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Enterprise Development as a Means of Stimulating the Networking of
Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Theses of Doctoral Dissertation

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1. History and objectives of the research

In today's economy the role of small and medium-sized enterprises assumes increasing importance.

This upgrading is apparent in two areas. On one hand, over the past decade theoretical research placed special emphasis on small and medium-sized enterprises as a special type of enterprise; what is more, this has recently become a dynamically developing area. On the other hand, parallel to theoretical research in everyday practice this sector also receives growing attention in the development of different national economies; it is enough to think of the tendencies present in the European Union (the European Charter for Small Enterprises, the Green Book and Enterprise Development Programmes embracing more years). The role of small and medium-sized enterprises can be judged in various different ways within the whole of the economy. It is generally accepted that it would be an oversimplification to state that the role of the SME sector has assumed increasing importance, since much more complex effects can be recognized in this area. In relation to the importance of the sector various different factors may be considered like the role of these enterprises in developing a competitive economic structure and their significance in employment.

However, beyond detecting their importance it must be recognized that these enterprises often struggle with serious problems. Theoretical research has pointed out that these problems usually derive from reasons related to the economies of scale or high transaction costs. Therefore, enterprise development as an external intervention in spontaneous market processes is a constantly developing field of theoretical research. Growing attention is lent to handling the problems present in the sector in everyday practice as well. Since these enterprises play an important role in the economy and market processes are often disadvantageous for them, the role of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises assumes growing significance also in the areas of everyday economic policy. This process is observable both in the European Union and in Hungary; what is more, I am convinced that in the next programming period (2007-2013) further sources will be concentrated in this area. Consequently, enterprise development as a type of community development intervention will become more and more significant in the near future.

Within this extremely broad area my research activity focuses on stimulating network cooperation among companies as a special enterprise development intervention.

Choosing the topic

In choosing the topic of my dissertation I was influenced by two subjective factors. On one hand, as a doctorate student I held seminars for my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Imre Lengyel within the course of „Regional and Local Economic Development”. Cooperation among enterprises, networking and the various forms of spatial concentration in terms of economic activities have an important role in this area. The diversity of cooperation, the interesting manifestations of uniqueness and similarities present in collaborations traceable both in theoretical reviews and in everyday economic practice grasped my interest as early as then.

On the other hand, I was honoured to be able to participate in designing the curriculum of „Enterprise Development”, one of the major courses of the specialization program of enterprise development within the economics training scheme at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of the University of Szeged. In the past four years I have been holding this course for full-time students, then later on for corresponding students together with my mentor, László Kállay. Based on our experience in teaching, we successfully developed a curriculum, the result of which is our book published by AULA in the spring of 2004. Enterprise development as a conscious community intervention in spontaneous market processes also proved to be an interesting topic. It is commonly known that today small and medium-sized enterprises are more capable of creating new work places and they often act as the engine of development in a given region or area.

My research in the past years convinced me that in the majority of cases the problems of small and medium-sized enterprises derive from reasons related to the economies of scale and high relative transaction costs. Obviously, the difficulties of small and medium-sized enterprises may be handled in various ways, from tackling problems of financing to providing consulting services specially designed for enterprises. In the course of analysing enterprise development interventions I noticed that in certain cases cooperations among small and medium-sized enterprises produce good answers to these problems. In today's practice of enterprise development, besides improving the climate of financing, the role of conscious support lent to networking is growing. Since company networks had already been in the focus of my interest, the decision of choosing the support of such cooperations as the central topic of my dissertation seemed obvious.

Objectives

The most important objective of the present doctoral dissertation is to provide a review of the scientific achievements and results defined in the international and Hungarian literature dealing with enterprise development interventions and regional company networks, and based on their synthesis to examine the opportunities of cooperation among small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the area of Szeged. Furthermore, it also offers a comprehensive analysis of stimulating this networking as a special form of enterprise development interventions. Issues examined in the paper can be grouped based on two main objectives:

- to analyse the theoretical questions of enterprise development and networking in a less developed region based on international literature and
- to analyse the opportunities of cooperation among enterprises operating in the area of Szeged based on theoretical considerations and define concrete development proposals.

In the first part of the paper (Chapters 1-3) – through the synthesis of theoretical consideration and international experience – the following theoretical questions were discussed:

- Why are small and medium-sized enterprises important and in what cases and how can and must they be supported?
- What reasons and motivations lead to the development of networks among enterprises?
- What forms of cooperation among companies are possible and which are the main characteristics of the various formations?
- Which are the most important enterprise development services, how does supporting networking integrate in these and what other interventions may be related to network organizing actions?
- What instruments and methods can effectively stimulate the formation and consolidation of networks ensuring real long-term effects?

In the second part of the paper (Chapters 4-5) I examined correlations and statements constituting the theoretical background in the frameworks of an empirical survey. Within a comprehensive research I also reviewed the networking opportunities and willingness to use enterprise development services of enterprises active in Szeged and its catchment area. I analysed answers received in the survey using various instruments and drew the most

important conclusions related to the given economic concentration. Assessing the situation unfolded the logical framework of possible interventions. Therefore, in analysing the possibilities of practical application I tried to find answers to the following questions.

- What types of cooperation can (and should) be encouraged within the given territorial unit?
- Which are the international good practices and how can these be adapted – taking into account the region's present development level – to the actual development practice?
- As an intellectual knowledge centre what role can the University of Szeged assume in developing networks?
- How could more effective enterprise development interventions be realized in the area of network building?
- What concrete steps could be done within financing possibilities in order to strengthen enterprise development in the region and to encourage the creation of potential networks?

Therefore, the practical objective of the paper – beyond the synthesis of relevant international literature and the analysis of the possibilities of adapting them – is to draw up a „proposal package” which, in our opinion, would offer a real chance for a deeper exploitation of the networking opportunities existing in the region.

2. The structure of the dissertation and applied methods

The paper consists of five major chapters. Since the goal of the dissertation is to answer the above introduced research questions, its structure also follows these objectives. The first three chapters include the summary of theoretical research and practical experience approaching the stimulation of networking as a special type of intervention from various aspects. This is followed by a primary research – closely linked to theoretical analyses –, then the paper ends with an attempt aiming at practice-oriented adaptation.

The first chapter deals with the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises, the target group of discussed interventions in detail. Following a comprehensive conceptual introduction I discuss the theoretical and practical significance of the sector. Furthermore, I also define economic and moral questions in relation to the necessity and effectiveness of their support.

In the second chapter I elaborate on thoughts and ideas related to networks. I briefly examine the place company networks have in the system of collaborations among various organisations and position networks based on the most important literature. Then I provide a detailed analysis of the different network sub-types and a discussion of the basic motivations leading to today's more and more frequent cooperations.

The goal of the third chapter is to define the role of interventions to stimulate networking within the system of enterprise development. Therefore, I shortly discuss possible levels of intervention and various enterprise development services. After providing a basic theoretical review on one hand, I define the distribution of the possible forms of network stimulation; on the other hand, I explore the most important linking points among the different possibilities of support.

In the fourth chapter some enterprises of Szeged and its catchment area are examined. Actual sampling took place within the frameworks of a larger research¹, and during the process several questions targeted cooperations and the analysis of enterprise development interventions occurring in the environment. The questionnaire was designed based on the Harvard Business School's questionnaire applied for the United States' survey of regional innovation clusters in 2001 (lead by Michael Porter), after its adaptation to local attributes. In

¹Based on the empirical survey completed in the research entitled „The Possible Role of the University of Szeged in Local Knowledge-based Economic Development” conducted under the supervision of prof. Dr. Imre Lengyel, Head of Research.

the frameworks of the research the questionnaire was sent to almost 700 enterprises between July and October 2004. Considering the basic goals of the research, we took into account several aspects in the selection of the interviewed enterprises. 170 enterprises returned the questionnaire giving valuable answers, these were the ones included in the final sample. In some cases data entering was also accompanied by a personal interview, within which a total of thirty companies were asked about their experiences so far and especially future opportunities perceived by them. Personal interviews primarily aimed at mapping „blank spots” and special emphasis was placed on willingness to cooperate and the need for enterprise development services. Statements occurring during personal (informal) discussions added more shades to the picture that was already highly unfavourable. Answers given to the questionnaires were analysed with different statistical methods. On one hand, I applied basic interpretation tools (distribution ratio, frequency, average), on the other hand, I examined correlations of the variables measured on a nominal scale by calculating the association coefficient Lambda, while I analysed data measured on the ordinal scale by calculating the value of Sperman’s rank correlation coefficient. Furthermore, I defined three groups of variables based on their different attributes. With the help of the above methodology I analysed the received data in detail and phrased several conclusions. At the end of the analysis I summarised the statements that are in a relevant connection with enterprise development and network stimulation, which greatly determine the development proposals to be formulated in the next chapter.

In the last, fifth main chapter I made an attempt to adapt synthetized knowledge and experience to practice. More precisely phrased: the chapter includes a series of network stimulation proposals that can be elaborated in light of the empirical survey. Taking alternatives into account I believe that all together two different types of network cooperation have a real ground to exist in the given economic concentration; consequently, it may useful to orientate development resources and activities in the direction of these areas.

3. Research results

My research over the past five years aimed at seeking an answer to how different business cooperations and especially the formation of networks can be encouraged effectively, furthermore, whether these actions can really assist small and medium-sized enterprises that based on the general view, need this kind of support. In answering the questions defined as the objective of my dissertation I mainly relied on the international and – rather poor – Hungarian literature. Obviously, in order to make an attempt to answer this question it was also necessary to become familiar with the nature of cooperations as well as the system of enterprise development interventions – unembraceable as it may seem. I believe that one possible strength of the paper is that by synthesizing Hungarian and international literature, it attempts to „clear up” numerous questions „not yet settled” starting from opportunities of enterprise development to attempts to create categories and a typology of the extremely heterogeneous network motivations. The empirical survey conducted in Szeged and its catchment area is organically linked to this theoretical dissertation dealing with scientific literature with the intention of synthesizing and the proposals designed based on results summarize research activities. In the followings the most important statements of the dissertation are summarised in an itemized way based on chapters, accompanied by the introduction of developed proposals.

A) The significance of small and medium-sized enterprises and the importance of their support

The role of small and medium-sized enterprises has greatly increased over the past few decades. Different scientific trends judge the role of small and medium-sized enterprises within the whole of the economy in different ways. Literature often highlights that decision-makers pay growing attention to these enterprises. This growing attention was discussed in two aspects: on one hand, I examined why small and medium-sized enterprises are important according to scientific trends and on the other hand, I shortly discussed why their support is essential. My analysis equally relied on international and Hungarian literature and my observations were also justified with statistical data compiled by international organisations (OECD, EU).

1. In the discussion I briefly looked at the **economic background processes** of the process of upgrading small and medium-sized enterprises. Practically, the sector has been upgraded by accelerated global processes, which means that the competition itself placed small and medium-sized enterprises in the foreground. By synthesizing the relevant literature I highlighted that three basic factors – closely connected to economic processes – have led to upgrading the sector: cost advantages lying in specialization, segmented needs and social-politic questions.

2. I summarised **highly heterogeneous scientific explanations related to the importance** of the sector and created some (explanatory) groups, in which, according to my view, theoretical statements supporting the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises can be classified: the role played in the development of a competitive economic structure, social considerations and questions related to the quality of life and self-realization.

3. I pointed out that small and medium-sized enterprises are important partly because **these enterprises are the engines of economic development**, the partners ensuring the efficiency of large companies and moreover, in certain cases they are the depositaries of constant development through maintaining innovation and competition. They also assume an important role in developing a competitive economic structure; furthermore, I dare to say that without „healthy small enterprises” it is rather hard to imagine an economy that functions well. Therefore, I would like to underline again that in my opinion **supporting small and medium-sized enterprises has by today become a question of competitiveness**.

4. Questions discussing the **necessity of supporting** the sector are organically connected to the part examining the significance of small and medium-sized enterprises. In my paper I made an attempt to create a theoretical development that defines general criteria in connection with the effectiveness of enterprise development interventions and their right to exist. Basically, a significant portion of these enterprises are worth supporting if the social benefits reachable through their support are higher than its social cost. Naturally, reality is much more complex than that. After discussing various problems the paper draws the final conclusion that, **strictly considering aspects of cost effectiveness, nothing more can be stated than that from governmental sources it is worth supporting enterprise development programmes that have a market developing approach and become self-sustained within reasonable time**.

B) Theoretical questions of cooperation among enterprises

In today's economy networks, clusters and cooperations appear more and more often. In the „jungle” of different cooperations both practical and theoretical experts find it more and more difficult to navigate. In the research I made an attempt to separate the different types of cooperations and create their typology. Furthermore, I examined in detail the special attributes of different network forms and analysed motivations leading to networking – relevant in terms of enterprise development interventions. The result of the research was that by studying the highly diverse Hungarian and international literature it was possible to distinguish among basic cooperation types and map and synthesize the different reasons leading to networking.

1. From the diversity of cooperations I highlighted networks and clusters that can be considered as the target area of enterprise development. Analysing them based on various different factors and relying mainly on Rosenfeld's work **I distinguished clusters, hard and soft networks**. I underlined that the distinction introduced above fundamentally defines the behavioural features of the three different network types. Consequently, **both throughout enterprise development interventions encouraging their creation and the management of already existing networks, special attention must be lent to the different attributes of network sub-types and therefore, it is necessary to use different methods and instruments**. The significance of this distinction must be emphasised again: the train of thought above also led to an observation that forecasts the fact that, based on theoretical grounds, interventions generally supporting cooperations are highly unlikely to be really successful.

2. I examined factors leading to networking in detail. It is possible to discover various explanatory reasons of **why certain enterprises seek cooperation opportunities with other enterprises**. The main goal of cooperation among enterprises lies in achieving advantages unavailable for them individually or to put it in even more details: achieving some kind of collective effectiveness. In my dissertation based on the synthesis of international literature I distinguished five determining factors, from which the creation of networks originates: extending the limits of resources, gaining cost advantages, better access to the market, increasing „acceptance” and the desire for recognition and gaining some kind of new knowledge.

3. Having examined different motivation types I proved that basically in some – direct or indirect – way almost all cooperations **aim at achieving more cost effective solutions**. The inherent driving force of cooperations is to increase competitiveness by way of reducing the different types of costs or maybe through increasing income.

4. The observation above assumes essential importance in the deeper interpretation of economic development interventions. I pointed out that in increasing the willingness of enterprises to cooperate, the direct cost advantages realizable throughout cooperations and the indirect ones likely to occur at a later stage must be clearly defined. Based on this the **realisation of cooperations only depends on the market decisions of potential participants**. Therefore, in designing network building actions it is important to be **clear on the players' expectations and the advantages realizable by them**.

C) Supporting the cooperation of enterprises as a tool of enterprise development

In the course of the research I reviewed the different enterprise development services and formulated the most important questions related to actions of assistance. Moreover, I positioned the stimulation of networking as a special form of enterprise development in the system of such interventions. One further achievement of this part of the dissertation is that I pointed out and evaluated the most important rules occurring in the stimulation of networking. Although this type of actions may also be handled as independent funding, I highlighted how stimulating cooperations can be linked to further enterprise development services.

1. I positioned the stimulation of networking in the system of enterprise development, relying mainly on the typology created by the Committee of Donors in 2001. Assistance aiming at encouraging cooperations represents a rather special form of enterprise development services. Based on the developed classification, **interventions targeting the stimulation of cooperations may primarily be regarded as business development services at the micro level**, provided that these directly target small and medium-sized enterprises.

2. I pointed out that cooperations can be stimulated with various tools. Since entrepreneurs are rather unwilling to cooperate, training and providing exhaustive information is of special importance. In successful programmes the importance of the set of tools used for persuasion is

often emphasised (for example, the organisation of Danish company networks). However, it must be stated: experience has clearly shown that **usually networks organised – mainly bottom-up – among the enterprises of the traded sector can prove to be successful in the long run.**

3. Analysing the question as an enterprise development intervention one of the most important problems lies in **the extent of support aiming at the stimulation of networking** and up to what development level of the cooperation can individual players be supported. I defined a limiting point in the development of cooperations: **support must be restricted to the establishment of cooperations and management networks.** Special attention must be lent to persuasion and providing information and the professional treatment of difficulties emerging at the early stage of cooperations (e.g. ensuring the broker managing the cooperation).

4. Another complex methodological question is **how emerging costs should be distributed among players** and to what extent community sources should be used for this goal. Naturally – especially because of the diversity of cooperations – concrete proportions cannot (and must not!) be defined in a general sense. I also proved that **probably neither programmes based entirely on market grounds nor services free of charge mean a good solution.** Supposedly the „user also pays principle” can be successful in this case too. In a certain percentage of cases requiring the payment of all the expenses would exclude the groups having the greatest need for such services, what would contradict the principles of supporting actions.

D) An analysis of Szeged and its catchment area from the aspect of enterprise development

Based on the observations in the theoretical review and the distinguished types one determining part of the individual research is the review of the given region's enterprise development services and network cooperations within the framework of an empirical survey. The empiric attitude served a dual goal: on one hand, it „took a snapshot” of the present situation assumed by the relevant parts of the economy, on the other hand, it set the limits of enterprise development interventions to be defined later. I also took a detailed look at present relationships and to what extent the institution system of enterprise development is suitable to stimulate the formation of networks. Naturally, I separately examined the possible role of the University of Szeged in developing local networks.

1. The first observation stated that examining enterprises in the region based on economic base theory, a significant dependency on imports can be seen in case of companies selling their products or services outside the region. Therefore, direct assistance provided for „traded types” of companies should target two areas: winning further markets (generating more demand) and reducing dependency on imports that may materialize in the constant development of local (potential) suppliers.
2. Another potential conclusion is that **integrator companies** that could mean the engine of growth **are missing from the region** (only 22% of the companies defining themselves as suppliers deliver goods inside the county border). Therefore, advantages lying in vertical company networks can be exploited only to a little extent, so in my opinion regional supplier programmes in themselves are not really grounded. This effect is further increased by the fact that a significant portion of companies are presently incapable of performing suppliers' tasks.
3. Unfortunately, the research has proven that **cooperations in the region are island-like and unorganized and involve a small group of enterprises**. On the other side there are bottom-up operating cooperations formed under market conditions. The group of companies that are willing to and can participate in such cooperations is being outlined. Presumably a certain percentage of companies would be willing to form cooperations but only in cases when it is clear what advantages they can realize (see cooperations emerging independently in various areas and attempts aiming to gain grant sources).

4. University relations are characterised by a dual correlation: on one hand, real cooperations are relatively rare here as well, on the other hand, **a significant portion of enterprises „would have an inclination”** to form cooperations with higher education institutions. It is not clear in this area either, what companies would expect from the university and what services the higher education institution can provide.

5. **The low rate of using enterprise development services** is another surprising factor. It seems that a significant percentage of companies are unsatisfied with the operation of organizations, moreover, they do not even expect special help from them any more and do not wish to exploit offered opportunities. In our view this derives from two reasons: in the past few years, enterprise development actions „lost credit” and a great part of the institution system is not suitable to provide real services for companies (based on the experience of the survey 87% of enterprises did not participate in network building actions).

6. It is clear that **traded-type innovative small and medium-sized enterprises are more sensitive** both to enterprise development services and to exploiting advantages lying in cooperations. Therefore, innovative companies would probably constitute an area suitable for network building enterprise development interventions.

7. Primary data analysis also suggested that respondents can be further classified. Expectations were fulfilled; the three groups of – rather heterogeneous - enterprises participating in the sample were mapped, showing similar attributes in relation to enterprise development services and network stimulating interventions. **Different groups make possible the development of different assistance schemes**, defining this way the logical frames of effective development programmes.

8. The first group included enterprises that are not innovative but have already used enterprise development services. I called these **„interested enterprises”**. The 38 small and medium-sized enterprises falling in this category constitute 26% of the companies in the sample. The second group consists of **„innovative enterprises”**, 33% of the sample (48 enterprises). In the third group we can find companies that are not innovative and have not used any enterprise development services. I called these **„closing up enterprises”** (60 enterprises, 41% of the sample). The distribution of enterprises among groups only indicates the characteristics of the sample but not their real proportion in the real structure of the economy.

9. Related to the judgement of the importance assumed by general enterprise development services, features characterising the different groups are well differentiated. The interested group shows the greatest responsiveness in the case of almost all the services. However, **this is not always supported by the fact that they really need that particular service.** In my opinion, interest is often attracted by hoped cost advantages and assistance and not real value adding. Closing up companies attached little importance to almost all of the service types. It was only consulting related to writing grant proposals that more than 30% of the enterprises in the group considered as important. In this case direct sources are available – and repayment is often not required –, so a higher rate of interest is not surprising. In case of innovative enterprises it is likely that the analysis of the value adding capacity assumed by the different services played a more important role and these companies also have larger „own knowledge” concerning certain questions. The companies in this group considered individual services less important than the group of interested enterprises.

10. In the analysis we observed that within the examined circle **innovative companies show more interest in the advantages lying in networking.** This is also justified by the fact that 40% of enterprises considered innovative claimed to be a member of some entrepreneurial group. So it seems that belonging to an entrepreneurial group is an important source of innovation, especially because 60% of these companies do not assume a strategy defining position within the given entrepreneurial group. This is confirmed by the fact that rather few enterprises of the two other groups belong to entrepreneurial groups.

11. In the analysis we devoted special attention to **university relations**, since based on the economic structure of the Szeged small region such cooperations would be likely. Relations with the university tend to be weak, in the examined range of companies innovative enterprises show more interest in university relations, but based on the collected data these companies have no strong ties with the knowledge centre either. Based on the survey there is no service type offered by the University of Szeged that more than 50% of enterprises would judge important, and only 40% of the enterprises considered innovative of the sample have regular professional relations with the lecturers or researchers of some university, which indicates relations outside the region in 20% of the cases.

12. One important aspect of cooperations may be that they target the development of some innovation. This area represented one of the greatest surprises; although certain cooperations can be observed, **regular cooperations related to the development of innovations are simply missing**. Even cooperations with higher education institutes are rather rare, what justifies the former results according to which in Hungary corporate relations dominate the cooperations between the university and company sphere.

E) The two sub-types of significant cooperation opportunities in the catchment area of Szeged

In the terminal phase of the research I made an attempt to draw up concrete development proposals in the light of experiences. Based on the economic characteristics of the region and experience deriving from the survey potential development directions present in the local economy are apparent. Within interventions one possibility lies in stimulating the creation of various (regional) networks. In harmony with local attributes only supporting certain cooperations can have a real effect. I briefly introduced the two basic types the encouragement of which, in my view, would ensure real results in the economic and enterprise development of Szeged and its region. One of the greatest values of individual work is that a programme package consisting of seven steps was also created in both cases, with the help of which supporting these cooperations would be possible.

1. In the last phase of the research **we worked up concrete development proposals** for the groups defined in the empirical research. In my view two „enterprise types” will probably be able to respond to network stimulating interventions (part of the groups of „innovative” and „interested enterprises”). In harmony with local attributes only supporting certain cooperations can have a real effect. I briefly introduced the two basic types of cooperation the encouragement of which, in my view, would ensure real results in the economic and enterprise development of Szeged and its region (innovative network built around the University of Szeged and the horizontal networks of „classical” small and medium-sized enterprises).

2. Based on the empirical research I pointed out that one possibility lies in **stimulating the cooperation of small and medium-sized enterprises**, which cooperation **could be realized in the „soft” network built around the University of Szeged** and the institute could also take the tasks related to coordination. Both the intellectual knowledge-base and the university's recognition are more than enough for undertaking such role and it is also apparent that especially innovative companies are happy to build such relations.

3. Good quality enterprise and network development services offered to interested parties represent the other possibility. **Horizontal cooperation among classical small and medium-sized enterprises** mainly concentrating on gaining cost advantages and meant to facilitate better access to markets constitutes this area. The region's economy has traditions in terms of cooperations and the areas where such attempts have been made are clearly visible. In this case increasing the willingness to form cooperations, persuading entrepreneurs and operating networks mean the greatest challenge. I also pointed out that the experiences of Italian „real service centres” can be applied to stimulate such cooperations.

4. The European Union's „**package of advice**” of clustering developed by Rosenfeld in 2002 and the US government's „handbook” on clusters divided development proposals stimulating networking in seven different steps. The programme package functions as a „menu”, depending on the development level, activities and nature of cooperations different actions may become important in each package. Due to experiences it can be claimed that **after necessary modifications the various groups of steps can become suitable for stimulating the two above-mentioned types of cooperations successfully**. Accordingly, I worked up in detail two series of interventions that, in my opinion, are suitable to support the creation and consolidation of networks with different features.

F) Future research directions

The constant development and transformation of networks and enterprise development offers various future research opportunities. We are convinced that many new and newer methods and tools will appear in enterprise development – as it happened in the past decade too – and the business world will also create more and more complex and interesting forms of cooperation. Therefore, one opportunity for further research lies in making an attempt to examine the new methods and tools occurring in everyday practice using high theoretical standards, to synthesize knowledge, identify rules and draw conclusions. Moreover, the methodology of mapping effects will probably become more elaborate, which can lead to a better examination of the direct and indirect consequences of interventions.

I believe that following our country's accession to the European Union, especially in the programming period of 2007-2013 the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises will assume an even more accentuated role in Hungary's economy. They will receive funding from various different programmes financed at the community and national level. The empirical analysis of networks organised in our country may (according to optimistic expectations) constitute another area of future research. Decision-makers of all times are usually interested in how the creation of different cooperations can be supported and they often draw up actual programmes as well. Today is no different, and on one hand, the Ministry of Economy and Transport encourages the emergence of suppliers by offering significant financial assistance in the frameworks of a special target programme, and on the other hand, one of the Economic Competitiveness Operational Programme's grant schemes intends to assist exactly the creation of cooperations among small and medium-sized enterprises. I hope that in the near future it will be possible to analyse and evaluate the real effects that these programmes exercise on the sphere of enterprises. In harmony with all this, further research challenges will emerge in studying the stimulation of cooperations as a special form of enterprise development.