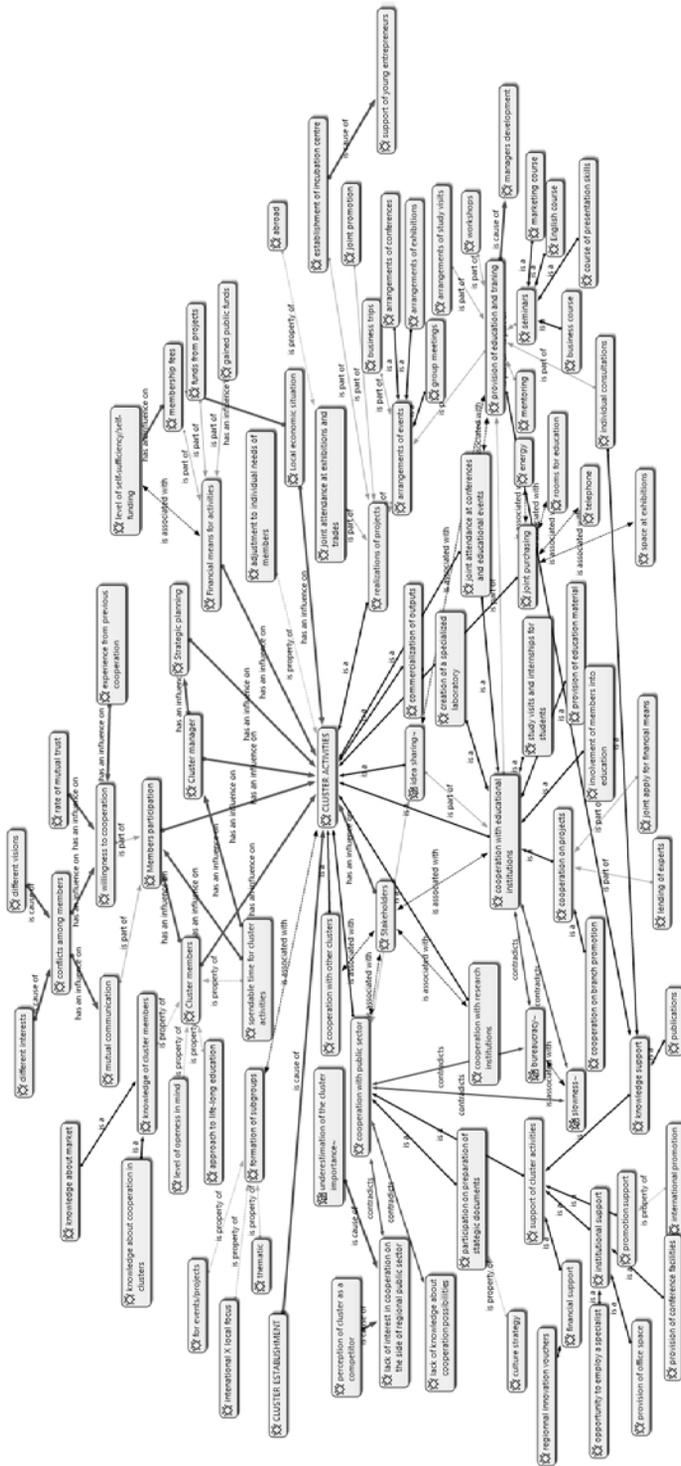


Fig. 4. Cluster activities and factors which influence them (source: created by authors, based on own research in Atlas.ti)

Negative attitudes of representatives in public administration are mainly reflected in their lack of knowledge about the possibilities of cooperation, the lack of interest to cooperate due to the fact that cluster is often perceived as insignificant, or even as a competitor. On contrary, cluster activities are often cherished by regional authorities. The support for cluster is often reflected in terms of regional innovation vouchers (financial) office spaces and equipment (institutional); promotion on international level (promotion), and consultations (educational).

## Discussions and conclusions

The aim of the paper is to gain insight in benefits of institutionalised cultural and creative clusters and determinants of its development. Hence the results were achieved by combination of semi-structured interviews, grounded theory and network maps in order to provide comprehensive understanding of benefits and determinants of their development. The paper supports the Michele Coletti's (2010) statement that cluster managers are one of key determinants of development. Cluster managers influence cluster activities primarily by defining and implementation of strategic planning process. Moreover, to have time to be involved in cluster management was detected as one of the predominant conditions, which has an influence on the quality of cluster manager's activities. Hence, cluster activities cannot be managed effectively as a part-time job or even as a hobby to become successful cluster for members as well as meeting requirements of evaluation measures under current and subsequent cluster policies in the V4 countries (see Piotrowski 2014). Furthermore, the results indicate that executive board as well as members of institutionalised cultural and creative clusters should take care of managers' management competencies and skill development such as communication and business (entrepreneurship, marketing) by participation in training activities to enhance cluster competitiveness. These research findings are consistent with Robert Murray, Julie Caulier-Grice and Geoff Mulgan (2010), as micro-companies and freelancers encourage informal communication and links, i.e. local buzz (Bathelt *et al.* 2004) within local creative milieu (Douglass 2016). These represent key factors for knowledge sharing and innovation creation. Thus the project oriented nature of requires innovative managerial approach of cluster managers to improve benefits for micro-companies and freelancers.

Initiators of institutionalised cultural and creative clusters used two different streams in relation to cluster formation. The first stream is primarily oriented on (top-down) performing both quantitative and qualitative analysis related to business and local policy environment. The analysis focused on creative potential and cultural background with informal procedures such as interviews as mentioned in Justin O'Connor and Xin Gu (2010). Nevertheless, this stream is influenced by economic situation of the particular region and administrative barriers that should be limited in order to motivate and further develop the idea of cluster formation. The second stream in cluster formation reflects on gradual development, when the potential members shared their collective needs. Furthermore, interviews exposed differences in struc-

ture institutionalised cultural and creative clusters compared to industrial clusters in the V4. Micro-companies and freelancers happen to be core members, while they are linked to non-profit organisations and associations. Interestingly, none of clusters in the V4 was initiated by academia as a part of quadruple-helix model (see Afonso *et al.* 2012). Thus there is a certain stimulus for academia to be more involved in order to initiate and develop the idea of institutionalised cultural and creative clusters such as currently formed the Zlín Creative Cluster in the Czech Republic.

Cluster members and their knowledge of cluster's specifics of CCI (see Kind, Meier zu Köcker 2012), knowledge of cooperation, level of openness, their approach to life-long learning, amount of time for cluster activities, their previous experience, communication skills, and their involvement in common activities have been mentioned as vital determinants for cluster development. Furthermore, the key benefits for cluster members are reflected in utilizing access to cluster internationalisation activities to increase their competitiveness by attending or presentation themselves in international events such as competitions, exhibitions, fairs, shows and other related events frequently based on informal communication. Tanja Sinozic and Franz Tödting (2015) aptly state that these international factors support the idea of creating identity and develop international networks. Moreover, cluster members are encouraged to share ideas, embark and set up joint projects, where the participation is driven collectively by both companies and managers. Primarily common activities or projects respectively of cluster members makes a vital contribution to the process of commercialization and market orientation of CCI products and services as creative industries frequently struggle in this regard. They arrange activities based on collective needs of members, where the focus is put on human resources to develop entrepreneurial skills for micro-companies and freelancers (see Beltrán, Miguel 2014). There is an emphasis on open communication within cluster members and management.

Relating to managerial application of the achieved results, the paper identified particular motives that drive cluster managers to form clusters, ranging from support for development of creative industries (social motive), access to funding (objective motive), and increasing competitiveness simultaneously with creating identity (individual motive). Thus, policy implication suggests application of multi-level governance approach should focus on rising awareness of institutionalised cultural and creative clusters as a tool for urban/regional development in terms of rising competitiveness, innovation absorption and creation, retaining creative class and creative milieu as well as quality of life.

Recognized inherent research limitations could not be transcended firstly in relation to the number of active CCI in the V4, where 8 out of 24 clusters agreed to conduct the interview within a time span of 2013–2014. Secondly investigated clusters were at different stages of their life cycle (Menzel, Fornahl 2010) or adaptive cycle (Martin, Sunley 2011) respectively and thus implemented public subsidies caused dissimilar responses in accordance to different phase of the cluster cycle (Brenner, Schlump 2011). Conversely, the paper includes defunct cluster initiatives from the current perspective that allowed to reveal already existed reasons for cluster decline.

Finally, to develop an insight to innovation activities in CCI in the V4 as a key factor for public subsidies and clusters evaluation respecting the European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis, the future investigation is supposed to be devoted to draw relevance of sharing tacit knowledge in relation to learning regions concept respecting findings in previous studies (see Blažek, Uhlíř 2011; Capello, Lenzi 2013).

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## VADYBINĖ VEIKLA KULTŪRINIULOSE IR KŪRYBINIULOSE KLASTERIULOSE: PAGRINDINIS KLASTERIŲ PLĖTROS VEIKSNYS VIŠEGRADO ŠALYSE

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Santrauka

Nepaisant fakto, kad yra atlikti gausūs kultūrinių ir kūrybinių industrijų erdvinio klasterizavimosi tyrinėjimai, esama nedaug tų, kurie skirti institucionaliizuotiems klasteriams kaip juridiniams subjektams. Todėl kūrybinių klasterių organizacijos tėra menkai teoretizuotos, palyginus su gamybiniais, į objektus nukreiptos (nestandartizuotos) produkcijos klasteriais. Tad šio straipsnio tikslas – prieiti išvalgos, kuo naudingi yra kultūriniai ir kūrybiniai klasteriai bei kokie yra jiems lemtingos įtakos turintys veiksniai, taip pat kokios yra šių klasterių plėtros kliūtys, kurias Višegrado šalyse lemia vadybinė veikla. Tam,

kad būtų pasiektas išsikeltas tikslas, renkant duomenis buvo panaudoti pusiau struktūruoti interviu su klasterių vadybininkais. Vėliau išvadoms parengti buvo pasitelktas teoriškai pagrįstas požiūris ir tinklo žemėlapiai. Galiausiai didžiausia klasterių nariams atitenkanti nauda aptariama pasitelkiant prieigą prie klasterių internalizavimo veiklos, žinių sklaidos vietos kūrybinėje aplinkoje ir prie bendradarbiavimo projektų siekiant kelti jų konkurencingumą ir skatinti produktų komercializavimą. Be to, bendradarbiavimo žinija, atvirumo lygis, požiūris į mokymąsi visą gyvenimą, klasterių veiklos trukmė, ankstesnioji patirtis, komunikacijos gebėjimai, dalyvavimas abipusiais ryšiais grindžiamame bendradarbiavime buvo traktuojami kaip pagrindiniai kultūrinių ir kūrybinių klasterių plėtrą lemiantys veiksniai.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: klasterių plėtra, klasterių vadyba, kūrybinės industrijos, kultūrinės industrijos, teorinis pagrįstumas, Višegrado šalys.