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**UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN**

**CRED**  
CENTER FOR REGIONAL  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

# Cooperation in the Swiss Hotel Industry: The Entrepreneur's Setup

## CRED-Bericht Nr. 16<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Inhalt dieses CRED-Berichts ist die Masterarbeit von Bieri Martin und Niederberger Manuel, betreut durch die Forschungsstelle Tourismus (CRED-T – Dr. Monika Bandi Tanner, Adrian Pfammatter) und durch das Department of Management and Entrepreneurship (IMU – Unternehmensführung – Prof. Dr. Artur Baldauf)

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## Short Summary

This master thesis identifies entrepreneurial prerequisites (the entrepreneur's setup) which positively influence the formation of cooperative relationships in the Swiss hotel industry.

The review of entrepreneurship and cooperation literature shows that the operational setup of an entrepreneur needs to be combined with his or her personal setup. Furthermore, environmental and cooperation specific characteristics complete the entrepreneur's setup.

In the empirical part, interviews were conducted in order to identify the elaborated entrepreneur's setup in the Swiss hotel industry. It was found that the cooperative entrepreneur is well-educated, innovative and socially active within his or her network. Operational factors such as the network position of the hotel (prior cooperative relationships), are an influencing aspect for the establishment of cooperation. On a cooperation level, shared values and similarity are more important than the reputation of the cooperation partner. Interestingly, no major differences between rural and city hotels were discovered.

With its qualitative-explorative approach, the thesis opens the horizon for further research in the fields of entrepreneurship, cooperation and the Swiss hotel industry.

\*In den CRED-Berichten werden Ergebnisse von Forschungsarbeiten und anwendungsrelevanten Projekten publiziert.

## **I. Management Summary**

Swiss hotels compete in a challenging macroeconomic environment (cf. Wirtschaftsforum Graubünden., 2003, p. 1). In recent years, several incidents interrupted the economic growth, like the economic crisis in 2009 and the strong national currency (cf. Federal Statistical Office, 2016, p. 11). In order to overcome the shrinking benefits and demands, creative actions are required. Cooperative relationships are seen as a key solution. Cooperation enables hotels to enlarge their competitive resources, exploit new business opportunities and save costs.

Next to economic and operational conditions, it is highly important for common practice to identify personal and entrepreneurial prerequisites which positively influence the formation process of cooperative relationships (cf. Bandi et al., 2015, pp. 41-42). Such conditions can be consolidated under the entrepreneur's setup.

The central objective of this thesis is to elaborate a comprehensive setup of the entrepreneur, who successfully established cooperative relationships in the Swiss hotel industry. The thesis aims to highlight the entrepreneur from different perspectives in order to examine different influence factors on the establishment of cooperation. The review of entrepreneurship and cooperation literature points out four sub-setups. The operational setup which consists of firm level antecedents needs to be combined with the personal setup that consists individual level aspects. Additionally, environmental and cooperation characteristics should be considered as well, in order to complete the entrepreneur's setup.

In the empirical part of the thesis, interviews were conducted in order to identify the elaborated entrepreneur's setup, in the Swiss hotel industry.

It was found that the cooperative entrepreneur is well-educated, innovative and socially active within his network. Furthermore, cultural aspects do highly influence his setup. Next to the personal setup, operational factors impact the cooperation establishment as well. The network position of the hotel, which is determined by its prior cooperative relationships, is seen as an influencing aspect for the establishment of cooperation. As already expected by analysing the contrasting results of management scholars, the hotel size had no influence. Eventually, on a cooperation level, shared values and similarity are more important than the reputation of the cooperation partner.

Interestingly, no major differences between rural and city hotels were discovered. However, with regard to the entrepreneurs in the Swiss hotel industry, several components of the entrepreneur's setup have been identified.

This master thesis adds value by analysing the intersection of three different research fields, namely entrepreneurship, cooperation and the Swiss hotel industry. With the help of a qualitative-explorative approach, the thesis opens the horizon for further research in the above-mentioned intersection.

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## V. List of Abbreviations

Cf.	Lat: confer (compare)
CRED	Center for Regional Economic Development
Dr.	Doctor
EC	Intersection of the entrepreneurship and cooperation
ECH	Intersection of the entrepreneurship, cooperation and Swiss hotel industry
E.g.	Lat: exempli gratia (for example)
Et al.	Lat: et alia (and others)
Ff.	Lat: folio (and the following)
FSO	Federal Statistical Office
IMU	Institute of Marketing and Management
IOL	Interorganizational learning
KPI	Key performance indicator
P.	Page
PP.	Pages
Prof.	Professor
RBV	Resource-based view
R&D	Research and development
SME	Small and medium sized enterprises
SNB	Swiss National Bank
TAC	Transaction cost economics
Vs.	Versus

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Differentiation and Delimitation

The Swiss hotel industry faces several issues, such as shrinking revenues, fierce competition and a challenging macroeconomic environment (cf. Wirtschaftsforum Graubünden, 2003, p. 1). In order to cope with these concerns, the industry has to be innovative and improve its offering continuously. Hotels need to exhibit a strong entrepreneurial drive<sup>2</sup>, due to the fact that they are rather small or medium sized and do not have unlimited access to internal funds (cf. Hoskisson et al., 2011, p. 1145). Creative solutions, such as establishing interorganizational cooperation, are a way to bundle competitive resources, save costs and exploit new business opportunities in order to assert the market position.

This thesis explores relevant components of the entrepreneur's setup for the establishment of successful cooperation in the Swiss hotel industry. The entrepreneur's setup consists of entrepreneur's characteristics, capabilities, qualifications, behaviour, values and further conditions and attributes on an individual, firm and cooperation level.

The thesis can be differentiated into three domains. A major focus lies on the entrepreneurship domain. Shane (2003, p. 3) defines entrepreneurship as follows: "Entrepreneurship is an activity that involves the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to introduce new goods and services, ways of organizing, markets, process and raw materials through organizing efforts that previously had not existed". The addressed entrepreneurial activities can take place on an individual, firm as well as on an interorganizational or network level (cf. Hoskisson et al., 2011, p. 1142). Aiming for undiscovered business opportunities, one of the above mentioned entrepreneurial activity is the establishment of cooperation which builds the second domain of this thesis. Cooperation includes all forms of collaboration between two or more independent firms to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (cf. Böhme, 2008, p. 393). Cooperation can be established through contractual agreements, equity instruments or informal relationships. In the literature, a major focus lies on strategic alliances which are arrangements between firms that involve development or exchange of products, technologies and services. They are established due to multiple motives and goals and appear across vertical,

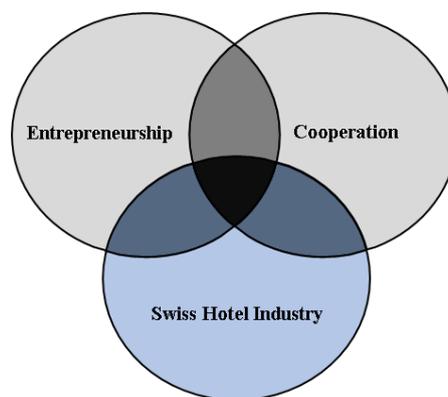
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<sup>2</sup> If an executive exhibits innovative, proactive and risk-taking behaviour (core elements of entrepreneurial orientation), he expresses entrepreneurial drive (cf. Slevin/Covin, 1990, p. 43).

horizontal and lateral boundaries (cf. Gulati, 1998, p. 293). However, in this thesis, no focus lies on a specific form of cooperation and no such form will be excluded, so that the number of research subjects will not be limited in the empirical part.

The focus on the intersection between entrepreneurship and cooperation (EC-domain) is useful, since an entrepreneur is the initiator of such an entrepreneurial activity as the establishment of cooperation.

The third domain sets restrictions regarding the industry, namely the Swiss hotel industry. The third domain will be addressed in the empirical part, whereas the theoretical part will be limited to the EC-domain.



**Figure 1: Domain Intersections**

## 1.2 Problem Definition

There is an existing lack of literature regarding the elements of the entrepreneur's setup that positively influence the establishment of cooperation. The literature on the EC-domain often focuses on performance outcomes like new venture performance (cf. Hoang/Antoncic, 2003, p. 167). There are less researchers who explored the proactive formation of cooperative relationships and the importance of the different dimensions of entrepreneurial behaviour for the formation process (cf. Sarkar/Echambadi/Harrison, 2001, p. 708). Hoang and Antoncic (2003, p. 167) agree with Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison that "fewer process-oriented studies, where networks are the dependent variable, have been conducted ...". Further, they recommend that the impact of the entrepreneurs' attributes on the quality of network linkages still need to be explored (cf. Hoang/Antoncic, 2003, p. 179).

The creative development of entrepreneurial organizations and cooperation networks replace the idea of intra-organizational firm growth and closed innovation process to enhance sales,

gain knowledge and stimulate innovation (cf. Larson, 1992, p. 101). Thus, it is highly important for the common practice to know the components of the entrepreneur's setup which positively influence the formation process of cooperation and how they are connected.

The authors think that the entrepreneur's setup has been insufficiently studied since the initiating idea of the cooperation establishment for exploiting future business opportunities starts on an individual level, on the level of the entrepreneur.

The cooperation research often focuses on the social perspective, such as the social network theory (cf. Granovetter, 1973, p. 1360). It explores interactions between individuals and organizations and how such interactions have an impact on entrepreneurial activities. A review of this research has been arranged by Jack (2010). However, Hoang and Antoncic (2003, p. 165) have rather questioned the impact of this theory. Shan (1990, p. 131), Gulati and Gargiulo (1999, p. 1475) found that both economic and social factors have a significant impact on the formation of new alliances. It is more expedient to include both perspectives, when developing a conceptual review.

Furthermore, there is almost no literature about the ECH-domain,<sup>3</sup> although the industry context surely must be regarded, when a strategic alliance or another form of cooperative relationship is established by firms (cf. Koza/Lewin, 1998, p. 256).

If a hotel faces serious economic difficulties, measures at an intra-organizational level frequently fall too short. In the hotel industry, inter-organizational concepts, such as cooperative relationships, are in many cases a better long-term solution to optimize business activities. With cooperative relationships, the Swiss hotel industry can deal with the challenging demands, such as professional marketing campaigns, complete service package, procurement and multi-optional touristic offers (cf. Hanser/Scaburri, 2001, p. 1).

### 1.3 Objective

The objective of the thesis is to analyse the setup of entrepreneurs who aim for the successful establishment of cooperative relationships in the Swiss hotel industry.

The main research question is: What are components and attributes of the entrepreneur's setup which are derived from entrepreneurship and cooperation research?

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<sup>3</sup> The ECH-domain is an intersection of three different domains: Entrepreneurship, cooperation and the Swiss hotel industry.

In a first step, the thesis combines entrepreneurship and cooperation literature and analyses the intersection between these two dimensions. In the analytical framework, the connections between the social and economic perspective will be examined. What are the potential barriers or contradictions between these two approaches?

While identifying the components of the entrepreneur's setup, the following research questions will be raised: What are gaps in the current literature and avenues for future research? Can the cooperative entrepreneur be characterized? Which characteristics and conditions are essential for entrepreneurs, who build cooperative relationships? Can the entrepreneur's setup be identified in the Swiss hotel industry? What are the differences between entrepreneurs who operate in city hotels and entrepreneurs who operate in hotels which are situated in rural regions of Switzerland?

In order to develop an extended understanding of this research goal, the thesis will firstly define the different ECH-domains and different theoretical perspectives.

In a second step, a systematic literature review will focus on exploring the above-mentioned entrepreneur's setup, while fostering the EC-domain.

The critical review will lighten up differences between definitions and its evolvement over time. Potential debates between authors will be analysed and discussed. To sum up, the systematic literature review will bridge the existing research gap while combining the two domains.

The aim of the theoretical part of the thesis will be the delineation of what is already known and what still needs to be studied if it comes to the cooperative entrepreneur. Eventually, the findings from the literature review will be tested with an explorative-qualitative research in the Swiss hotel industry.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

The methodological approach is derived from the main and secondary objectives of the thesis. The main questions will be answered by a literature analysis and an empirical part. With the help of an in-depth and systematic literature review, the conceptual framework for the entrepreneur's setup will be elaborated. Chapter 4 *Scope of Literature Review* describes the methodological approach for the literature review in detail. In order to explore the entrepreneur's setup empirically, a qualitative research design was chosen. Chapter 6 *Methodology of the Empirical Research* outlines the sample selection and the methodological design for the empirical part.

## 2 ECH – Domain

In the following chapter, the three domains, entrepreneurship, cooperation and Swiss hotel industry will be defined and described. In chapter 5 *Results of the Literature Review*, the domains entrepreneurship and cooperation are covered, whereas the third domain, the Swiss hotel industry, will only be included in the empirical part of this thesis. In this thesis, the intersection of all three domains will be defined as ECH-domain. The current state of research of the ECH-domain will be described as a fourth section in this chapter.

### 2.1 What Constitutes Entrepreneurship?

As mentioned in the introduction section, entrepreneurship is one of the three domains in this thesis. Therefore, a definition of what is an entrepreneur and a description of what constitutes entrepreneurship will be provided in this section.

A clear description of the domain cannot be found in the literature. Well-accepted definitions that set the borders of the research field do not exist, even though numerous authors defined the term 'entrepreneurship' (cf. Venkatraman, 1997, p. 119). Therefore, definitions about entrepreneurship are found in great variety.

According to Schumpeter (1934), entrepreneurs use single resources and combine them to a business opportunity. This process is called creative destruction. The before mentioned resources can be located in or outside an organization. With this resource combining character, entrepreneurship can be seen as an innovative behaviour that generates growth (as cited in Shane, 2003, pp. 33-35). The wealth creating character and the accumulation of capital is therefore a central point in entrepreneurial behaviour (cf. Chell/Baines, 2000, p. 198).

Taking into consideration that the entrepreneur is the key figure of entrepreneurship, Schumpeter (1939, p. 129) extended his previous understanding about entrepreneurship and defined the entrepreneur as a person who recognizes business opportunities and their values. The entrepreneur creates successful innovation from ideas and knows how to implement them in the market. To sum up, an entrepreneur not only is an innovative person who has good ideas, he is able to bring these ideas to the market and generate profit.

According to Venkatraman (1997, p. 120), most researchers have focused on the entrepreneur, who he is and what he does, ignoring that entrepreneurship consists of both, (i) the presence of

opportunities and (ii) the presence of innovative individuals. Authors have described entrepreneurs as people who establish a new business (cf. Tjosvold/Weicker, 1993, p. 13). In contrast to this view, Venkatraman (1997, p. 120) suggested a wider understanding and stated that the core field should focus on the appearance of opportunity creation of goods and services in an economy and the ability to discover and exploit such opportunities. As a third field Venkatraman suggested that the consequences on an economic, psychological and social level should be considered. Following this suggestion, Shane (2003, p. 3) defined entrepreneurship as "... an activity that involves the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to introduce new goods and services, ways of organizing, markets, process and raw materials through organizing efforts that previously had not existed."

Seeing the establishment of cooperation as an entrepreneurial activity, the definition by Shane (2003, p. 3) is adopted for the purposes of this thesis.

Entrepreneurship can also be described as a process. Keeping in mind the understanding of entrepreneurship, the entrepreneurial process can be split in three stages: (i) the discovery of opportunities, (ii) the evaluation of opportunities and (iii) the exploitation of these opportunities (cf. Shane/Venkatraman, 2000, p. 218).

Therefore, entrepreneurship requires the existence of entrepreneurial opportunities (cf. Shane/Venkatraman, 2000, p. 220). Situations in which goods, services, materials and organizational processes are brought to market and sold at a higher price than their costs, are described by Casson (1982) as entrepreneurial opportunities (as cited in Shane, 2003, p. 41).

According to Hayek (1945, p. 520) all opportunities must be available to all people at the same time. Only a subset of the population (the entrepreneurs) will then be able to recognize the opportunities (cf. Kirzner, 1973, p. 172).

However, the discovery of entrepreneurial opportunities is not sufficient. After having discovered the opportunity, the entrepreneur must see its value through his evaluation and must then be able to use the opportunities through exploitation (cf. Shane/Venkatraman, 2000, p. 222). Not all recognised opportunities are exploited. According to Venkatraman (1997, p. 123) the joint consideration of the opportunity and the characteristics of the individual will explain why some discovered opportunities are exploited and some are not.

Sathe (1989, pp. 20-32) described entrepreneurship as the interplay of environment and individuals. The entrepreneurial process is started by the entrepreneur who represents the individual context of entrepreneurship. The market in which a firm takes actions can be seen

as the environmental context. Combining these two perspectives, the entrepreneur faces an environmental condition which will influence the individual entrepreneurial behaviour.

According to Sathe, a third perspective, the organization, plays a role in this interplay. The organizational context can be seen as the organization's strategy, values and structure.

Taking this organizational context into account, scholars defined the term corporate entrepreneurship. Corporate entrepreneurship can be understood as a subset to the field of entrepreneurship on firm level.

As it is the case for entrepreneurship, the definitions of corporate entrepreneurship differ from author to author. Guth and Ginsberg (1990, p. 5) referred to strategic renewal and defined corporate entrepreneurship as follows: "Corporate entrepreneurship encompasses two types of phenomena and the processes surrounding them: (i) the birth of new businesses within existing organizations, i.e. internal innovation or venturing; and (ii) the transformation of organizations through renewal of the key ideas on which they are built, i.e. strategic renewal."

In addition to Guth and Ginsberg (1990), Jennings and Lumpkin (1989, p. 489) focused on the products and markets and elaborated corporate entrepreneurship as the degree to that a firm develops new products and markets. According to them, a firm is entrepreneurial if it has a significant amount of new or renewed products and markets.

Zahra (1991, p. 262) also used the idea of business creation and noted: "Corporate entrepreneurship refers to formal and informal activities aimed at creating new business in established companies through product and process innovations and market developments. These activities may take place at the corporate, division (business), functional, or project level, with the unifying objective of improving a company's competitive position and financial performance. Corporate entrepreneurship also entails the strategic renewal of an existing business." Zahra (1995, p. 227) used his prior definition to create a short and clear description of corporate entrepreneurship. Therefore, corporate entrepreneurship can be defined as: "... the sum of a company's innovation, renewal, and venturing efforts."

Heavey and Simsek, (2013, p. 837) were influenced by Zahra's definition of corporate entrepreneurship and stated that the corporate entrepreneurship construct can be used to explain performance differences across firms.

Not only the aspect of new business creation is covered in the literature, but corporate entrepreneurship can as well be seen as a process. This process is similar to the entrepreneurial process, but takes place on a firm level. According to Burgelman (1983, p. 1349) corporate entrepreneurship is: "... the process whereby firms engage in diversification through internal development. Such diversification requires new resource combinations to extend the firm's

activities in areas unrelated, or marginally related, to its current domain of competence and corresponding opportunity set.” In addition to this, Chung and Gibbons (1997, p. 13) described the process as the transformation of individual ideas to an organization's action through uncertainty management that will lead the organization to competitive advantages.

Focusing on the entrepreneurial process, one key concept of entrepreneurship is entrepreneurial orientation. According to Lumpkin and Dess (1996, p. 137) entrepreneurial orientation is the management style that eventually makes the organization entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurial orientation can be seen as the process and structure of a firm that involves proactiveness, innovativeness and a risk-taking behaviour (cf. Stam/Elfring, 2008, p. 98). The fundamental concept of Lumpkin and Dess (1996, p. 137) contains two additional entrepreneurial characteristics, autonomy and competitive aggressiveness. Overall it can be said that entrepreneurial orientation must be embedded in the firm's strategy.

While in the current language an entrepreneur is defined as the founder and owner of a new business, this thesis widens this definition and identifies entrepreneurs, as individuals with an innovative behaviour, that possess the ability to recognize business opportunities with wealth-creating character. Such business opportunities can be the establishment of cooperative relationships. Individuals who successfully discover, evaluate, establish and ultimately make use of such opportunities are identified as entrepreneurs. This definition is similar to the description of entrepreneurship by Pechlaner and Raich (2004, p. 136): “The entrepreneur is generally understood to be someone with certain attributes, such as creativity, innovation or having a pioneer spirit”.

## 2.2 What Constitutes Cooperation?

Cooperation is the second domain of this thesis. Together with entrepreneurship, the domain cooperation builds the foundation for the EC-domain which is elaborated in chapter 5 *Results of the Literature Review*. Considering the implementation of a possible organizational form or the strategic orientation, firms move between the two poles 'market' (external transaction) and 'hierarchy' (internal transaction) (cf. Tremblay, 1998, p. 843). In addition to the two aforementioned extremes of organizational coordination, cooperation can be identified as a mixed form between the two poles. It is defined as the collaboration between legally and formally independent firms (cf. Böhme, 2008, p. 393). Cooperation offers the opportunity to strengthen or reorient the strategic profiling of the company. Thus, decisive competitive advantages can be achieved (cf. Laux/Soller, 2008, p. 46). Therefore, a definition of what constitutes cooperation will be provided. This section points out the different directions, contractual and legal forms, objectives, and optimal requirements for the establishment of cooperation.

### 2.2.1 Direction of Cooperation

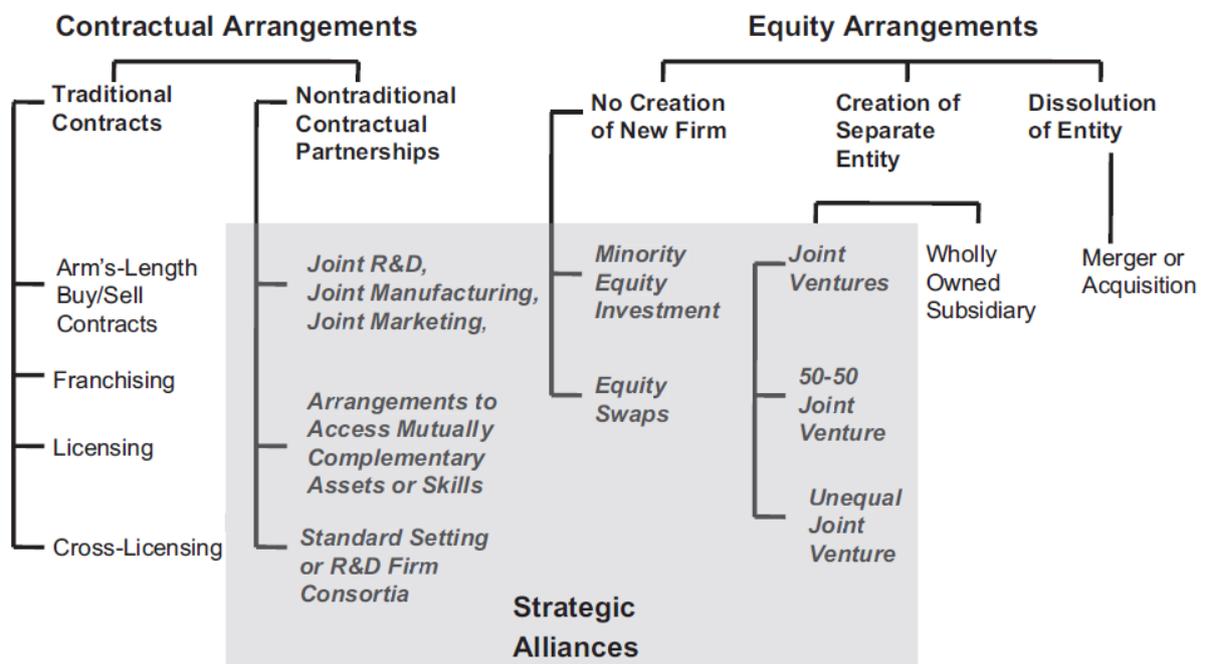
With regard to possible directions of cooperation, three different types can be distinguished (cf. Homburg/Krohmer, 2009, pp. 508-509):

- 'Horizontal cooperation' refers to cooperative relationships between firms of the same value chain and within the same industry. If cooperating firms are potential competitors, the term cooptation is used. For example, cooperation between different hotels.
- In 'vertical cooperation', firms in different value chain stages foster cooperative relationships. Possible examples may be the cooperation between tourism associations, tour operators or mountain railways with hotels in a specific destination.
- 'Lateral cooperation' relates to cooperation between firms in different industries or sectors. In terms of the hotel industry, banks, insurance firms or the retail trade are possible lateral partners.

### 2.2.2 Contractual and Legal Forms of Cooperation

In practice, cooperation is either based on trust or different forms of contractual and legal agreements. *Figure 2* displays a general overview of the scope of interfirm relationships. In particular, cooperative arrangements that can be characterized as strategic alliances. The

majority of cooperative relationships in the hotel industry can be categorized as strategic alliances.



**Figure 2: Scope of Interfirm Relationships (taken from Kale/Singh, 2009, p. 47)**

In the case of purely contractual forms, the partners remain independent. Cooperative forms to access selective assets, services, skills or franchising and licensing contracts are a few examples of contractual cooperation. In the case of cooperation with capital investment, the partners might possess minority interests in each other's firms or even establish a joint venture. *Figure 3* shows cooperative arrangements according to their relational intensity (cf. Bandi et al., 2015, p. 16).

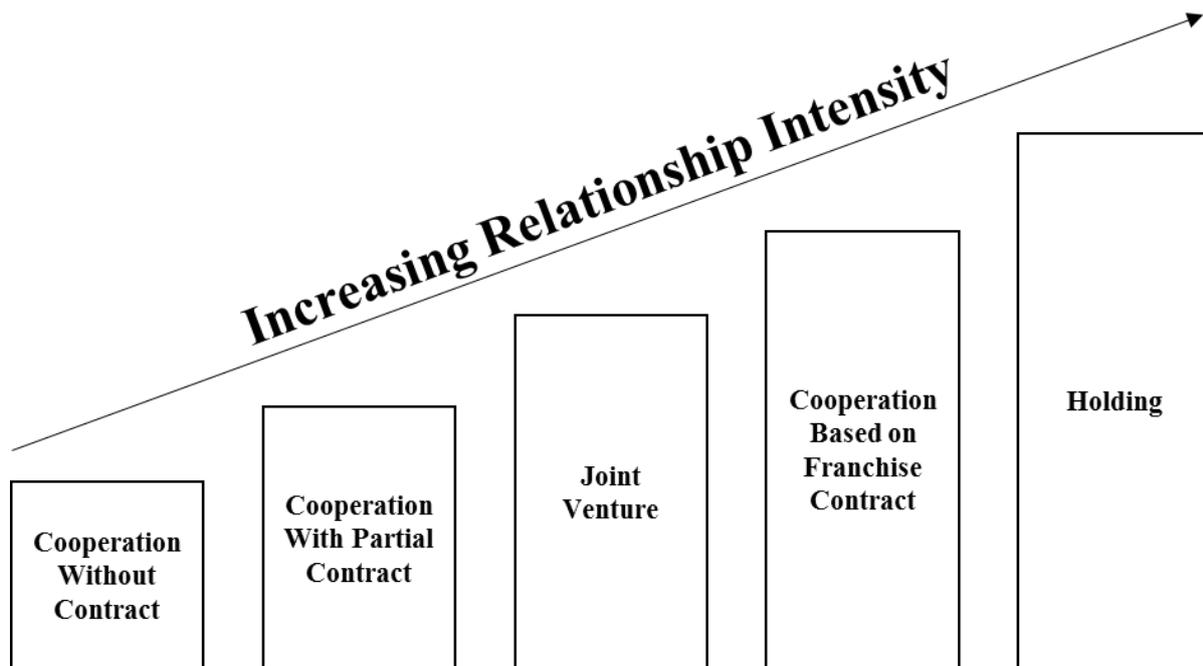


Figure 3: Relational Intensity of Cooperation (taken from Bandi et al., 2015, p. 16)<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the Swiss Code of Obligation, the following different legal forms of cooperative arrangements can be distinguished: Association, cooperative society, unregistered partnership, collective proprietorship, limited partnership, limited stock company, limited stock partnership and private limited company (cf. Frey, 2002, pp. 246-249). According to Frey (2002, p. 250), the limited stock company and the private limited company are most suitable for cooperation with higher relational intensity and the association, the unregistered partnership as well as the cooperative society for cooperation with lower relational intensity.

### 2.2.3 Objectives of Cooperation

There are several objectives, why a firm should establish cooperative relationships. In the following, this subsection displays the most important cooperation objectives in the hotel industry. In general, one can differentiate between reciprocal and redistributive goals. However, the two target categories can overlap and are not always strictly separable. On the one hand, reciprocal objectives are based on complementary resources and skills which help to achieve synergy effects ('economies of scope'). On the other hand, redistributive goals are characterized by the synchronization of existing resources and abilities to leverage their scale

<sup>4</sup> Figure 3 was taken from Bandi et al. (2015, p. 16) and was approximately translated into English. The figure from Bandi et al. is based on Frey (2002, p. 232).

(‘economies of scale’) (cf. Jacobi, 1996, p. 102). Eventually, the main objective of every cooperation is to optimize the costs and (or) to generate higher earnings. The following objectives can be identified in the hotel industry (cf. Jacobi, 1996, pp. 105-128):

- Gain in know-how and competence: The target is to achieve a joint implementation of exclusive knowledge and the creation of high-quality services for guests.
- Cost savings: Cooperation is intended to achieve cost savings at all stages of the value chain (e.g. marketing and distribution costs, purchasing costs, personnel costs and further transactional costs).
- Image improvements: Cooperative relationships can increase the attractiveness of hotels and improve the reputation of a destination.
- Market access: Cooperation is useful for both, the creation of new market segments within an existing market (e.g. new target group), as well as the successful entering into new markets (e.g. internationalization).
- Media presence: The level of media presence and public awareness should be increased by publicly effective cooperation.
- Time advantage: Time is one of the most important factors in relation to the innovation process. With the help of cooperative relationships, hotels are able to place innovations at an early stage on the market and exploit possible first-mover advantages.
- Risk reduction: Entering into cooperation may result in the reduction of risk by the principle of risk spreading.

#### 2.2.4 Optimal Requirements for the Establishment of Cooperation

If a cooperative relationship wants to survive in the long-term, the risk potential should be minimized or reduced even before establishment of the cooperation. Several important aspects have to be included already in the planning phase of the establishment. Essentially, the definitive success of cooperative relationships depends on factors such as shared values, partner compatibility as well as acceptable contract design. The following requirements are important when establishing cooperative relationships (cf. Jacobi, 1996, pp. 133-162):

- Partner congruence: The partner is a strategic resource in terms of competence, compatibility, resources and commitment. The creation of trust is the basic prerequisite for the establishment of a cooperation. A reciprocal approach between the partners should be dominant and opportunistic behaviour must be avoided.

- **Resource congruence:** The partner should either have resources that are not available in the own firm (complementary resources), or resources that are not sufficiently available in the own organization (similar resources). There exist several kinds of resources, such as tangible and intangible assets, financial funds or human capital.
- **Target congruence:** In order to achieve a long-term success, the cooperation partners should agree on at least one primary objective. Furthermore, they should align their main interests and reach an agreement about the assessment and evaluation criteria of the defined objectives.
- **Image and brand congruence:** The cooperation partners should have a similar strategic positioning as well as a similar brand image, otherwise conflicts might arise.
- **Cultural congruence:** A complete discrepancy, as well as a complete consistency of the partner's corporate culture, should be avoided, as the former leads to high coordination costs and the latter neglects learning effects resulting from differences. However, the management style, the organizational structure and the general norms should be similar.
- **Information and communication management:** Within the cooperation an open and trust-based communication management should prevail, in order not to exclude any partner of success-relevant information.
- **Cooperative behaviour and contractual design:** When a cooperation is established, opportunistic behaviour and information asymmetry are difficult to predict. With the help of formal contracts, opportunistic behaviour and information asymmetry can be suppressed. However, the basis for good cooperative behaviour is trust. Jacobi (1996, p. 159) identifies trust as the decisive factor for the realization of agreed upon goals and as essential for the success of the cooperation.

### **2.3 What Constitutes the Swiss Hotel Industry?**

This section provides an overview of the Swiss hotel industry. The Federal Statistical Office (FSO) regularly publishes data about the Swiss tourism industry. According to the FSO, 5,055 Swiss hotels with 141,018 rooms were surveyed in 2015. The average room occupancy rate for Swiss hotels was 51.5 % and the average hotel capacity was 55 available beds (cf. Federal Statistical Office, 2016, pp. 3-5). In the last years, the average amount of beds per hotel was increasing and differing across the regions. While city hotels usually have a bed offer above the average, hotels in rural regions have less beds than the Swiss average (cf. Hotelleriesuisse, 2016, p. 20). Not only the amount of beds differed between the regions. The occupancy rate

was above 52 % in city hotels and only around 30 % in rural and mountain regions (cf. Hotelleriesuisse, 2016, p. 32).

In 2015, the Swiss hotel industry consisted of 63,000 FTEs which accounts for 1.7 % of the tertiary sector. The tertiary sector implied 74 % of all FTEs in Switzerland. (cf. Hotelleriesuisse, 2016, p. 39).

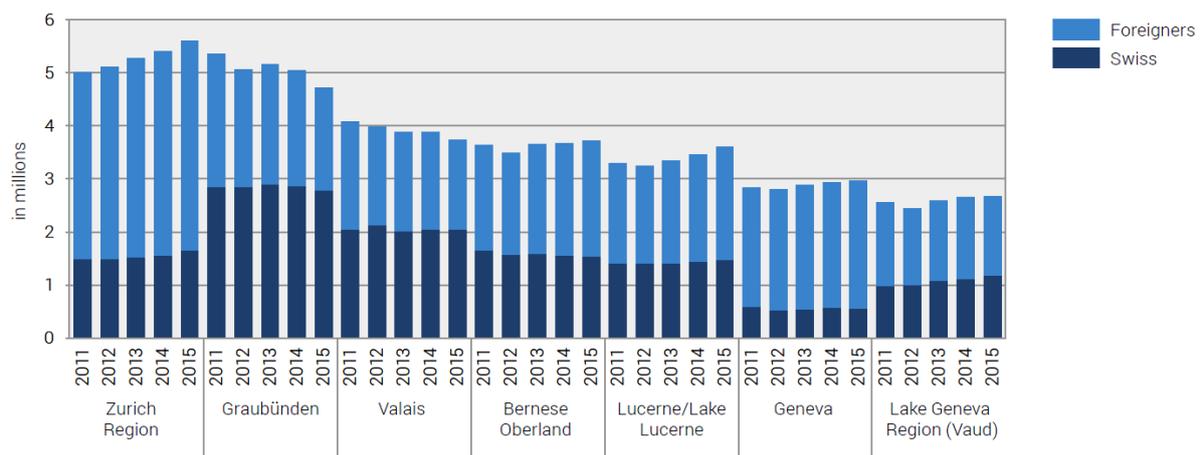
The establishments were differently distributed in the different tourist regions. The tourist region of Grisons had the largest portion of establishments (14 %).

In the last ten years, the number of establishments diminished. In comparison with 2006, the surveyed number of establishments declined by more than 600 units or 11.2 %. Eight out of the eleven tourist regions were affected by this decrease.

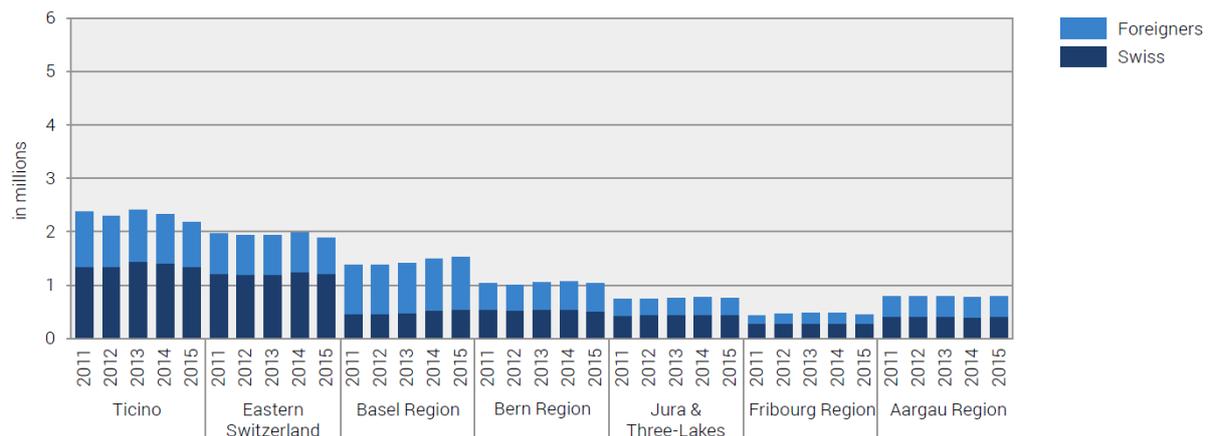
Furthermore, several incidents interrupted the economic growth. After the economic crisis in 2009, the Swiss franc raised strongly against the Euro in 2011. Until the 15. January 2015, the Swiss National Bank stabilised the exchange rate.

Overall, the overnight stays by European visitors declined by 29 % since 2009. The mountain regions were most affected by this decrease and in Grisons, the largest absolute decline was observed. In contrast, urban areas did show an increase in overnight stays (cf. Federal Statistical Office, 2016, pp. 3-17).

The following graphs show the absolute overnight stays in hotel establishments by tourist region.



**Figure 4: Overnight Stays in Hotels and Health Establishment by Tourist Region, 2011-2015 (1/2) (taken from Federal Statistical Office 2016, p. 17)**



**Figure 5: Overnight Stays in Hotels and Health Establishment by Tourist Region, 2011-2015 (2/2) (taken from Federal Statistical Office 2016, p. 17)**

## 2.4 State of Research in ECH – Domain

Already in 2002, Frey (2002, p. 9) stated that many publications had been issued on the subject of cooperation. More than a decade later, the research field of cooperation remains an important subject for scientific studies, not least because of the diversity of cooperative relationships observed in practice. Frey (2002) presents different holistic design approaches for the practical implementation of cooperation with regard to specific characteristics in the hotel industry.

Concerning cooperation in the Swiss hotel industry, several practice reports have been published (e.g. Wirtschaftsforum Graubünden, 2003; Bandi et al., 2015). Hanser, director of the Wirtschaftsforum Graubünden, and further authors (2003, p. 21) concluded that the following cooperative relationships are typical for the Swiss hotel industry:

- Regional or marketing cooperation (between hotels)
- Cooperation within the destination (between hotels and firms)
- Development of a distribution network (between hotels and firms from other industries)

The main objective of Bandi et al. (2015) was to conceive and develop a cooperation-tool ('fit-together') to support practice. One can conclude that in the last 20 years, the intersection of cooperation and the Swiss hotel industry was widely researched with the help of both, scientific papers and practice reports.

However, what about the state of research of the ECH-domain, in particular with regard to entrepreneurship? Bandi et al. (2015, pp. 41-42) concluded that among experts, the personal prerequisites on individual level are considered to be the most important factors regarding the establishment of cooperation. Compared to personal conditions, operational requirements are

rather secondary. In their summary, they point out the most important personal prerequisites (cf. Bandi et al., 2015, p. 43):

- Mutual trust
- Tolerance and willingness
- Ability to cooperate and leadership (in particular, openness, flexibility and willingness to experiment and change)

In practice, hotel entrepreneurs and their personal conditions seem to be highly important. However, scientific results and information for defining the ECH-domain are rather scarce. Pechlaner and Raich (2004, pp. 123-136) investigated the role of the entrepreneur in tourism networks. Their research domain combines cooperation, entrepreneurship and tourism research, which seems highly related to the ECH-domain of this thesis. Furthermore, Peters (2003) stated that many European tourism firms, such as hotels, are characterised by similar attributes (as cited in Pechlaner/Raich, 2004, p. 123). Due to this fact, the results might be transferred to the ECH-domain of the thesis. Next to leadership skills, they found that recognizing and accepting the need for cooperation are the most important requirements of entrepreneurs (cf. Pechlaner/Raich, 2004, pp. 135-136). Like Pechlaner and Raich, Komppula aimed to understand the role of entrepreneurs when establishing successful destinations. With the help of six case studies and several structured interviews, the findings point out that “... without innovative, committed, and risk-taking entrepreneurs no destination will flourish” (Komppula, 2014, p. 361). Furthermore, Komppula (2014, p. 368) stated that successful cooperation always requires mutual trust, a collective vision and objectives, and commitment between the partners. Most important, Komppula strongly emphasized that “the role of individual enterprises and entrepreneurs is largely underestimated in the literature and in the models of destination competitiveness” (Komppula, 2014, p. 369).

Therefore, this thesis explores further conditions to define the cooperative entrepreneur comprehensively.

### 3 Theoretical Perspectives

Over the last 30 years, academic scholars established a vast understanding of strategic firm cooperation and its key capabilities of leading to sustainable competitive advantage (cf. Dyer/Singh, 1998, p. 661). In order to fully understand the characteristics and behaviour of cooperative entrepreneurs and their strategic implications, the analytical framework for this thesis will be divided into an economic and a social perspective. The perspectives should explain possible theories at most fundamental level, in order to understand entrepreneurial and firm behaviour towards strategic cooperation. With the help of the theoretical foundation, the authors are able to conduct the literature review and explain possible domain intersections.

#### 3.1 Economic Perspective

Firms engage in alliances, if the costs are too high to perform economic market transactions, but not high enough to justify an integration (cf. Hennart, 1988, p. 372). Transaction cost economics (TAC) view cooperative relationships as mixed forms of contractual governance between the purely market-based and the organization's internal hierarchical relation (cf. Williamson, 1973, p. 316, 1985; Powell, 1990, p. 297). The aim was to enlighten the terms, under which a firm would prefer the one strategy over the other.<sup>5</sup> Especially Coase (1937) and Williamson (1973; 1985) are two scholars who initially explained the view of TAC. In their view, entrepreneurs set up a firm, if the costs of managing the economic transfer are higher on the free markets than in-house. Costs on the free market consist of search costs, contract negotiation costs and the costs of potential conflict resolving (cf. Mohr/Spekman, 1994, p. 139). As opposed to market costs, in-house costs consider costs of inefficiencies, operational risks, adaption processes and bureaucracies (cf. Barney/Hesterly, 2006, pp. 7-11; Williamson, 1991, p.77-78). Two principal assumptions of TAC about the behaviour of agents are essential to build a theoretical foundation for answering the main research question. First, they are not fully rational, but rather bounded in their own behaviour (cf. Simon, 1947, p. 241) and second, agents pursue their own interests and act opportunistically (cf. Williamson, 1981, pp. 1544-1546). These two assumptions create uncertainty under which it could become costly or difficult for counterparties to engage in cooperative relationships, since not all eventualities

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the uncertainty and risk of opportunistic behaviour, the exchange frequency or the asset specificity of an economic transaction (cf. Podolny, 1994, p. 458; Gulati 1995a, p. 86).

can be foreseen (cf. Williamson, 1985, pp. 58-60). The best protection against adversarial actions and opportunism is to draft formal contracts or to install other governance mechanisms (cf. Riordan/Williamson, 1985, pp. 366-367; Powell, 1990, p. 297). TAC is able to explain some determinants of cooperative relationships, but fails to clarify the behavioural attributes of the partners involved. Granovetter (cf. 1985, p. 481) stated that the framework of TAC presents a heavily undersocialized view and ignores the social context in which an economic transaction takes place (cf. Powell, 1990, p. 299).

In contrast to the TAC, the resource-based view (RBV) suggests that firms should achieve synergies from joint actions and the exchange of strategic resources (cf. Nair/Trendowski/Judge, 2008, p. 1027; Dyer/Singh, 1998, p. 666ff.; Gulati/Nohria/Zaheer, 2000, p. 207). Therefore, firms try to cooperate with whom they share the strongest resource interdependence (cf. Pfeffer/Nowak, 1976, p. 398). Especially, the relational view, which Dyer and Sing (cf. 1998, pp. 666-669) described, tries to explain that agents choose to establish cooperative relationships with whom they share mutual complementarities in firm resources. The economic target is to achieve synergies and access each other's assets. According to Gulati (cf. 1999, pp. 413-316), resource interdependence and the potential of creating joint synergies are necessary, but insufficient to fully explain alliance formation. Not all potential beneficial opportunities lead to a cooperative relationship. In order to describe the establishment of successful alliances, social factors, such as familiarity, reciprocity and trust have to be taken into account (cf. Gulati, 1995a, pp. 105-107). Thus, the RBV faces similar conceptual problems as the TAC.

Instead of viewing collaborative relationships as a mere cooperation of sharing unique and strategic resources, the interorganizational learning view (IOL) points out that firms tend to collaborate in order to advance their knowledge and abilities (cf. Kale/Singh/Perlmutter, 2000; Lane/Lubatkin, 1998; Powell/Koput/Smith-Doerr, 1996). The eventual goal of a firm is to use the cooperation to identify, transmit, internalize and develop the knowledge which lingers within other partner firms (cf. Lane/Lubatkin, 1998, pp. 464-465). Entrepreneurial firms sometimes lack the financial soundness to integrate critical functions and strategic resources within its own hierarchy. Cooperative relationships are an alternative to integration activities that provide the entrepreneur with all the strategic benefits while avoiding the capital investment of an integration. Cooperation activities ensure the entrepreneur's environmental flexibility and advance his innovation capability (cf. Larson, 1992, p. 78).

### 3.2 Social Perspective

The analysis of cooperation is not entirely limited to an economical context. In order to completely understand the entrepreneurial drive of forming alliances, the analysis has to take the industrial environment and the social context, in which alliances are profoundly embedded into account (cf. Koza/Lewin, 1998, p. 256; Gulati/Gargiulo, 1999, p. 1475). According to this view, the social structure of ties and cultural values serve as an exclusive source of strategic opportunities (cf. Gulati, 1995a, p. 108, 1995b, p. 622). Further are the firms' economic activities strongly embedded in the network of interpersonal relationships and the behaviour within its network (cf. Granovetter, 1985, p. 481). Highly important for the social perspective, is the concept of social embeddedness (cf. Granovetter, 1985). Scholars differentiate between the relational and structural embeddedness (cf. Rowley/Behrens/Krackhardt, 2000, pp. 370-371). The relational embeddedness focuses on the effect of tie strength between a firm with current and past partners on alliance formation (cf. Uzzi/Lancaster, 2003, pp. 393, 397-398). Relationally embedded firms tend to promote joint synergies and efficient on governance-based reciprocal and trustful relations (cf. Gulati/Gargiulo, 1999, pp. 1475-1481; Uzzi, 1997, pp. 43-47). Structural embeddedness, however, stresses the impact of the entire network of ties surrounding the firm and the firm's position in its network (cf. Gnyawali/Madhavan, 2001, pp. 431-432, 441-442). The effect is more decent and deferred, than the immediate impact of relational embeddedness (cf. Granovetter, 1992, pp. 34-36). An informal control mechanism to prevent opportunism and adversary behaviour is interfirm trust (cf. Das/Teng, 1998, p. 491). If cooperation partners play by the rules and have a strong relationship, trust may even replace formal contracts or capital investments. Although, the role of trust on cooperation governance is well explored (cf. Gulati/Singh, 1998, p. 790), scholars debate whether trust is a feature on firm level (cf. Gulati, 1995a, p. 92; Gulati/Singh, 1998, p. 790) or a function on an individual level between people (cf. Ring/Van de Ven, 1992, p. 488).

Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison (2001, p. 701) stated that "the entrepreneurial aspect of alliances is rooted in the social network perspective." Within their social structure, entrepreneurs are able to exploit opportunities through information access, timing, referrals and control (cf. Burt, 1992, p. 2). Sources of innovation and entrepreneurial activities do not only exist inside firms but are rather found in the intersections between firms (cf. Powell/Koput/Smith-Doerr, 1996, p. 118).

Thus, the conceptual framework and the literature review will have to adopt a combination of the economic and social perspective to completely detect the entrepreneur's setup when establishing successful cooperative relationships.

## 4 Scope of Literature Review

The theoretical section of the thesis will be implemented through a systematic procedure. The aim of a systematic literature review is to provide a highly unbiased and critical overview of a scientific subject. A systematic review differs from a traditional narrative review to the extent that its review process is transparent, systematic and reproducible (cf. Transfield/Denyer/Smart, 2003, p. 207). By using a systematic approach to collect the relevant journals, the review provides an objective data collection. The methodology used is based on three steps: data collection, data analysis and outline of the results (cf. de Mol/Khapova/Elfring, 2015, pp. 234ff.).

The purpose of this review is to highlight the current status of the literature about the EC-domain which consists of the two domains entrepreneurship and cooperation. The entrepreneur's setup for the establishment of successful cooperation will be analysed. The third domain, the Swiss hotel industry will be addressed in the empirical part of the thesis with an explorative-qualitative study. The aim is to show the acknowledgements of the systematic literature review in practice and to explore even new characteristics of entrepreneurs, who have built successful cooperative relationships.

### 4.1 Data Collection

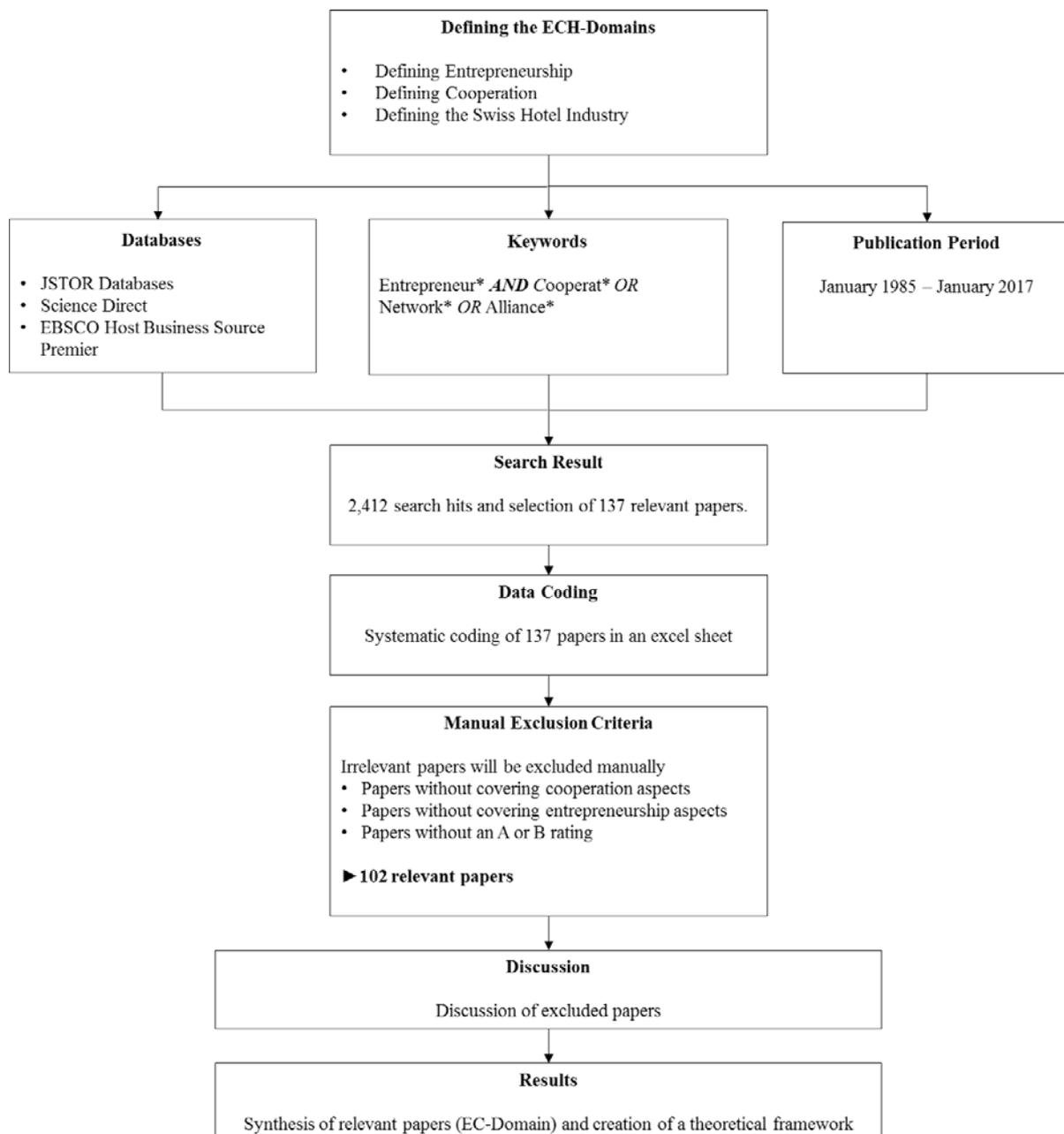
The systematic literature review focuses only on journals, with a subject relevant to the EC-domain. The authors of this thesis did search for relevant studies, published in the period from January 1985 to January 2017,<sup>6</sup> in the following databases: EBSCO Host Research Databases Business Source Premier, JSTOR Databases and Science Direct. Each author performed predefined search term combinations (cf. *Figure 6*) on one of the different databases, by combining Boolean operators. The following search term: 'entrepreneur\*' was combined with each of the following keywords: 'cooperat\*', 'network\*' and 'alliance\*'. The search term combinations had to occur in one of the following parts of the paper: 'Keywords', 'title' or 'abstract'.

The search result consisted of 2,412 papers from which 137 possible papers were determined.

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<sup>6</sup> The academic paper of Birley (1985) was taken as a decisive beginning point regarding the search for relevant literature. However, most papers are published after 1990.

Each author decided whether the found journals on its allocated database should be included into the data set or not. After a meticulous understanding of the results and the subject of the journal, a decision was made. The subject of the journal had to be part of the predefined EC-domain and the journals had to assess a certain quality.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 6: Scope of Literature Review (adapted from: de Mol/Khapova/Elfring, 2015, p. 236)**

<sup>7</sup> Relevant journals are ranked with an A or B rating on <http://vhbonline.org/vhb4you/jourqual/vhb-jourqual-3/gesamtliste/> [19.04.2017].

## 4.2 Data Analysis

The initial data collection provided 137 possible papers. Every identified paper was coded into one of three excel-spreadsheets that either contain conceptual, qualitative-empirical or quantitative-empirical papers. The three different spreadsheets are displayed in chapter 1 *Identified Studies* in the appendix.

The following codes were used to analyse the papers in the excel-spreadsheet for conceptual papers: Study characteristics (authors, year, journal abbreviation and journal rating), context and theoretical background, important definitions and key conceptual propositions.

In order to code qualitative-empirical papers, the following codes were used: Study characteristics (authors, year, journal abbreviation, journal rating), context and theoretical background, important definitions, research question and key findings.

Moreover, quantitative-empirical papers were supplemented with a coding of the sample and the following variables: antecedents (independent variables), mediator variables, consequences (dependent variables) and context (moderating variables).

Eventually, all papers which are not published in a relevant journal were excluded from the systematic research.

The relevant journals needed to have a strong focus on strategic management and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the relevant journals had to be equally distributed among the publication period. Thus, this literature review does not exclude any critical view.

After the manual exclusion of non-relevant papers, 102 studies were left for the establishment of a theoretical framework, the discussion of the relevant studies and the synthesis of the gathered data.

In *Table 1*, the distribution of the relevant studies is displayed. The scope of this literature review consists of journals that refer to entrepreneurship, strategic management, technology and innovation management and international business. Most papers are published in journals that either focus on entrepreneurship (entrepreneurship domain) or strategic management (cooperation domain).

Furthermore, as mentioned above, only papers with a rating higher than B are included in this literature review.

*Figure 7* shows the distribution of conceptual, empirical-qualitative as well as empirical-quantitative papers on a timeline. Most papers were published between 1990 and 2014. The majority of the papers are empirical-quantitative papers.

Paper	Rating	1985-	1990-	1995-	2000-	2005-	2010-	2015-	Total	% of Total	
		1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2015	2017			
Entrepreneurship	<i>Entrepreneurship and Regional Development</i>	B			5	2	1		8	8%	
	<i>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</i>	A	1	2	1	6	3		13	13%	
	<i>Journal of Business Venturing</i>	A	1		2	5	1		9	9%	
	<i>Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization</i>	A						1	1	1%	
	<i>Journal of Small Business Management</i>	B		1	2			1	1	5	5%
	<i>Small Business Economics</i>	B			1				1	1	1%
	<i>American Journal of Sociology</i>	B			1				1	1	1%
Strategic Management	<i>Academy of Management Executive (Perspectives)</i>	B			2				2	2%	
	<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	A+	1	2	1	2	1		7	7%	
	<i>Academy of Management Proceedings</i>	B		1	2	1	1		5	5%	
	<i>Academy of Management Review</i>	A+	3						3	3%	
	<i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>	A+	1	3					4	4%	
	<i>European Management Journal</i>	B				1		1	2	2%	
	<i>Interfaces</i>	B				1			1	1%	
	<i>Journal of Business Review</i>	B					2		2	2%	
	<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	A				1	1	1	3	3%	
	<i>Long Range Planning</i>	B				1			1	2	2%
	<i>Organization Science</i>	A+			3				3	3%	
	<i>Scandinavian Journal of Management</i>	B			1				1	1%	
<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	A			5	3	5	2	15	15%		
Technology and Innovation Management	<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>	B					1		1	1%	
	<i>International Journal of Innovation Management</i>	B				1			1	1%	
	<i>Journal of International Marketing</i>	B					1		1	1%	
	<i>Journal of Product Innovation Management</i>	A					1	1	2	2%	
	<i>Production and Operations Management</i>	A						2	2	2%	
	<i>Research Policy</i>	A					1	1	2	2%	
International Business	<i>International Business Review</i>	B					1		1	1%	
	<i>International Journal of Ressource Management</i>	B				1			1	1%	
	<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i>	A				1		1	2	2%	
	<i>Journal of World Business</i>	B				1			1	1%	
<b>Total</b>									<b>102</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Table 1: Overview of the Selected Journals (adapted from Keupp/Gassmann, 2016, p. 8)

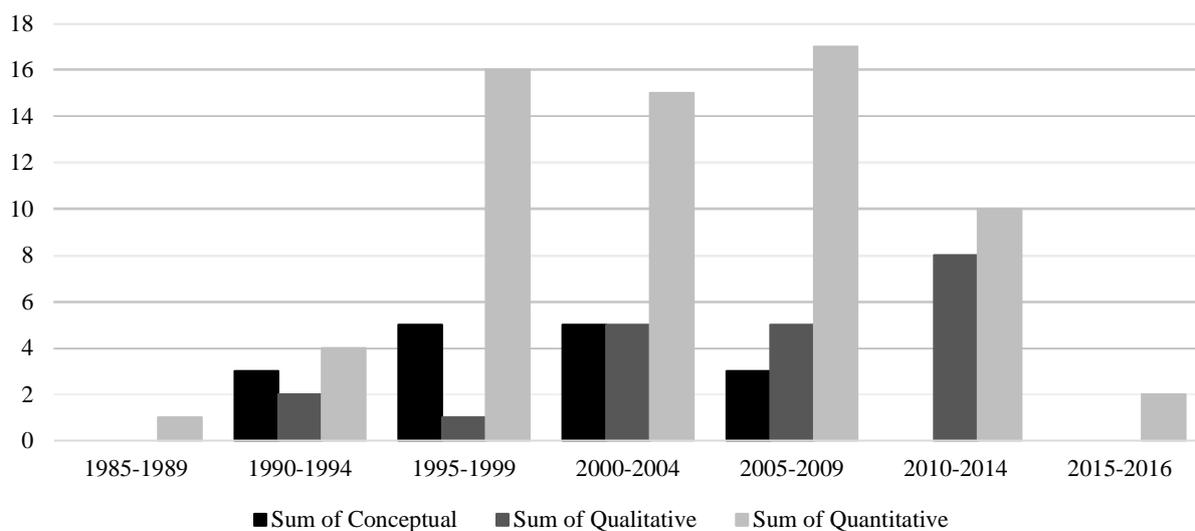
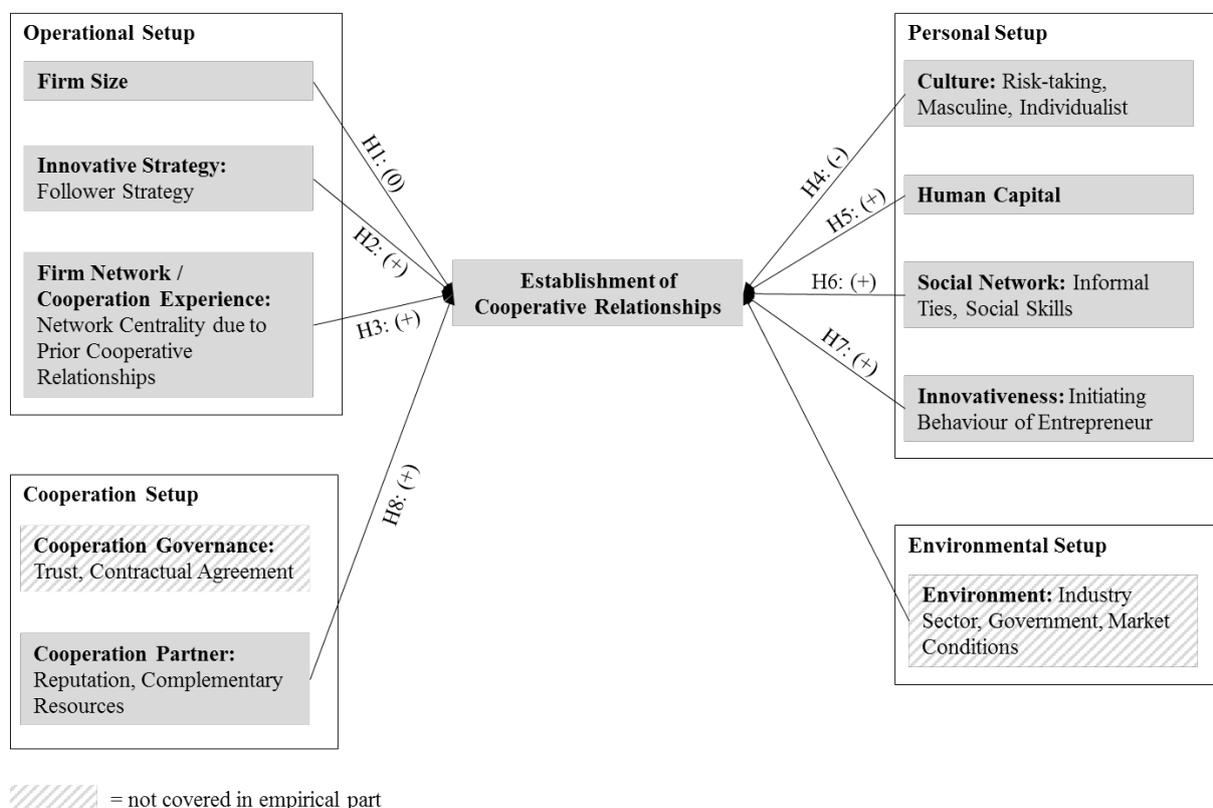


Figure 7: Distribution of Conceptual, Empirical-Qualitative and -Quantitative Papers

In order to create a theoretical framework, the papers were subordinated into the different perspectives of the entrepreneur's setup. It was differentiated between the operational setup on a firm level, the personal setup on an individual level, the environmental setup and the cooperation setup on a cooperation level. For each perspective, different categories were determined from the respective literature.

Figure 8 shows the theoretical framework of the literature review. Additionally, the figure shows the working hypothesis for the empirical part which were determined out of this literature review. The process of the hypothesis development is described in chapter 5.2

*Summary of the Literature Review.*



**Figure 8: Theoretical Framework of the Literature Review**

## 5 Results of the Literature Review

### 5.1 The Entrepreneur's Setup Categories

In order to map the conditions of the entrepreneur's setup, organizational, individual and cooperation specific perspectives are considered in the following literature review. For every perspective, the studies in the scope of the literature review were subdivided into different categories. In these categories, the major findings are described and agreements as well as disagreements between authors are discussed. The aim of this review is to give an overview of the literature which covers the entrepreneur's setup for the successful establishment of cooperative relationships.

#### 5.1.1 Operational Setup (Firm Level Perspective)

Starting with the operational setup of the entrepreneur, the literature review will focus on four firm level categories: Firm size, innovative strategy, firm network and the firm's cooperation experience.

##### *Firm Size*

Shan (1990, p. 129) analysed as one of the first authors how firm size influences the cooperative behaviour of a firm. In his empirical quantitative study, he discovered that firm size negatively effects the cooperative behaviour. The bigger the firm, the less it uses cooperative arrangements. This effect can be explained through transaction cost considerations. A firm's need for cooperative arrangements can be determined by the need for complementary used assets which is bigger for small firms (cf. Shan, 1990, pp. 136-137). However, four years later Shan, Walker and Kogut (1994, pp. 392-393) have found no significant effect of firm size on its firm's cooperative behaviour. According to this study, neither small, nor large firms do attract more cooperation partners. However, they elaborated that firm size has a significant positive effect on the innovation output of a firm.

As a part of their study, Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison (2001, p. 701) elaborated that firm size moderates the positive effect of alliance proactiveness on market based performance. They agreed on the before mentioned study of Shan (1990) and found that smaller firms benefit more from alliance proactive behaviour than larger firms. They stated that alliances contribute more benefits to smaller firms than to larger firms.

Marino et al. (2002, p. 155) did not agree on the negative effect of size on the cooperative behaviour of firms. In their study, they discovered the opposite using firm size as a control

variable, which has a significant effect on the analysed variables. The study examines the influence of entrepreneurial orientation on the alliance portfolio moderated by national culture. They elaborated that larger firms are more likely to develop a bigger portfolio of alliances than smaller firms. One possible explanation could be that the larger a firm gets, the more the firm needs partners with complementary assets in order to reach its goals.

One of the most comprehensive studies in the scope of this literature review is the one of Kim and Vonortas (2014). The authors empirically analysed the willingness of young companies to participate in collaborative agreements. In their empirical part of the study, they found that firms are more likely to enter into cooperative relationships as they grow in size (cf. Kim/Vonortas, 2014, p. 803). Other findings of this study are presented in the subsections *Innovative Strategy*, *Firm Network*, *Human Capital* and *Environmental Setup*.

As described above, there is no common sense about the influence of firm size on the establishment of cooperative relationships.

### *Innovative Strategy*

The link between strategy aspects and cooperative relationships is often made in the literature. An example of this research direction is the study of Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1996, p. 146). They found that firms with a risky strategy have a higher alliance formation rate. Such firms will profit the most from additional resources which they eventually find in alliances. In addition to this, they are able to spread the risk within their alliances.

Shan (1990, p. 131) suggested that the strategic behaviour can also be a determinant for the use of cooperative arrangements. The need to cooperate is determined by the distance of the firm's competitive position in comparison to its competitors. This implies that firms which use a follower strategy, more often use cooperative arrangements than firms that are first-mover and therefore follow a pioneer strategy (Shan, 1990, p. 131). Even though the innovative firm would be able to bring its products faster to the market through cooperative arrangements, most of the firms will choose not to cooperate in order to keep the rents for themselves (Shan, 1990, p. 132). With regard to SMEs, Van Gils and Zwart (2004, p. 685) explain the lack of knowledge-sharing alliances due to the fact that SMEs fear transferring their knowledge as it is seen as indispensable for the competitive advantage.

Another firm strategy aspect is the firm's general behaviour towards cooperation which is widely discussed in the literature. Larson (1992, p. 99) describes that a successful establishment

of cooperation may start due to the fact that some firms have an open-minded culture which is necessary for building relational ties.

In 2001, Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison specified Larson's idea and came up with a new variable, 'alliance proactiveness'. In their study, they defined alliance proactiveness as: "... the extent to which an organization engages in identifying and responding to partnering opportunities" (Sarkar/Echambadi/Harrison, 2001, p. 701). Using data from 182 firms, they found that in general, alliance proactiveness has a positive influence on market based performance. In the same context, Achrol (1997) stated that alliance proactiveness enables firms to build ties with partners who are in the possession of strategic assets (as cited in Sarkar/Echambadi/Harrison, 2001, p. 708).

In the discussion of their study Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison (2001, p. 708) went one step further and stated that alliance proactiveness is a better potential explanation of value creation than the number of established alliances. Cooperative relationships may not only have been initiated by the analysed firm of the study, but also by hand of partner initiatives.

The general influence of alliance proactiveness on market based performance is moderated (negative influence) by firm size and by environmental dynamism (positive influence). The two moderators are discussed in the subsections *Firm Size* and *Environmental Setup*.

In 2011, Khalid and Larimo (2012) used the term 'alliance entrepreneurship'. Alliance entrepreneurship is the "... proactive formation of strategic networks, enabling firms to develop access relationships into acquired strategic assets" (Khalid/Larimo, 2012, p. 901). Alliance entrepreneurship can therefore be compared to alliance proactiveness which is described by Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison (2001). Khalid and Larimo (2012, p. 901) examined the effect of alliance entrepreneurship on the development of a common vision between the alliance partners, the alliance capability and the alliance performance. For all these hypotheses, the authors found significant positive support.

In addition to the before mentioned studies, Wu et al. (2008) used the term 'willingness of firms to cooperate' which also targets the same research direction with the difference that Wu et al. (2008) analysed the determinants of the willingness of the partner firms to cooperate. They discovered that trust influences the willingness positively and firm resources have no influence. Risk considerations may be an explanation why firm resources do not influence firms' willingness to cooperate. The willingness of firms to cooperate however, influences the competitiveness of the firm positively.

While the aforementioned authors used a variable which directly points to the behaviour towards alliances, other authors examined the effect of entrepreneurship on performance, whereby the establishment of cooperative relationships plays a secondary role. Teng (2007, pp. 136-137) elaborated the intersection of strategic management and corporate entrepreneurship literature. In this study, the author stated that firms who undertake corporate entrepreneurship activities face more resource gaps, due to pursuing growth opportunities without considering its lack of resources. Establishing strategic alliances is an expedient way to fill these resource gaps. Teng (2007, p. 126) therefore concluded that entrepreneurial firms use strategic alliances more extensively. Moreover, entrepreneurial firms benefit more from the complementary rather than the supplementary fit between alliance partner. Additionally, strategic alliances help entrepreneurial firms to develop first-mover advantage and are beneficial if relation-specific assets are included (cf. Teng, 2007, pp. 128-130).

Rothaermel (2001, p. 687) agreed on the before mentioned study of Teng (2007). He found that network strategy is more beneficial if the network aims to exploit complementary assets rather than exploring new technologies.

Brouthers, Nakos and Dimitratos (2014, p. 1161) analysed the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on performance. They further examined the moderating role of strategic alliances. In their empirical study, they found that entrepreneurial orientation positively influences the international performance of SMEs and when these firms participate in alliances, the positive effect increases.

Jiang et al. (2016) focused on a similar relation. In contrast to Brouthers, Nakos and Dimitratos (2014), Jiang et al. (2016) point out the partner firms' innovative and financial performance. They discovered that firms which are highly entrepreneurial benefit the most from knowledge acquisition and knowledge creation. Furthermore, they stated that proactive, innovative and risk-taking firms are more likely to be able to acquire the knowledge of their alliance partners (cf. Jiang et al., 2016, p. 112).

Next to the studies focusing on entrepreneurship and innovation as independent variables, Kim and Vonortas (2014, p. 803) examined innovation as the dependent variable. They found that firms which are more willing to enter into alliances are more innovative. Such young firms enter into alliances in order to gain a competitive advantage. The study examined different conditions under which the willingness to enter into alliances increases.

Hora and Dotta (2013, p. 1391) focused on the firm's strategy in the formation of alliances. They stated that a firm can concentrate on achieving repeated partnerships with a few companies (alliance portfolio depth) or concentrate on cooperative relationships with partners across several aspects of the value chain (alliance portfolio scope). However, firms can also focus on both aspects. In their empirical quantitative study, the authors elaborated that both, scope and depth have a positive impact on innovation and commercialization success. Additionally, they found that the relationship between portfolio scope and success is moderated by portfolio depth (cf. Hora/Dotta, 2013, p. 1389).

Rothaermel and Deeds (2004, p. 215) analysed the product development path. Their study goes slightly into another direction than the aforementioned studies. They discovered that successful new ventures follow a product development path. This path starts with two different forms of cooperative relationships. Exploration alliances help creating more products in development, exploitation alliances lead to more products on the market. However, they additionally discovered that firm size negatively moderates the product development path (cf. Rothaermel/Deeds, 2004, p. 201).

In 2006, Lin and Chen's (2006, p. 155) study targets the same research direction. They developed a new construct concerning the possibility of product innovation through industry networks. They found that knowledge integration mediates the relationship of three different antecedents to new product performance. The antecedents are already well known in the literature: 'resource complementary', 'market orientation' and 'information sharing'. These three factors lead to knowledge integration which in turn increases the new product performance.

The study is important due to the fact that nowadays, interorganizational networks are the core in new product development rather than single entrepreneurial firms who compete to exploit the value of knowledge through new product innovation.

Marion et al. (2014) analysed the evolution of interorganizational relationships in emerging ventures. Similar to the before mentioned studies, Marion et al. (2014) focused on the network in the new product development phase. They found that emerging organizations tend to establish outsourcing relationships early in the new product development phase. Many of these outsourcing relationships turned into alliances. The authors state that the early relationships are dynamic and evolve in the growth state of an organization. The early relationships may be critical for the success of new ventures.

There are several authors that link strategy aspects with aspects of the firm's network.

Donckels and Lambrecht (1997, p. 23) uncovered that small organizations tend to build networks with more local contacts. However, this is not the case for the small firms' strategy which focuses on growth, the enhancement of competitiveness and the continuing development. According to this study, strategy has an effect on the firm's network choice.

Koka and Prescott (2008, p. 639) conducted research in a similar area. They used the strategy variable as a moderator in the relationship between the alliance network design and performance. According to these authors, firms have to choose between prominent or entrepreneurial alliance network designs. While prominent alliance networks benefit from ties with other prominent firms, entrepreneurial alliance networks benefit from information and knowledge within the network. In their study, the authors found that if the firm follows an analyzer strategy, it is more beneficial to emphasize the prominent alliance network (cf. Koka/Prescott, 2008, p. 639). By the term 'analyzer strategy', the authors understand the strategy in which firms use a traditional product and customer base but simultaneously search for new opportunities on the market (cf. Koka/Prescott, 2008, p. 645).

Further information on the influence of firm network antecedents will be discussed in the next subsection *Firm Network*.

### *Firm Network*

The firm's network is another important variable for the establishment of cooperative relationships. Gulati (1998, p. 331) stated that networks enable firms to enter into alliance opportunities and can be a determinant of how often and with whom alliances are established. Walker, Kogut and Shan (1997, p. 118) stressed the importance to consider a firm's network in examining its cooperative relationships. The authors proposed that the frequency of a young firm entering into cooperative relationships is determined by its network structure. The network structure consists of both, a network aspect and an entrepreneurial aspect. The study describes the concept of social capital and where entrepreneurial opportunities are found in networks. Social capital is a highly important concept for the understanding of interfirm networks within growing industries.

In 2000, Kogut enhanced his argumentation from above about network structure and concluded that the important resources of a network are not coming from bilateral ties but from the partner's network ties. Informal and formal ties can be important to generate value (as cited in Hitt et al. 2000, p. 482).

Tsai (2000) agreed on the importance of social capital and stated that for the formation of alliances, social capital is as important as complementary capabilities (as cited in Hitt et al., 2000, p. 482).

The effect of the firm's network centrality on the establishment of cooperative relationships has been widely examined by academic scholars. According to Shan, Walker and Kogut (1994, p. 393), the network position should be analysed if it comes to interfirm cooperation. In their study, they disclosed that the network position (variation of social capital available to firms) positively influences the number of commercial ties. The more differentiated the network of a firm and the more the firm is known by different possible partners, the more cooperative relationships can be expected.

In addition, network position has an influence on the formation of cooperative relationships considering third parties. Having common third parties positively influences the establishment of cooperative relationships and increases the possibility that two firms start a cooperative relationship. The more distant two firms are in a firm network, the less probable is the establishment of cooperation (cf. Gulati, 1995b, p. 642). In 1999, Gulati and Gargiulo (1999) further strengthened this hypothesis in their study. The social context on firm level influences the establishment of cooperation. Gulati and Gargiulo (1999, p. 1439) also found that joint centrality in the network increases the probability of new alliance formation.

Furthermore, Hoang (1997, p. 271) analysed the network position of a firm and its influence on equity alliance establishment. In detail, he analysed how acquisition and equity relations are determined by network centrality. A firm which is well connected in its industry, more likely enters into equity alliances.

Network centrality was not only examined by the effect of forming new cooperative relationships, but also by the effect on performance and success.

For instance, Stam and Elfring (2008, p. 97) focused on the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on performance. In their study, intra- and extra industry social capital has a moderating impact. Furthermore, the combination of high network centrality with extensive bridging ties positively affects the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and venture performance. However, network centrality itself has no significant effect on performance.

Gilsing et al. (2008) examined the network position of firms and its impact on performance (exploration success). They elaborated that highly central firms have the strongest improvements in their explorative innovation performance. However, the authors discovered

that network position alone is not the full explanation. The exploration success is influenced by two other aspects of embeddedness: technological distance and network density. The authors stated that all three elements of network embeddedness have to be considered in order to understand novelty creation and absorptive capacity (cf. Gilsing et al., 2008, pp. 1728-1729).

However, the influence of firm network on performance was not only researched with network centrality as an antecedent. Lechner, Dowling and Welpé (2006, pp. 515-516) did focus on different network types and their influence on performance. They found that reputation networks (networks with market leaders and respected firms) have a positive influence on the time to break even for young firms that are financed by venture capitalists. The signalling effect of reputational partners is important, especially for young firms.

Moreover, the authors uncovered that marketing information networks and networks with competitors are important factors in the years after the foundation. Competitor networks can be a source of firm development, especially with regard to the realization of major projects. Interestingly, no correlation between the social network of the entrepreneur and the time-to-break-even was found. The authors stated that social network on an individual level might have an indirect effect.

However, focusing again on the establishment of cooperative relationships, Neergaard and Ulhøi (2006) used trust as an antecedent. While most studies about trust focus on its influence on cooperation governance, Neergaard and Ulhøi (2006, p. 519) analysed the aspect of trust in the formation of interorganizational entrepreneurial networks. In their study, trust plays a critical role in the establishment, maintenance and transformation of interorganizational cooperative relationships. Additionally, it was found that the absence of trust ends up in discontinuation.

Particularly, the authors focused on the process of network development (networking behaviour). In addition to the influence of trust, the process is moderated by prior partner knowledge and reputation in the early cooperative phase. While prior partner knowledge is seen as a key mechanism, reputation is crucial for the development of trustworthy cooperative behaviour. Interestingly, geographical proximity seems to have less influence on the establishment of trustful cooperative relationships.

The process of development is also mediated by commitment, reciprocity and experiential knowledge. The study is therefore in line with Larson (1992) which is described in detail in the subsections *Cooperation Governance* and *Cooperation Partner*.

Next to network centrality and trust, the networking capability of a firm is an important variable of the firm network. Walter, Auer and Ritter (2006, pp. 541-542) found that network capability has a direct influence on performance variables such as sales growth, profit attainment, sales per employee, long-term survival, realized competitive advantages and perceived customer relationship quality. The network capability consists of four dimensions: Relational skills, coordination, market knowledge and internal communication.

In 2013, McGrath and O'Toole analysed enablers and inhibitors for the development of network capability. Enablers of network capability for entrepreneurial firms are network experience, information sharing and participation in consumer events. In contrast, control over decision making, lack of knowledge sharing and joint problem solving are inhibitors of network capacity (cf. McGrath/O'Toole, 2013, p. 1141).

Kelley, Peters and O'Connor (2009, pp. 221-222) examined how networks are created within a company. The empirical quantitative study elaborated three constructs which are important for the establishment of a network. Relevant for this literature review are the constructs organizational network capacity and individual network capacity. Organizational network capacity is important to locate individuals with situation-specific knowledge. Furthermore, it includes the willingness of members to commit in networks. In combination with the individual network capacity, the construct facilitates the establishment of networks for organizations. The individual network capacity will be discussed in the subsection *Social Network* on an individual level.

The study of Ozcan and Eisenhardt (2009, p. 246) spotlight the quality of alliance portfolios. In detail, the authors focused on how executives originate high performing alliance portfolios. They elaborated that firms who keep an eye on the industry architecture (firm roles and interdependencies) while forming ties, form portfolios that perform better and benefit from higher firm performance than firms who pursue a series of single ties. Additionally, firms that form ties with two disconnected firms perform higher and develop a high-performing portfolio compared to firms who use existing ties as stepping-stones to form new ties (cf. Ozcan/Eisenhardt, 2009, pp. 259-263). As a third important factor to establish a high-performing alliance portfolio, Ozcan and Eisenhardt (2009, p. 268) propose that multiple ties around key industry uncertainties are important and need to be managed with full attention. In their study, the authors focus on agency, strategic action and dynamic of portfolios and suggest further research in this area (cf. Ozcan/Eisenhardt, 2009, p. 271).

In contrast to the before mentioned study, which states that many network ties are beneficial for firm performance, the study of Hallen and Eisenhardt (2012) focuses on the efficiency of ties in order to increase firm performance. In their study, the authors differentiate between two strategies to build efficient ties. One strategy targets to leverage existing strong ties, whereby this strategy is only available to privileged firms. The other strategy is a catalysing strategy which relies on strategic actions in order to shape opportunities which are advantageous for the firm's tie formation (cf. Hallen/Eisenhardt, 2012, pp. 54-55). The study focuses on signalling and network actions in order to form business ties which allow cooperative relationships.

While examining the willingness to enter into alliances, Kim and Vonortas (2014, p. 803) found that firms whose networking behaviour is aligned with the networking behaviour of their counterparts are more willing to enter into alliances than other firms.

### *Cooperation Experience*

Next to firm size, innovative strategy and firm network, a fourth firm level category is discussed in this literature review. According to the literature, cooperation experience is an important factor for the establishment of cooperative relationships.

As one of the first authors, Gulati (1995b, p. 641) revealed that prior alliances of two firms have a positive effect on the probability for further alliances between these firms compared to firms without common history. However, the effect is u-shaped. Up to a number of around four alliances the effect stays positive. From that point on, more alliances distinguish the positive effect of additional alliances and therefore decrease the effect on likelihood of alliance formation. This finding is consistent with Larson (1992, p. 84) who could support a similar hypothesis on an individual level. Not only prior alliances, but also the time elapsed after the last formation of prior alliances influences the probability of the establishment of a new cooperative relationship. The longer the time after the last cooperation, the less probable is the formation of a new cooperation between the two firms (cf. Gulati 1995b, p. 644).

In 1998, Gulati discovered that repeated ties (alliances) are less likely organized as minority equity investments or joint ventures, regardless their type of prior ties (cf. Gulati/Singh 1998, p. 805).

One year later Gulati (1999, p. 413) brought the impact of prior alliances on alliance formation into focus again. In this study, he found that the formation of new alliances is influenced by the firm's position in the interfirm network caused by prior alliance experience. These network resources serve as predictor variables for the frequency a firm enters into cooperative

relationships. Firms that are located centrally in a network of alliances have a higher probability to enter into new alliances (cf. Gulati, 1999, p. 411). In conclusion, Gulati linked firm network aspects with cooperation experience and therefore connects two categories of this literature review.

Gulati, Nohria and Zaheer (2000, p. 209) proposed that firms can benefit from a higher competitive advantage out of strategic alliances by gaining more experience with establishing alliances. Not only increases the return of an alliance by alliance experience, but also the ability of forging new alliances. Additionally, the authors stated that a firm's network of ties is a resource with high value that can yield higher returns than other intangible or tangible assets.

Draulans, deMan and Volberda (2003) elaborated alliance capabilities as a success factor. In their study, they considered four topics which are related to the establishment or existence of alliances capabilities: Number of alliances, use of evaluation models, use of an alliance specialist and alliance training.

As found by the before mentioned study of Gulati, Nohria and Zaheer (2000), Draulans, deMan and Volberda (2003, p. 155) discovered that the success of an organization's alliance increases with the organization's alliance experience. However, the effect is curvilinear.

In addition, Draulans, deMan and Volberda (2003, p. 158) elaborated that inexperienced organizations should make use of evaluation models. Experienced organizations on the other hand are able to benefit from comparing various alliances with one another.

A third possibility to increase the success of alliances, is the use of an alliance specialist. Organizations that use an alliance specialist are more successful than organizations without a specialist. Not just the use, but also the hierarchy level at which the specialist is placed, matters. The lower the alliance specialist is placed and the closer he is to the action, the more successful is the establishment of the alliance (cf. Draulans/deMan/Volberda, 2003, p. 158).

A fourth topic covered in the study is the use of alliance training. In their study, Draulans, deMan and Volberda (2003, p. 159) elaborated that organizations who use alliance training have an alliance success rate which is 10 % higher than organizations who do not use alliance trainings.

The four topics show that special management techniques need to be implemented in order to increase the alliance capability of a firm which in turn allows successful alliances.

Similar to the before mentioned study, Rothaermel and Deeds (2006, pp. 429-430) analysed alliance management capabilities which are defined as "... a firm's ability to effectively manage multiple alliances" (Rothaermel/Deeds, 2006, p. 430).

In their study, which is based on the findings about alliance capabilities of Dyer and Singh (1998), the authors found that alliance experience and alliance type moderate the effect between venture alliances and the new product development of these ventures. They were able to empirically proof the existence of alliance capability. In general, the results show that management capability can be a competitive advantage. However, the alliance can be risky if a management exceeds its alliance management capabilities. The authors suggest that managers have to keep an eye on their current alliance portfolio within their alliance management capabilities.

In contrast to the aforementioned studies, Katila and Mang (2003) focus on the timing of cooperation. They disclosed that the higher the collaboration experience of an entrepreneurial firm, the sooner the firm enters into a collaborative relationship (cf. Katila/Mang, 2003, p. 327).

### 5.1.2 Personal Setup (Individual Level Perspective)

In addition to the operational setup on a firm level perspective, studies about the personal setup on an individual level will be analysed in this literature review. As suggested by Dockels and Lambrecht (1997, p. 23), it is important to consider entrepreneur-related conditions besides the enterprise-related characteristics.

The personal setup of the entrepreneur will be structured in four categories. Starting with cultural aspects, the literature review will describe the categories human capital, social network and innovativeness.

#### *Culture*

Birley (1985) was the first author in the scope of the literature review who analysed the characteristics of entrepreneurs who establish a firm. In her paper, Birley found that firms are often established by local people who used to work in small firms. These local people often started their business in a similar industry as they used to work (cf. Birley, 1985, p. 107).

However, the background of the people was only one part of the study. Birley further focused on the networks, entrepreneurs use to start their businesses. According to Birley, entrepreneurs often start their businesses local due to their local informal networks and the possibility to cooperate. These social network aspects will be discussed in the subsection *Social Network*.

Chen, Chen and Meindl (1998, pp. 285-289) examined the cultural effects of individualism and collectivism. These two cultures have a different conception of the self and therefore different mechanisms in fostering cooperation. In their study, they elaborated that the before mentioned two cultural dimension characteristics are driven by different motives. While individualists are driven by goal interdependence, enhancement of personal identity, cognition-based trust, explicit cooperative rules and mediated partial communication, collectivists are driven by goal sharing, enhancement of group identity, affect-based trust, social pressure control and face-to-face communication (cf. Chen/Chen/Meindl, 1998, p. 298). With this study, Chen, Chen and Meindl integrated the cultural differences of individualism and collectivism into the cooperation research.

Similar to Chen, Chen and Meindl (1998), Jones et al. (1998, p. 396) examined the influence of individualist and collectivist strategy on collaborative stability and change. They highlight that cooperation partners who rather follow an individualist strategy, use entrepreneurial logic and the cooperation itself to enhance their own opportunities. Stability in collaborative arrangements is not of interest and changes in membership are common. Following Chen, Chen and Meindl (1998), Jones et al. (1998, p. 396) also propose that governance mechanisms are important for members who follow an individualist strategy. In contrast to this, members who follow a collectivist strategy, employ a relational logic and focus on mutual benefits. These members constantly try to intensify the relationship with their cooperation partners and restrict their contacts to these selected partners. Stability in collaborative relationships are important and governance mechanisms are developed by the partners on their own.

In 2000, Steensma, Marino and Weaver took up the before mentioned studies and focused on Hofstede's cultural model as well. In their quantitative empirical study, they analysed the effect of masculinity (vs. femininity), uncertainty avoidance (vs. risk-taking) and individualism (vs. collectivism) on the acceptance of cooperative strategies, the importance of partner commonality and the importance of contractual safeguards. They found that entrepreneurs from cultures that have masculine and individualist values have a lower acceptance of cooperative strategies, as described above. Entrepreneurs from uncertainty avoiding cultures on the other hand, have a greater appreciation for cooperative strategies. Such cultures appreciate to share risk and performance through cooperative relationships. Focusing on contractual safeguards, individualist cultures use more contractual safeguards as collectivist cultures. Therefore, this finding supports the results of Jones et al. (1998). Additionally, entrepreneurs from feminine cultures appreciate partner commonality more than entrepreneurs from masculine cultures, as they prefer to solve conflicts through direct communication. Entrepreneurs from uncertainty

avoiding cultures placed greater importance on partner commonality and contractual safeguards than entrepreneurs from cultures that accept uncertainty.

In their study, they stated that cultural differences should be discounted and cultural values can be a driver of competitive advantage (cf. Steensma/Marino/Weaver, 2000, pp. 603-604).

In another study, Steensma et al. (2000, p. 966) asserted that national culture influences the formation of alliances. As stated above, cultures that are pronounced masculine do not form alliances as often as cultures with a rather feminine character. In addition to this, feminine societies are more correspondent to uncertainty. Taken together, feminine societies do more likely enter into alliances in order to overcome uncertainty than masculine societies. In this second study, Steensma et al. (2000, p. 967) enhanced the first study and analysed the probability of equity ties within these alliances. They found that in collective societies, people are more open to give up control and enter into alliances with equity ties than in individualistic cultures.

With an explicit study about national culture as a moderator on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and strategic behaviour, Marino et al. (2002) agreed on the before mentioned findings that culture influences the behaviour regarding the establishment of cooperation.

Marino et al. (2002, p. 155) elaborated that the more masculine and the more individualist a culture, the less intense is the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on strategic alliance portfolio extensiveness, indicating that entrepreneurs from masculine and individualist cultures do not enter into cooperative relationships as often as entrepreneurs from collectivist and feminine cultures. Even though cooperative relationships are thought to be win-win situations, they are not attractive to entrepreneurs from masculine cultures who are aiming for entrepreneurial success. These entrepreneurs see cooperative relationships from a zero-sum perspective. However, due to the fact that they are sometimes in need for additional resources, entrepreneurs from masculine cultures enter into cooperative relationships but less often than entrepreneurs from feminine cultures (cf. Marino et al., 2002, p. 147).

Interestingly, Marino et al. (2002, p. 155) could not find significant support for the moderating effect of uncertainty avoidance on the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on alliance portfolio extensiveness.

In addition to the aforementioned studies that focus on Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, Drakopoulou Dodd and Patra (2002, p. 131) discovered that nationality plays an important role in the behaviour of entrepreneurs. The authors analysed Greek entrepreneurs and found

significant differences in their networking behaviour compared to entrepreneurs from other nations. They suggest that national differences must be considered and stated: "National differences exist. Culture matters" (Drakopoulou Dodd/Patra, 2002, p. 131).

### *Human Capital*

Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1996, p. 146) were the first authors who investigated human capital aspects affecting the alliance formation rate. They analysed the firms' top management teams and elaborated that large, experienced top management teams with high-level previous jobs form alliances at a higher level. In addition, well connected top managers demonstrate through a mutual former employer, an increased alliance formation rate. Furthermore, they explained that top managers possess the resources and the power to form alliances. Such resources can be time, abilities, ties and status. Top management teams with the above-mentioned characteristics have a distinct ability to find alliances and do get more offers to enter into alliances than top management teams without these characteristics.

Kim and Higgins (2005) focused on top managers as well. In their study, they found that career affiliations of top managers influence their alliance formation rate. Career affiliations act as a signal of status, substance and legitimacy.

As part of their study, Kim and Vonortas (2014, p. 803) took a human capital aspect into consideration while examining a young firm's willingness to enter into alliances. They agreed on the before mentioned studies and emphasized that firms are more likely to enter into alliances if they have a leadership with education advantages and networking experience.

Not only was the effect of human capital on the establishment of cooperative relationships examined, but Donckels and Lambrecht (1997) also investigated the relation between human capital aspects and the firm's network position. Next to enterprise-related characteristics they uncovered that highly trained entrepreneurs with an enormous job experience tend to discuss more business-related matters with relatives. They also tend to a wider network which may enhance the possibility to enter into cooperative relationships (cf. Donckels/Lambrecht 1997, p. 23).

In addition to the before mentioned studies, Pirinsky (2013) elaborated in an empirical quantitative study that income and education increases the confidence of individuals. Confidence is an important factor for people participating in networks. It increases the risk-taking behaviour and the entrepreneurs are more actively involved in cooperative interactions.

The authors stated that confidence can be seen as the origin of cooperation. Confidence decreases with age and varies significantly across cultures. Additionally, the authors discovered that men are more confident than women.

### *Social Network*

Considering the individual setup of an entrepreneur, the most popular aspect in the literature is the social network. Honig and Davidsson (2000, p. 1) found that the social capital is more important for nascent entrepreneurs than human capital. However, Mosey and Wright (2007, p. 932) link social and human capital aspects and investigated the relationship. In their study, they discovered that differences in the academic entrepreneur's social capital can be explained with the entrepreneur's human capital. In this study, human capital was derived from ownership experience. Entrepreneurs with previous firm ownership experience are more effective in the development of network relationships and tend to have a larger social network. The authors state that business experience (human capital) was essential for entrepreneurs to build relationships with potential investors and experienced managers. Brüderl and Preisendörfer (1998, p. 213) link the human and social capital as well. They argue with the compensation hypothesis and state that an entrepreneur's shortfall in human capital can be compensated with social capital.

Birley (1985) focused on the social network that entrepreneurs use to establish their businesses. The author split the social network into formal and informal network sources (cf. Birley 1985, pp. 113-115). With the help of an empirical quantitative analysis, she elaborated that next to the formal network, the informal network sources are a key element in assembling a business. Especially business contacts are beneficial whereas family and friends are useful when local issues count. In the assembling of resources, employees and other business elements, the informal network (family, friends and colleagues) is important.

Regarding the results, Larson (1992, p. 98) agreed with Birley (1985). She found that informal contracts are the most common way, cooperation partner form their cooperation governance. Consistent with the aforementioned results, Olk and Chung (2004, pp. 4-5) elaborated that more than half of the alliances investigated, involve a personal tie. Only 16 % of the analysed alliances involve an organizational tie. They suggest that research more often should consider individual level actions in order to analyse the development and occurrence of strategic alliances. Hite (2005, p. 139) agreed on the results as well and concluded that personal relationships evolve quicker towards relational embeddedness.

Larson (1992, p. 98) additionally described that friends and shared histories on an individual level are important for the foundation of trust in transactions between companies. She stated that personal reputation is an important factor. It is important to be known by the right people in order to establish successful cooperation. This can be described as personal trust. Next to personal trust, economic trust regarding capabilities of these people is important as well. A combination of personal and economic trust builds the foundation of cooperation (cf. Larson, 1992, pp. 84-85).

In 2008, Smith and Lohrke extended the previous research about trust within the entrepreneurial network. The authors analysed the reliance of affective and cognitive trust on the network development process. They split the network development process into three different stages. In stage one, entrepreneurs form personal and essential dyadic exchanges. In this first stage, the relationship is mostly based on affective trust. In the second stage, both, affective and cognitive trust are important for the relationship in dyadic socioeconomic exchanges. In the third stage, where organizational exchanges take place, cognitive trust is most important for the relationship (cf. Smith/Lohrke, 2008, pp. 318-319). The study highlights the different forms of trust from the social network of the entrepreneur to his cooperative relationships.

Larson and Starr (1993, pp. 6-7) focused on the establishment of cooperative relationships as well. The authors used the term 'opportunistic ties' as a description of the process to choose the right partners from informal linkages in a social network. Entrepreneurs must have the ability to turn their informal relationships into business contacts. The selection of potential business contacts will be done opportunistically by analysing the resources of potential partners. Thus, entrepreneur needs to be clear about the critical resources needed in order to approach the right business partners out of his prior relationships. More studies focusing on the selection of the cooperation partner will be described in the subsection *Cooperation Partner* within the cooperation setup.

Hansen (1995, pp. 7-10) suggested that entrepreneurs should focus on their action set variables while establishing networks. He described that the entrepreneur's action set consists of three variables: Size, degree of inter-connectivity with the partners and frequency of interaction with these partners. In his study, the author found a positive effect of these three variables on new organization growth.

It is not always clear how to measure the effect of the variable social network on the establishment of cooperation or profitability. One possible measure is the time spent on

establishing networks. Brown and Butler (1995, p. 62) conducted this measure but could not find a significant effect of time spent on networking or profitability. However, they elaborated a positive influence on growth in sales.

The study of Lee and Tsang (2001) goes into the same direction and considers networking activities of the entrepreneur and its influence on venture growth. They discovered that networking activities and the number of partners have a positive influence on venture growth. Interestingly, extroversion has a negative impact on the number of partners but a positive impact on networking activities (cf. Lee/Tsang 2001, p. 583). Thus, extroversion is not beneficial for finding business and potential partners to set up cooperative relationships.

In addition to this, Molina-Morales and Martínez-Fernández (2009, p. 1013) found a negative effect of individual social capital by detecting that the social capital's beneficial aspects are limited to certain point. The effects of trust and social interaction have an inverted u-shape influence on firm value creation.

Focusing again on networking activities, Witt (2004) analysed the effect of social networking on the success of start-ups. Witt (2004, pp. 405-406) proposed that the more the industry in which the entrepreneur operates is based on tactic knowledge and the more cooperation is needed in order to follow the chosen strategy, the more time is invested in networking activities. Additionally, he stated that gender and resources strongly influence networking activities which in turn have an impact on network size and diversity.

Five years later, Kelley, Peters and O'Connor (2009, pp. 221-222) are the first authors who discussed network capabilities on an individual level. In this study, the authors analysed individual level capabilities in combination with organization level networking capabilities. They define individual network capability as "... an individual's skill in locating and securing cooperation ..." (Kelley et al., 2009, p. 222). In combination with organization network capability, individual network capability facilitates the establishment of networks.

De Carolis, Litzky and Eddleston (2009, p. 527) elaborated that the entrepreneur's network relations do matter in the new venture creation process. In their empirical qualitative study, they found that the social capital of an entrepreneur enhances his illusion of control. They characterize the illusion of control as "... an individual's estimation of the extent to which his skills, abilities, and knowledge are suited for a particular situation" (De Carolis/Litzky/Eddleston, 2009, p. 531). The illusion of control is positively related to the progress of new venture creation. The study therefore agrees on the before mentioned findings

of Witt (2004) and shows the positive influence of social capital on start-up or new venture creation.

Ebbers (2013) analysed the effect of the entrepreneur's networking behaviour on the amount of the received or given business contracts. He elaborated that either individual networking orientation (building a network for personal gain) or *tertius iungens* orientation (facilitation of tie formation between third parties) increases the amount of business assignments an entrepreneur may offer. However, he could not find a significant effect of networking behaviour on the amount of business assignments an entrepreneur receives from his business partners (cf. Ebbers, 2013, p. 1). Thus, the influence of networking behaviour on the establishment of cooperative relationships is not clear.

Other authors focused on the effect of the social network on entrepreneurship. In his study, Greve (1995, pp. 5-8) conducted the time spent on networking activities. He elaborated a positive relation to entrepreneurship. Moreover, entrepreneurs in the later step of the firm's establishment process have a larger network and spend more time on fostering these contacts, compared to entrepreneurs in earlier steps of the firm establishment process. Additionally, he emphasized that the people in the network and their background matter greatly. Active network persons in management positions are positively related to entrepreneurship. Consequently, the informal network and the different background of entrepreneurs should not be ignored.

Not only the use of the entrepreneur's social network but also his social skills can enhance the entrepreneur's success as stated by Baron and Markman (2000, p. 106). The authors defined social skills as the ability that help entrepreneurs to interact with others effectively. These skills help entrepreneurs to establish a high level of social capital, which is built on reputation, contacts and relevant experience. Hence, it is important to make a good first impression, to be able to express empathy and to adapt to a wide range of social situations accurately. The social skills improve the interaction quality and ultimately help the entrepreneurs in the formation of business alliances. Eventually, such business alliances can lead to a higher competitive advantage (cf. Baron/Markman, 2000, p. 111).

Three years later, Baron and Markman (2003, p. 41) focused again on the role of the entrepreneur's social competence. In an empirical quantitative study, they found that accuracy in perceiving others (an aspect of social competence) lead to higher financial success. In

general, they discovered that a high level of social capital is important for entrepreneurs to gain access to important persons, who can be a driver for their financial success.

Next to the networking aspects discussed above, the structural determinants of a network are of interest for Batjaragal (2006, pp. 314-317). In his study, the focus lies on the influence of the initial network structures and the past firm performance on the current network structures. He elaborated that the greater the initial network size, the less changes (growth) in current network size can be observed. Additionally, the greater the initial network size, the smaller the change in strong and weak ties and resources over time. One explanation might be that past investments in ties will lead to major contracts with these ties. The entrepreneur will be less willing to actively enter into new contacts with potential cooperation partners. Such entrepreneurs will focus on their key and resource-rich ties.

Besides, the author elaborated that the greater the revenue growth in the past, the less changes in network structure can be observed and restructuring of networks can be costly, time-consuming and risky in order to achieve higher performance.

In 2011, research about social networks in relation to the establishment of cooperative relationships focused on a new direction. Internationalization aspects were observed more frequently in the literature.

Vasilchenko and Morrish (2011, p. 88) examined the effect of entrepreneurial business and social network on the internationalization of firms. They discovered that entrepreneurial networks can be an important factor for the exploration of internationalization opportunities. Moreover, they found that social networks can lead to collaboration and consequently develop the entrepreneur's business network which in turn facilitates the exploitation of internationalization opportunities. The study builds on previous literature about the effect of entrepreneurial networks on performance and includes the internationalization aspect. Furthermore, the authors describe the development process of cooperation out of the entrepreneurial social network.

Evers and O'Gorman (2011, p. 549) focused on the internationalization of new ventures similar to Vasilchenko and Morrish (2011). They elaborated that the entrepreneur's prior social and business ties influence the internationalization behaviour due to the fact that entrepreneurs used their prior ties to identify initial foreign exchange partners. In addition to network aspects, prior knowledge influences the internationalization behaviour, too.

In the same year, Kontinen and Ojala (2011) focused on the same relationship as Evers and O'Gorman (2011). Regarding one finding, the authors were in agreement with the before mentioned study. The entrepreneur's network is an important factor to discover international opportunities. Particularly, they uncovered that new formal ties are more important than existing informal or family ties in order to react on international business opportunities. In contrast to Evers and O'Gorman (2011) the authors discovered no effect of prior knowledge on the international opportunity recognition (cf. Kontinen/Ojala, 2011, p. 490).

Continuing the research, Ellis (2011) analysed the influence of social ties on international opportunity recognition. The author found that entrepreneurs in open markets more often rely on social ties than entrepreneurs who work in rather closed economies. Social ties can provide benefits in accessing opportunities, but the positive effect is limited. Networks are bounded to communication horizons. Geographic, psychic and linguistic distances minimize the success of entrepreneurs who rely solely on ties (cf. Ellis, 2011, p. 121).

In addition to the aforementioned studies, a couple of years later, Felzensztein et al. (2015, p. 145) elaborated that the number of networks used by entrepreneurs will increase the likelihood of small firms targeting international markets.

Siu and Bao (2008, p. 79) focus on four separate network dimensions (relationship, governance, structure and dynamism) and identified different network strategies for start-ups. They separated the four entrepreneurial network types regarding external resource dependence and network adaption. Network adaption is referred to entrepreneurial efforts in network construction and change. The extent an entrepreneur relies on external resources is described as external resource dependence. The first type, the customer orientated networker, focuses on internal resources and uses transaction-based relationships to cultivate customer relationships. The partnership networker has a high commitment to long-term cooperative relationships, while the value orientated networker focuses on the overall structure of the network and emphasizes the coordination within the value chain. Finally, the prospecting networkers are entrepreneurs within the start-up stage. This type of networker is highly resource dependent. They need to make a great effort to collaboration-based relationship in order to achieve growth (cf. Siu/Bao, 2008, pp. 96-97).

In general, a lot of studies focus on the effect of social networks on performance or on entrepreneurs' activities to establish such networks. The link between the existing social

network and its influence on the establishment of cooperative relationships can be seen as a research gap in literature.

Often-cited authors for network and entrepreneurship literature are Hoang and Antoncic (2003). In their conceptual research paper, they focused on three areas of network-based research in entrepreneurship: Network relationships, governance and structure. While reviewing 70 papers, Hoang and Antoncic (2003, p. 167) elaborated that only a few studies focus on network being the dependent variable and only a handful of studies observed the theory of network development. In future research, more qualitative and longitudinal studies are needed in order to consider network dynamics.

### *Innovativeness*

Innovativeness is an important variable for the establishment of cooperation. Innovativeness can be characterized by the behaviour of the person who takes the proactive part and initiates cooperative relationships (cf. Larson, 1992, p. 89). Without such an initiation behaviour, no cooperation will be established.

Guzmán and Santos (2001) see the variable intrinsic motivation as a part of entrepreneurial quality. If an entrepreneur has entrepreneurial quality, he adopts energizing behaviours such as the capacity for innovation and the ability to cooperate with others (cf. Guzmán/Santos, 2001, p. 225). In their study, they analysed entrepreneurs of Seville and found an existing lack of entrepreneurs with intrinsic motivation which might explain the low economic development of this region with only few innovations and established cooperative relationships.

Another aspect subordinated into the category innovativeness was described by Tjosvold and Weicker (1993 pp. 13-14). They disclosed that the entrepreneur's goals have a crucial impact on whether they are able to cooperate successfully or not. If Entrepreneurs follow cooperative goals, compared to independent or competitive goals, they develop their business successfully through collaboration with the people in their network. Entrepreneurs who formulate cooperative goals, discuss different views, learn from each other, develop new ways of thinking about a topic and are able to strengthen their business. In addition, they are confident about future work relations.

### 5.1.3 Environmental Setup

In addition to the operational and personal setup of the entrepreneur, environmental aspects are important factors for the successful establishment of cooperation. Hence, the industry sector

greatly influences the environmental setup. If the environment is complex, expanding and the expertise widely distributed, it is beneficial to cooperate (cf. Powell/Koput/Smith-Doerr, 1996, p. 116). Additionally, if the industry sector is characterised by complementarity and therefore demands the combination of multiple disciplines, cooperative relationships are an often-used strategy. Another factor is the degree in which firms are willing to reduce the innovation period in their industry sector. In general, if the innovation period is long, less cooperative relationships are established (cf. Hagedoorn, 1993, pp. 378-380).

Brush and Chaganti (1997) did enhance the study of Hagedorn (1993) and examined the difference of high-tech companies and non-high-tech companies in pursuing cooperative strategies. In their study, they used a survey and personal interviews to imply an exploratory approach due to a lack of empirical research regarding this topic. The findings from the survey demonstrate that only a small portion of non-high-tech new ventures established cooperative strategies and when they have engaged in cooperative strategies they needed them apart from their core operations. In addition, they found that new ventures that were not using cooperative strategies, generated smaller revenues with sales in primarily local markets. These findings indicate the importance of cooperative strategies and its growing interest in research.

They discovered additional differences between non-high-tech and high-tech new ventures. Non-high-tech new ventures entered into a greater variety of cooperative relationships with formulated contracts of a rather informal character compared to high-tech new ventures.

In their qualitative research, they elaborated governmental regulations as an additional environmental factor that influences the use of cooperative strategies. Both, non-high-tech new ventures and high-tech new ventures rather pursue cooperative strategies when governmental regulations are increasing (cf. Brush/Chaganti, 1997, pp. 43-49).

Bianchi (2001) compared two industries that differ in the magnitude of cooperation. In his empirical qualitative study, he compared the south Italian tomato producing industry with the south Italian mozzarella producing industry. The tomato producers seem to be individualist who are not willing to cooperate whereas the mozzarella producers developed an institution to promote their product (cf. Bianchi, 2001, p. 117). This is surprising since the tomato industry generates lower profit margins and entering into cooperative relationships would be rather beneficial. However, taking a closer view on the products, it can be observed that the mozzarella producers only could generate such high profit margins through the production regulations established in their cooperation.

In addition, Katila and Mang (2003, p. 327) observed the industry influence on cooperation establishment as well. In contrast to the before mentioned studies, the authors focused on timing. They elaborated that the higher the R&D intensity, the sooner firms will cooperate in the development phase of the product life cycle. Firms that invest heavily in the search of possible opportunities need to have early access to resources in order to exploit the opportunities.

Apart from studies about the industry sector of a firm, Dickson and Weaver (1997) linked the environmental uncertainty with the use of alliances. First, they found that the key manager's perception about the environment is an important factor for use of alliances. In detail, they tested sources of environmental uncertainty and their effect on alliance use. Three of four sources influenced alliance use positively. Low predictability of competitor actions and customer demands negatively influences the use of alliances whereas high general uncertainty, technological demand and volatility, and the demand for internationalization positively influences the use of alliances. According to these findings, there must exist at least a minimum level of predictability in order to enter into an alliance and entrepreneurs are rather energized by environmental uncertainty than threatened (cf. Dickson/Weaver, 1997, pp. 420-421). Furthermore, the authors observed the key manager's orientation. In accordance with Larson (1992), Dickson and Weaver (1997) elaborated that the use of alliances due to general uncertainty is higher for collectivistic key managers with low entrepreneurial orientation.

Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1996, p. 146) examined another part of the environmental setup. They discovered that firms in challenging market conditions have a higher rate of alliance formation. However, they could not confirm their hypothesis that firms in growth-stage markets form alliance at a higher level than firms in mature-stage markets. They rather elaborated the opposite. Firms in growth-stage markets had the lowest alliance formation rate. Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison (2001) analysed the influence of environment as a moderator on their general supported hypothesis of alliance proactiveness influencing market based performance. They discovered that market dynamism positively influences the positive effect of alliance proactiveness on market based performance. However, they did not identify a significant moderating effect for competitive dynamism. It seems that alliance proactiveness has a higher positive effect in an environment with dynamic consumer demands (cf. Sarkar/Echambadi/Harrison, 2001, p. 709). In their study, they could not agree on the

aforementioned study of Dickson and Weaver (1997), who revealed a negative effect of predictability of consumer demands on alliance use.

Kim and Vonortas (2014, p. 803) examined the same research direction as Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison (2001). They found that young firms are more willing to enter into alliances in industry sectors with rapid change and market volatility.

Koka and Prescott (2008, p. 639) investigated an environmental aspect as a moderator. They analysed if prominent or entrepreneurial alliance networks remain beneficial under different environmental circumstances. They stated that prominent alliance networks benefit from access and ties to other prominent firms and entrepreneurial alliances profit from the access of information. In their study, they elaborated that following an environmental change, entrepreneurial alliance networks performed better. However, if the entrepreneurial change was too rapid, none of the two alliance networks types performed well. If the change forces organizations to gather information, knowledge and technology that already exists, the entrepreneurial alliance network is beneficial (Koka/Prescott, 2008, p. 659).

#### 5.1.4 Cooperation Setup (Cooperation Level Perspective)

After the personal, operational and environmental setup, a fourth aspect is covered by the literature review of this master thesis, namely the cooperation setup. The setup consists of two categories, cooperation governance and cooperation partner.

##### *Cooperation Governance*

In the literature, a major part of the studies about the successful establishment of cooperative relationships contain elements of cooperation governance. In order to avoid risk, governance mechanisms are used to provide control within cooperative relationships. Parkhe (1993, p. 794) stated that some alliance structures are more likely to be associated with the opportunity to cheat, behavioural uncertainty and poor stability compared to other alliance structures. Research must focus on this opportunism when analysing interfirm cooperation.

Semlinger (2008, pp. 558-559) elaborated that cooperation has to take familiarity, requirements and opportunities of partners into consideration. Mutual trust supports this familiarity. In particular, cooperative relationships should enable the right of autonomous decision making and develop specific know-how for every partner. Nowadays, networks are no longer restricted to local cooperation. Social proximity is no longer possible and organizations establish

cooperation among partners with divergent goals. The required knowledge is not always in the immediate surrounding and organizations need to be open to cooperate with strangers. Furthermore, Semlinger (2008, p. 559) stated that networks have to combine cooperation with competition in order to get access to advanced knowledge. According to this study, cooperation governance aspects are an important factor to successfully establish cooperative relationships.

Trust is an important factor of a successful cooperation and a substantial element in almost every study about cooperation governance. Barney and Hansen (1994) have started the discussion about trust in the literature. They distinguish three different forms of trust in economic exchanges: Weak form of trust, semi strong form of trust and strong form of trust. In their paper, they show that the different forms of trust affect the governance mechanisms used and in turn affect the form of cooperation (cf. Barney/Hansen, 1994, p. 175). Gulati (1995a, p. 85) suggests expanding the single use of the transaction cost approach with the consideration of interfirm trust in order to explain the governance factors in interfirm alliances. On a firm level, risk influences the governance structure of a cooperation. According to Ring and Van de Ven (1992, p. 488), the complexity of the governance structure rises with an increasing transaction risk. Cooperation parties select a governance structure which provides appropriate safeguards to that risk. Ring and Van de Ven (1992, p. 489) see trust as another important factor. The more repeated market transactions cooperation partners have, the more trust between these organizations can be expected. Additionally, the more market transactions the organization have, the easier they can predict the others' actions. Moreover, the reliance on each other increases which further reduces the complexity of the governance structure.

Regarding a firm's governance, the shareholders' needs have to be taken into account as well. The types of shareholders can influence the number of cooperative relationships a firm establishes. If the firm is publicly held, fewer relationships can be expected (cf. Shan/Walker/Kogut, 1994, p. 392).

Further research on governance aspects were conducted by Zaheer and Venkatraman (1995). In their study, they conceptualize (vertical) quasi-integration as a governance structure. Quasi-integration is a relationship based on the dependence of a firm on another. They found that asset specificity is positively related to quasi integration and therefore causes more governance. Asset specificity can be defined as the dependence on specific assets and higher investments. Such relationships need comprehensive safeguards (cf. Zaheer/Venkatraman, 1995, pp. 376-377). Additionally, they discovered that trust is positively related to quasi-integration.

However, this finding is not consistent with the prior research conducted about trust and governance. Higher levels of trust increase the extent of governance in a hierarchical point of view due to the fact that it interacts with asset specificity (cf. Zaheer/Venkatraman, 1995, p. 387). In addition to the before mentioned authors, Jones, Hesterly and Borgatti (1997) also addressed asset specificity in their conceptual study. These authors focused on exchange conditions that positively affect the success of network governance and in turn positively influence cooperative exchanges. The authors linked TAC with social network theories. The examined conditions are human asset specificity, demand uncertainty, frequency of interactions and task complexity (tasks requiring diverse specialists). If all conditions are met, it is more beneficial for firms to participate in a network rather than choosing hierarchy or market solutions (cf. Jones/Hesterly/Borgatti, 1997, p. 911).

Chen and Chen (2003, p. 1) examined the alignment of resources when cooperation is established. In particular, they analysed the resource types that are involved in the cooperation and their impact on cooperation governance. In their study, they elaborated that TAC are an adequate way to explain the choice between contractual alliances or equity joint ventures and the RBV optimally explains the choice between exchange and integration alliances (two forms of contractual alliances).

Chen and Chen (2003, pp. 10-12) discovered that the higher the investment in alliance specific assets, the higher the need for control over these alliances and more organizations will choose equity joint ventures instead of contractual alliances. Asset specificity is defined as: "... investment specifically devoted to the alliance in terms of tooling and equipment or know how" (Chen/Chen, 2003, p. 10).

In addition to asset specificity, organizations prefer equity joint ventures when the behavioural uncertainty is high. With the establishment of equity joint ventures, a higher degree of control is possible. In contrast, contractual agreements are preferred when complementary strategic resources are involved. Conflicting interests are less possible and flexibility is generally more important than control (cf. Chen/Chen, 2003, p. 10).

In addition, Chen and Chen (2003) analysed the choice between exchange and integration alliances. They found that dependency on R&D resources tilts the cooperation to an integration contract. In contrast, the ability to provide marketing and production resources tilts the alliance towards exchange contracts. Additionally, resource complementary tilts the alliance towards exchange contracts as well (cf. Chen/Chen, 2003, p. 12).

Reuer, Arino and Mellewigt (2006, pp. 306-307) analysed contracts and governance aspects in the formation of entrepreneurial interfirm alliances. In compliance with Chen and Chen (2003), they elaborated that asset specificity contributes to the choice of an equity-based alliance contract rather than an arrangement on a non-equity basis. Additionally, they found that the higher the partner search costs and the higher the strategic importance of the alliance, the more complex the contract will be arranged. If there is relational capital involved, partners will choose a non-equity rather than an equity-based arrangement. Firms tend to go for a governance solution rather than a contractual fix, if the perceived risk is high. There exist various antecedents for contractual forms and governance structures.

Shu et al. (2013, p. 913) examined the knowledge spillover in alliances. They elaborated that knowledge protection increases knowledge spillover within an alliance. Agarwal, Audretsch and Sarkar (2010) define knowledge spillover as "... the external benefits from knowledge creation that is enjoyed by parties other than the party investing in the creation" (as cited in Shu et al., 2013, p. 914). Furthermore, the effect is moderated by the focal firm's entrepreneurial orientation and by the established alliance type (non-equity joint ventures vs. equity joint ventures).

### *Cooperation Partner*

The second category in the cooperation setup considers the cooperation partner. In order to cooperate successfully, the cooperation partner is an important factor. Dyer and Singh (1998, pp. 660-679) identified potential sources of competitive advantages due to interorganizational relationships. With propositions focusing on the alliance partner, they examined four different sources: Relation-specific assets, knowledge-sharing routines, complementary resources, and capabilities and effective governance. Investments of the alliance partner in one of these sources, for example investments in relation-specific assets and knowledge-sharing routines, will increase the potential for competitive advantages. In addition to this, complementary resources (resources which are synergy sensitive that increase its value when combined) increase competitive advantages. Moreover, the alliance partner's ability to align transactions within governance rules enlarges competitive advantages.

In terms of resource combination, Wiklund and Shepherd (2009) agreed on the aforementioned study of Dyer and Singh (1998). They elaborated that (domestic and international) alliances are only effective when they are able to recognize their complementary resources and further

“... discover and conduct productive resource combinations” (Wiklund/Shepherd, 2009, p. 193).

In 1999, Gulati and Gargiulo enhanced the research about the cooperation partner and elaborated that the chance of establishing an alliance increases with interdependence between two organizations and with the firm's prior alliance experience. In addition to this, the authors interpret that an emerging alliance network constantly gather information about needs, competencies and reliability of potential partners (cf. Gulati/Gargiulo, 1999, p. 1476). Hitt et al. (2000, p. 482) also point out that complementary capabilities between partners are important in forming alliances. Firms usually enter into alliances with firms they share complementary resources. Mazzarol and Reboud (2008, p. 223) agreed on the before mentioned and further discovered that firms only cooperate if such cooperation would reduce the customer's perception of risk and if the firm keeps the control about the final outcome.

Additionally, Hitt et al. (2000) stated that alliance proactiveness facilitates the development of knowledge and skills about the creation of alliances and simplifies the process of partner selection (as cited in Sarkar/Echambadi/Harrison, 2001, p. 708).

In 2001, Yeheskel et al. analysed cooperative relationships in Israel. They found a clear preference to enter into alliances with foreign rather than local partners (cf. Yeheskel et al., 2001, p. 22). However, it depends on the cooperation type if an alliance with a foreign partner is beneficial or not. R&D and marketing alliances with foreign partners generally outperformed local alliances. In contrast, production alliances with another Israeli firm outperformed foreign alliances. Overall, they stated that firms who enter into alliances underperform firms who do not enter into alliance agreements (cf. Yeheskel et al., 2001, p. 16).

Larson (1992, p. 86) sees firm reputation as an important factor for the establishment of cooperation. Small entrepreneurial firms prefer to cooperate with partners who enjoy having a good reputation in the industry in order to profit from their quality benefits.

Stuart (2000) agreed with Larson (1992) and identified that status and recognition can be derived from direct and indirect network ties. Especially for entrepreneurial firms, this status might be valuable (as cited in Hitt et al., 2000, p. 482).

Meuleman et al. (2010, p. 995) enhanced the reputational aspect in the field of cooperation partner literature. In their study, the authors found that relational embeddedness is an important factor in selecting potential partners. However, the importance decreases if agency risks are low. In addition to this, reputational capital can be a substitute for relational embeddedness and

therefore help firms to expand their network and enter into new cooperative relationships. According to the authors, reputation is mostly based on the firm's previous behaviour and exchange partner reputation can reduce the risk of opportunistic behaviour (cf. Meuleman et al., 2010, p. 1003).

In addition to the influence of firm reputation on cooperation partner selection, Larson (1992, p. 90) described the importance of reciprocity. If one part delivers something valuable, it is beneficial if the counterpart takes the next opportunity to return the favour in order to start a cycle of reciprocity which finally increases the cooperation efficiency.

In 2000, Farrow, Johnson and Larson examined success factors of collaborative alliances by conducting a case study. The virtual firm in the example of the study was successful due to the fact that the collaborative alliance was comprehensively established, common goals were defined and benefits for all participants were created. One additional success factor was the lead entrepreneur, who successfully coordinated all decision making in the collaborative alliance.

Other authors continued the research on cooperation partner aspects and the influence on success. Lee (2007) elaborated that the relationship between alliance partners positively and significantly effect new venture success. According to Lee (2007, p. 735), relevant aspects for the relationship between alliance partners are mutual trust, communication, coordination and shared values.

Hora and Dutta (2010, pp. 2-3) found that alliance depth (number of established alliances with one partner) has a curvilinear inverted u-shaped relationship with entrepreneurial success. If a firm has too many alliances with the same partner, the firm may lose its focus (development of the organization).

In 2013, 'fairness perception', another variable which can be subordinated in the category cooperation partner, was described in the literature. Van Burg et al. (2013) and van Burg and van Oorschot (2013) analysed the fairness perception of entrepreneurs who cooperate. Van Burg and van Oorschot (2013, p. 1336) displayed a model that explains the changes in EC-domain due to changes in fairness perceptions. The perception of fairness depends on learning effects and entrepreneurial experience. Van Burg et al. (2013, p. 677) focused on how the aforementioned fairness perception is formed by cooperative entrepreneurs.

## 5.2 Summary of the Literature Review

The aim of this summary is to give a short overview about the major findings in each category. With the help of the literature review, different working hypotheses for the empirical part are developed. In the following, the line of reasoning for the establishment of each working hypothesis will be presented.

### 5.2.1 Operational Setup (Firm Level Perspective)

#### *Firm Size*

In the literature, there is no common sense about the influence of firm size on the establishment of cooperative behaviour. Shan (1990, p. 129) and Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison (2001, p. 701) found a negative effect of firm size on the cooperative behaviour of a firm or elaborated that cooperative relationships are more beneficial for smaller firms.

By comparison, Marino et al. (2002, p. 155) and Kim and Vonortas (2014, p. 803) discovered the opposite. According to these authors, firms that are bigger in size are more willing to enter into cooperative relationships.

Due to the split understanding in the literature, no effect of firm size on the establishment of cooperative relationships is expected. Shan, Walker and Kogut (1994, pp. 392-393) agreed on this reasoning.

***Hypothesis 1: The hotel size has no effect on the cooperative behaviour.***

#### *Innovative Strategy*

By examining strategy aspects in the establishment of cooperative relationships, different research directions can be found. Several authors focus on how different strategies influence the use of cooperation. Shan (1990, p. 131) differentiates between firms who choose a follower or a pioneer strategy.

In the study of Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison (2001, p. 701), the firm's behaviour to cooperation is described as alliance proactiveness or alliance entrepreneurship as described by Khalid and Larimo (2011, p. 901). This proactive behaviour has a positive effect on the firm's performance too.

Several authors, such as Teng (2007), Nakos and Dimitratos (2014) and Jiang et al. (2016) aim to explain the effect of entrepreneurial aspects on performance with the use of cooperative

relationships. On the other hand, Rothaermel and Deeds (2004) as well as Lin and Chen (2006) focus on the formation of alliances in the development of new products.

Keeping in mind that the Swiss hotel industry is completing the study as a third domain, the focus lies on the use of cooperative relationships due to the strategy chosen. Thus, hypothesis 2 expresses the following:

***Hypothesis 2:** Hotels which use a follower strategy, more often use horizontal cooperative arrangements with competitors than firms that see themselves as pioneers.*

### *Firm Network*

Walker, Kogut and Shan (1997, p. 118) stress the importance of considering a firm's network while examining its cooperative relationships. Popular research variables considering the firm's network are the network centrality and the network position as examined by Shan, Walter and Kogut (1994), Gulati (1995b) and Gulati and Gargiulo (1999). A central position in the network enhances the probability to form cooperative relationships.

While other authors focused on the effect of network centrality and network type on performance, Neergaard and Ulhøi (2006, p. 519) found that trust positively influences the establishment of international cooperative relationships. Walter, Auer and Ritter (2006) as well as McGrath and O'Toole (2013) analysed a firm's network capability and how it is developed. Another research direction in the category firm network is the quality of alliance portfolios and the efficiency of the entrepreneur's ties as studied by Ozcan and Eisenhardt (2009) and Hallen and Eisenhardt (2012).

For the empirical part of this thesis, the firm network aspects are not covered in an own working hypothesis. The network of a firm will be included in the third hypothesis, combined with cooperation experience aspects. According to Gulati (1999, p. 411), prior alliance experience cause a better network position which facilitates the establishment of cooperative relationships. The combination of the two categories is appropriate due to their contextual intersection.

### *Cooperation Experience*

There is a general meaning about the facilitating effect of prior cooperation experience on the establishment of cooperation. The authors in the scope of this literature review found that prior alliances, alliance experience and number of alliances enhance the alliance capability or have a direct influence on the establishment of cooperative relationships. Gulati (1995b), Gulati, Nohria and Zaheer (2000), as well as Draulans, deMan and Volberda (2003) examined this effect in their study.

As described above, the network position benefits from the cooperation experience and in turn enhances the probability of alliance formation. This finding in the literature is covered by the third working hypothesis.

***Hypothesis 3:*** *The higher the cooperation experience, the more likely a hotel will enter into new cooperative relationships.*

### 5.2.2 Personal Setup (Individual Level Perspective)

#### *Culture*

Culture is one of the most important determinants for the willingness to cooperate. While Birley (1985, p. 107) found that local people form alliances within an informal network, most authors who examined the cultural dimensions, analysed Hofstede's cultural model.

The difference between individualism and collectivism was mostly discussed by the academic scholars in scope. This cultural dimension (individualism vs. collectivism) leads to different motives as examined by Chen, Chen and Meindl (1998, pp. 285-289) or influence the collaborative stability as analysed by Jones et al. (1998, p. 396). Steensma, Marino and Weaver (2000) took the effects of masculinity vs. femininity, individualism vs. collectivism and uncertainty avoidance vs. risk-taking in the process of establishing cooperative relationships into consideration. The results of this study are key for the forth working hypothesis.

***Hypothesis 4:*** *Entrepreneurs from risk-taking cultures that have masculine and individualist values, have a lower acceptance of cooperative strategies.*

#### *Human Capital*

Next to culture, human capital aspects on an individual level influence the establishment of cooperative relationships. Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1996), Kim and Higgins (2005) as well as Kim and Vonortas (2014) examined this effect, while focusing on the individuals in the top management teams. They elaborated that top management teams with rich experience and education advantages form cooperative relationships at a higher level. In addition to this, Dockels and Lambrecht (1997, p. 23) found that the human capital enhances a firm's network position and in turn facilitates the establishment of cooperative relationships.

The fifth working hypothesis considers the findings within the aforementioned research directions.

***Hypothesis 5:*** *Well-educated entrepreneurs with high-level previous jobs are more likely to form cooperative relationships.*

### *Social Network*

The social network of an entrepreneur is widely discussed in the literature. The authors in this research area agree on the importance of the informal network. Birley (1985, p. 113), Larson (1992, p. 98), Olk and Chung (2004, pp. 4-5) and Hite (2005, p. 139) elaborated that the informal network is important to create a business or to develop personal trust which in turn facilitates the establishment of cooperative relationships. Smith and Lohrke (2008, pp. 318-319) enhanced the trust aspect and examined the importance of affective and cognitive trust in different stages of the network development phase.

Another group of authors (cf. Brown, 1995; Lee/Tsang, 2001) focused on the impact of entrepreneurs' networking activities on venture success and found a positive effect. However, social capital is not always beneficial. Lee and Tsang (2001, p. 583) discovered that extroversion can have a negative effect on the recognition of business partners. Additionally, Molina-Morales and Martínez-Fernández (2009, p. 1013) elaborated that social capital can inhibit innovativeness. Nevertheless, Witt (2004, pp. 405-406) discovered a positive effect of networking on network size and density which in turn is beneficial for the establishment of cooperation.

Baron and Markman (2000, p. 111) examined the entrepreneurs' social skills and their relationship to social capital. The effect is positive and social capital in turn influences the formation of business alliances. In 2011, several authors analysed the positive influence of social network on internationalization aspects such as the exploration of international business opportunities. Vasilchenko and Morrish (2011, p. 88), Evers and O'Gormann (2011, p. 549) as well as Kontinen and Ojala (2011, p. 490) have similar findings and stated that social networks facilitate the internationalization process.

Hoang and Antoncic (2003, p. 167) summed up the social network literature and point to a research gap with social network being a dependent variable. Additionally, it can be said that while the influence of the social network on performance is widely discussed, the formation process from an existing social network to a functioning cooperation is not sufficiently covered in the current literature.

However, as a seventh working hypothesis, the literature about the entrepreneur's social network will be considered as follows:

***Hypothesis 7: Cooperative relationships are established through informal ties of the entrepreneur.***

### *Innovativeness*

According to Larson (1992, p. 89), innovativeness can be seen as the initiating role of an entrepreneur when setting up a cooperation. Moreover, defining common cooperative goals are a key factor in order to be able to cooperate successfully, as described by Tjosvold and Weicker (1993, pp. 13-14).

For the empirical part of the thesis, the focus lies on the innovative person who enables cooperative relationships.

***Hypothesis 8:** Entrepreneurs who initiate cooperative relationships can be seen as innovative persons.*

### 5.2.3 Environmental Setup

Focusing on the influence of environmental aspects on the establishment of cooperative relationships, the industry sector plays an important role. Powell, Kogut and Smith-Doerr (1996, p. 116), Hagedoorn (1993, pp. 378-380) as well as Brush and Chaganti (1997, pp. 43-49) discovered that organizations do more likely form alliances in complex and high technological industries with short innovation periods.

Dickson and Weaver (1997, pp. 420-421) analysed the effect of uncertainty. They found that general uncertainty enhances the firm's willingness to cooperate whereas low predictability of competitor actions and consumer demands inhibits cooperation. Challenging market conditions are therefore beneficial for the establishment of cooperative relationships, as identified by Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1996, p. 146).

In several studies, the environmental aspect is used as a moderator as shown in the study of Sarkar, Echambadi and Harrison (2001) as well as Koka and Prescott (2008).

Due to the fact that the empirical part investigates the Swiss hotel industry, industry related differences cannot be expected. Thus, a working hypothesis for environmental factors influencing the establishment of cooperation in the Swiss hotel industry is impracticable.

### 5.2.4 Cooperation Setup (Cooperation Level Perspective)

#### *Cooperation Governance*

A major part of the literature about cooperative relationships highlight influencing elements of cooperation governance, such as trust. The research about trust has its roots in the study of Barney and Hansen (1994, p. 175) who differentiate between a weak form, a semi form and a

strong form of trust. Semlinger (2008, pp. 558-559), Ring and Van de Ven (1992, p. 488) as well as Gulati (1995a, p. 85) agreed that trust facilitates the governance structure of cooperative relationships. Risk on the other hand increases the cooperation governance.

Another determinant of the cooperation governance is asset specificity, as found by Zaheer and Venkatraman (1995 pp. 376-377), Jones, Hesterly and Borgatti (1997, p. 911) as well as Chen and Chen (2003, p. 1). These authors agreed that investments in assets increase the complexity of the cooperation governance. Reuer, Arino and Mellewigt (2006, pp. 306-307) additionally uncovered that asset specificity rather leads to equity based agreements.

Due to the fact that studies about the cooperation governance target governance and control aspects as the dependent variable, the development of a hypothesis how governance aspects influence the establishment of cooperative relationships is not possible. Consequently, cooperation governance will be excluded for the empirical part of this thesis.

### *Cooperation Partner*

Considering the cooperation partner, Wiklund and Shepherd (2009, p. 193) focus on the importance of complementary resources in order to achieve effectivity in cooperative relationships. Hitt (2000, p. 482) agreed and emphasized the importance of complementary capabilities in forming alliances.

In addition to complementarity, reputation, status, recognition and relational embeddedness are according to Larson (1992, p. 86) and Meuleman et al. (2010, p. 995), important determinants for the partner selection and the establishment of cooperative relationships. These factors are determined by the firm's behaviour. By having a good reputation, the firm will benefit in finding appropriate cooperation partners.

The working hypothesis related to the category cooperation partner includes the determining aspects of firm reputation and complementary resources.

***Hypothesis 8: Reputation and complementary resources are the most important factors for the selection of the cooperation partner.***

## 6 Methodology of the Empirical Research

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach chosen for the empirical part of the thesis. It includes strategic sampling decisions, data collection and analysis procedures, as well as the quality measures taken. In order to become familiar with the topic of the thesis, fundamental information was described in the chapter 5 *Results of the Literature Review*. According to Hart (2001, p. 2), “a search of literature is an essential part of every research project.”

The methodological research approach has to be either of quantitative or qualitative nature, although mixed forms can be employed. It is recommended that the selection of an empirical design should not be made due to personal judgement, but rather on what information the authors is seeking to explore or to uncover (cf. Davies, 2007, p. 10). Furthermore, Silverman (2008, p. 122) emphasizes that the method chosen should be appropriate for the specific research topic and models that are used to work with. Finally, the method used should correspond with the research objectives and questions the authors investigate.

### 6.1 Qualitative Research Concept

If adopting a quantitative approach for a thesis, the data collection is mostly straight-forward, but requires a detailed planning stage and can be very time-consuming. The analysis is often determined by the way the research was planned and the data was gathered (cf. Davies, 2007, p. 26). However, using a qualitative approach can help to understand experiences and to give a more in-depth insight. If there exists no comprehensive literature about a scientific field, like it is case for the intersection domain on ECH, it is difficult to explore the richness and complexity of real life only with quantitative numbers. Brush and Chaganti (1997, p. 40) stated that “the comparative lack of empirical research on cooperative strategies of new ventures in general, and on non-high-tech new ventures in particular, implied an exploratory approach ...” If a research question cannot be answered through a simple interview question, and the researchers might need to ask people about a further explanation to an answer or describe their experience, then a qualitative approach should be favoured (cf. Rubin/Rubin, 2005, pp. 2-3). Silverman (2008, p. 6) favours a qualitative approach as well, especially “if you are concerned with exploring people's life histories or everyday behaviour.” The aim of a qualitative research approach is to have a look behind the surface. Research questions have to be answered by exploring relationships between persons and organizations and reflecting about personal experiences and feelings (cf. Davies, 2007, pp. 26-27).

Obtaining a look behind the surface is especially crucial for this thesis and its main research question. Asking entrepreneurs in the Swiss hotel industry about their experience and knowledge in the establishment of cooperative relationships will give the authors insights on the entrepreneur's setup and behaviour. These different subjective views will be key aspects for the empirical analysis. Considering the above-mentioned aspects, a qualitative research approach seems appropriate for this thesis.

## 6.2 Methodological Design

Within qualitative research, Flick (2009, pp. X-XI) differs between verbal data, observations and mediated data. Under the term verbal data, he incorporates different forms of interviews, narratives and focus groups. Observation and mediated data include using the internet and documents, visual data, observation and ethnography. Davies (2007, p. 151) stated almost identical data collection methods for qualitative research.

According to Davies (2007), small sample interviewing is the most popular data collection method used by students or entry-level researchers, once it has been decided a qualitative research path will be taken. The objective of such a method is to "... emerge feelings, ideas, described experiences, opinions, views, attitudes, and perspectives that have a breadth and depth to them extending beyond that which a structured questionnaire would deliver" (Davies, 2007, pp. 151-152).

The objective of the thesis is to analyse the setup of entrepreneurs who aim for successful cooperation in the Swiss hotel industry. To empirically reach this goal, the adopted methods need to be able to explore the relevant information. Lechner and Leyronas (2009, p. 648) expressed that if they want to determine "... more about how and why entrepreneurs developed their companies into organizational form of the small-business group ..." they need to pursue a qualitative methodology, as the existing research on this phenomenon is limited. Due to lack of existing literature in the ECH-domain, this thesis uses qualitative interviews as a research instrument. The combination of insights from the interviews and the literature review gives the ability to explore the main objective of the thesis empirically.

### 6.2.1 Semi-structured Interview

Interviews are especially useful when it comes to the exploration of experiences, feelings, attitudes and views in depth (cf. Davies, 2007, p. 152). This thesis will make use of semi-structured interviews to gather the qualitative data. With such a research instrument, the interviewer is able to maintain control of the interview process by using the corresponding

interview guidelines. Moreover, the interviewer remains flexible in which order the pre-defined questions are asked and is able to back up standardized questions to ensure that the answer is fully given. According to Richardson, Dohrenwend and Klein (1965) and Smith (1975), personal interviews suit well for the exploration of attitudes, values, beliefs and motives (as cited in Barriball/While, 1994, p. 329). This is significant for this thesis, since this is what the authors try to figure out when conducting interviews. Flick (2009, p. 156) agreed that such an interview method is extremely helpful to study an interviewee's complex and subjective stock of knowledge about a topic. However, the information that an interviewee is telling during the interview may be influenced by the situation in which they are told. These method limitations are especially associated with narrative interviews (cf. Flick, 2009, pp. 184-185), but may also occur in semi-structured interviews, as the interviewees might get irritated by the structure of the interview (cf. Flick, 2009, p. 161). By constructing a comprehensive interview guideline, the authors tried to avoid such influences.

### 6.2.2 Sample

There are two different sampling methods for qualitative research, called probability and non-probability-sampling. The non-probability sampling is a technique where the samples are drawn in a process that does not give all potential individuals in the population equal chances of being selected. With this method, people can explicitly be selected according to their ability to help answering the research question (cf. Davies, 2007, p. 144). The factors that are used to draw a sample are selected specifically for each research project. While it is possible to choose interview participants with specific characteristics to obtain a comprehensive picture of a situation, it cannot be used to make a fully representative statement about the population.

As this thesis tries to explore the entrepreneur's setup, the potential interviewees were either the founder, owner or director of a Swiss hotel, who already established cooperative relationships. The cooperative relationships can either be horizontal, vertical or lateral. No direction of cooperation was excluded in this thesis.

This thesis excludes all established cooperation which were already interviewed by the CRED for their survey about cooperation models in the Swiss hotel industry.<sup>8</sup> In order to find the appropriate participants, several websites and personal contacts were consulted. Furthermore, the hotels had to match the chosen 3x3 sample which includes three rural hotels, located in the

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<sup>8</sup> See Bandi et al. (2015).

Swiss Alps and three hotels in Swiss cities. The aim of this sample is to determine differences between the two regions in the entrepreneur's setup.

In total, 21 hotels were asked. Six of these were willing to participate in the interview which led to a commitment quota of 28.5%.

The final sample of the thesis includes the following hotels and respective entrepreneurs:

### *Rural Hotels*

- Märchenhotel Bellevue, Braunwald

Interviewpartner: Patric Vogel (owner and director)

The Märchenhotel Bellevue in Braunwald (car free mountain village in the canton of Glarus) is a family friendly four-star hotel with modern family suites, adventure bath, outdoor pool, wellness, wine degustation, animal adventures, four play areas and further experiences. A speciality of the hotel is the daily fairy tale by the hotelier.

- Resort Belvedere Hotels, Scuol

Interviewpartner: Kurt Baumgartner (owner, director and founder of the resort)

The Resort Belvedere Hotels Scuol, which is located in the canton of Grisons, consists of the four-star hotel Belvedere together with the four-star hotel GuardaVal, the three-star hotel Belvair and the Thai restaurant Nam Thai. All houses are connected with each other and the Engadin Bad Scuol. The resort offers in-house spa and wellness areas, modern seminar and conference rooms and several restaurants, bars and bistros.

- Swiss Holiday Park, Morschach

Interviewpartner: Walter Trösch (director)

The Swiss Holiday Park in Morschach is located above the Vierwaldstättersee in the canton of Schwyz. The biggest holiday and leisure resort in Switzerland offers several indoor and outdoor activities for all generations such as sport and play activities, an adventure farm, a go-kart track and a big bathing landscape.

### *City Hotels*

- Hotel Schweizerhof, Lucerne

Interviewpartner: Patrick Hauser (owner)

The five-star hotel Schweizerhof is internationally known as the festival hotel in Lucerne. The hotel is close to the historic old town with several shopping possibilities and the culture and convention centre KKL. The hotel offers a view on the Vierwaldstättersee and the surrounding mountains.

- Hotel Wilden Mann, Lucerne

Interviewpartner: Arno Affolter (director)

The four-star hotel Wilden Mann is one of the most tradition-steeped hotels in Lucerne. The Wilden Mann welcomes guests for 500 years, first as a bar, later as a tavern and since 1869 as a hotel. The Wilden Mann consists of seven interconnected old buildings which gives the hotel its charm.

- The Dolder Hotel Group, Zurich

Interviewpartner: Mark Jacob (director)

The Dolder Hotel Group consists of the five-star hotel The Dolder Grand, the four-star hotel Dolder Waldhaus and Dolder Sports. The resort offers luxury rooms and suites, exquisite gastronomy, a 4,000-square metre spa area, banquet facilities and a valuable art collection. The luxury city resort is located above the city of Zurich with a view on the city, the lake and the surrounding mountains.

### 6.2.3 Qualitative Interviews

The qualitative research contains six interviews, which are held with entrepreneurs, who established cooperative relationships in the Swiss hotel industry. The main questions were prepared in advance to ensure that insights in the research questions are obtained. The predefined questions were sent to the interviewees in advance in the form of interview guidelines.<sup>9</sup> The design of semi-structured interviews allows the interviewer to ask follow-up questions for explanations or more in-detail information about a topic that the interviewee

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<sup>9</sup> The interview guidelines are attached in chapter 2 *Interview Guidelines* of the appendix.

introduces. It ensures a high level of depth, detail, vividness, richness and nuance (cf. Rubin/Rubin, 2005, p. 129). Therefore, it is highly important to get familiar with the cooperative relationships the entrepreneurs have established.

In order to develop the interview guidelines, eight out of ten categories which were determined in the literature review were retrieved.<sup>10</sup> Two categories, namely the entire environmental setup and cooperation governance aspects, are not included in the empirical investigation. Due to the fact that the literature review represents the intersection domain of entrepreneurship and cooperation, not all found categories are of practical interest for the hotel industry. The environmental setup will be excluded, since all research objects are part of the same industry and cooperation governance aspects will be ignored, as no study which investigated possible effects of cooperation governance on the establishment of cooperation was found.

As described in the section *Summary of the Literature Review*, the authors developed working hypotheses for the eight different categories of the entrepreneur's setup. In order to design a comprehensive interview guideline, the authors established questions for each category aiming to be able to explore and discuss the working hypotheses in an empirical manner by comparing the different answers of the interviewees. The following questions were predefined in order to show the proposed relations of the working hypotheses:<sup>11</sup>

***Hypothesis 1: The hotel size has no effect on the cooperative behaviour.***

- How many beds does the hotel or the hotel group offer?

***Hypothesis 2: Hotels which use a follower strategy, more often use horizontal cooperative arrangements with competitors than firms that see themselves as pioneers.***

- Is the hotel strategy inspired by other hotel concepts or does your hotel has a concept that differs from others?
- Is the openness towards cooperative relationships part of your hotel's strategy?

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<sup>10</sup> The categorization process is described in the subsection 6.3.1 *Categorization*.

<sup>11</sup> The theoretical framework in *Figure 8* illustrates the diverse relationships.

**Hypothesis 3:** *The higher the cooperation experience the more likely a hotel will enter into new cooperative relationships.*

- Did your hotel enter into cooperative relationships in the past? How many? What kind of cooperative relationships? Were the relationships successful?

**Hypothesis 4:** *Entrepreneurs from risk-taking cultures that have masculine and individualist values, have a lower acceptance of cooperative strategies.*

Uncertainty avoidance (tendency questions: 1 = I strongly disagree, 7 = I strongly agree):

- I expect others to closely follow instructions and procedures.
- Company rules should not be broken - even when people think it is in the company's best.

Collectivism (tendency questions: 1 = I strongly disagree, 7 = I strongly agree):

- Individuals should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group.

Individualism / Masculinity (tendency questions: 1 = very unimportant, 7 = very important):

- How important is it to you to have challenging work to do – work from which you can achieve a personal sense of accomplishment?

Masculinity (tendency questions: 1 = very unimportant, 7 = very important):

- How important is it to you to get the recognition you deserve when you do a good job?

**Hypothesis 5:** *Well-educated entrepreneurs with high-level previous jobs are more likely to form cooperative relationships.*

- Could you please describe your education?
- What was your previous job and position?
- What is your work experience in the hotel industry?

**Hypothesis 6:** *Cooperative relationships are established through informal ties of the entrepreneur.*

- Do you actively conduct networking activities?
- Have you personally known your cooperation partner before establishing the cooperative relationship? (Would you only enter into cooperative relationships with partners you know personally?)

***Hypothesis 7:** Entrepreneurs who initiate cooperative relationships can be seen as innovative persons.*

- Do you see yourself as the initiator of the cooperative relationships you entered?

***Hypothesis 8:** Reputation and complementary resources are the most important factors for the selection of the cooperation partner.*

- Why did you enter into cooperation with your cooperation partner?
- Do you think that you and your cooperation partner do share similar core values and characteristics?
- Did you have any fears entering the cooperation?

In order to transcribe the interviews, the interviewees have been audio-recorded. The interview partners were asked for permission in advance and written-notes were made to back-up or illustrate a given context. The transcripts are presented in chapter 4 *Interview Transcripts* in the appendix.

After the interview execution by the authors of this thesis, the interviews were transcribed<sup>12</sup> and analysed. “A transcription is a complete manuscript record of what was said by all parties during the course of an audio-recorded interview” (Davies, 2007, p. 190).

### **6.3 Data Analysis**

Flick (2014, p. 370) defines the qualitative data analysis as “... the interpretation and classification of linguistic (or visual) material.” The intention is to explore, precise and state a generalisation by comparing materials, texts or cases.

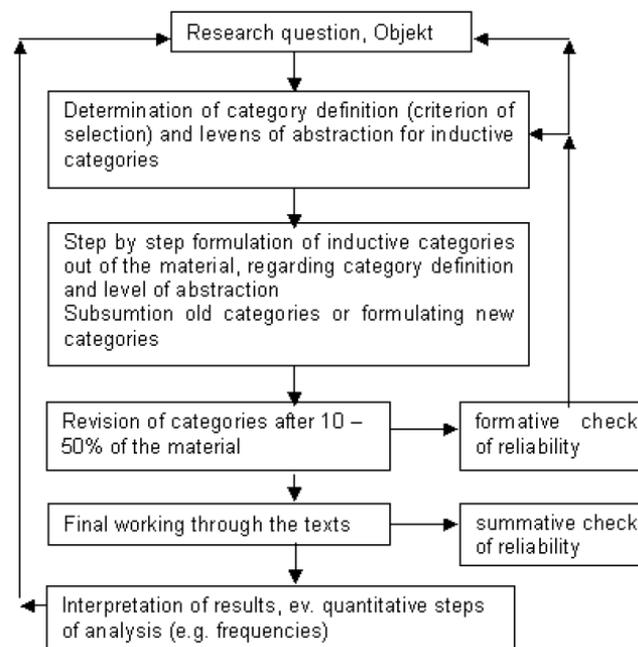
This thesis especially aims to describe the behaviour, characteristics and experience of entrepreneurs who established a cooperative relationship in the Swiss hotel industry, based on the chosen methodological design. In terms of the semi-structured interview, the analysis approach is used. This approach will be described in the next two subsections.

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<sup>12</sup> The interviews are not transcribed in a verbatim manner. However, the authors pay attention that the content will be reproduced accurately.

### 6.3.1 Categorization

Generally, “coding is the work with materials for generating concepts and for allocating excerpts of the material to categories” (Flick, 2014, p. 373). The aim of this process is to take parts of an interview out of their context and cluster them with other similar excerpts. For these coding and clustering purposes, provisional predefined categories were used. The different categories can be either developed before or during the analysis of the data (cf. Flick, 2014, p. 45). In this thesis, the categories were defined before the analysis, due to the fact that the literature review was done before the analysis of the interviews. The definition of the categories was a continuous process with possible changes during the transcription of the interviews. The categorization process considered Mayring's inductive approach (2000b, p. 4),<sup>13</sup> as illustrated in *Figure 9*.



**Figure 9: Step Model of Inductive Categorization Development (taken from Mayring, 2000b, p. 4)**

The model is composed of two main steps: First, “the material is worked through, and categories are tentative and step by step deduced” (Mayring, 2000b, p. 4). The categories are derived from the theoretical background and the literature review to determine the aspects of

<sup>13</sup> Mayring's article in the online journal mostly refers to his published book (2000a) which is written in German. The authors prefer to cite the online journal which is written in English, in order not to translate the terminology wrongly.

the textual material taken into account (cf. Mayring, 2000b, p. 4). Second, Mayring (2000b, p. 4) suggests conducting a "... feedback loop to revise the categories and check in respect to their reliability."

It is important to systematically define the categories that are going to be used before marking the data in the transcript (cf. Rubin/Rubin, 2005, p. 216). An overview of the defined categories is presented in chapter 3 *Content Analysis Categories*, in the appendix to this master thesis.

Consistency in using the categories, can be provided when following four questions formulated by Boyatzis (1998, p. 31, as cited in Rubin/Rubin, 2005, pp. 216-217):

1. What am I going to call it (label it)?
2. How am I defining it?
3. How am I going to recognize it in the interviews?
4. What do I want to exclude?

To sum up, the categories are based on the literature review, the theoretical background and the interview transcripts.

### 6.3.2 Consolidation of Data

Subsequent to the formulation of the different categories, the interview transcripts need to be interpreted. The concluding objective is to formulate explanations about "... the views in the field, their links among each other, their ties to context conditions ..." (Flick, 2014, p. 373). With the help of codes, relevant parts of the transcripts were subordinated into the appropriate categories. All significant aspects and attributes about the entrepreneur's setup mentioned, were collected. To provide a more reliable output, each author analysed the transcripts on his own. By conducting an independent analysis, no prioritising was applied. Instead, if possible, all aspects that have been mentioned were taken into consideration.

The coding allows the researcher to then consolidate the data according to the subject matter of the category. For the research of this thesis, a summary table has been constructed as a gathering instrument. The source and the actual excerpt were collected in a table. This method provides a systematic overview of the data which simplifies the step of interpretation for the authors. Chapter 5 *Summary Table of Categories* in the appendix, contains all excerpts used.

Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 224) differentiate two types of studies when analysing coded data: On the one hand, there are the cultural studies, in which "... you combine what different interviewees have said about the same concepts to refine your understandings of what each concept means." On the other hand, there are the topical studies, in which "... you compare and weigh contrasting descriptions of events to work out your own interpretations of what

happened” (Rubin/Rubin, 2005, p. 224). Due to the importance of similarities as well as differences between the entrepreneurs, a combination of both types to write up the entrepreneur's setup was used.

#### **6.4 Quality Criteria**

Within this section, quality measures for the research method are considered. The legitimacy of such a qualitative research method has continually been a discussion point (cf. Flick, 2014, p. 480). In general, the value of research is discussed in terms of three quality criteria: Reliability, validity and objectivity (cf. Flick, 2014, pp. 480-487). The aim is to address the correctness and credibility of the findings by fulfilling these criteria (cf. Creswell, 2013, p. 201). The first and the second criteria are characterised by Gibbs (2007, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 201) as follows: “Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects.” The last criteria, objectivity, was described by Flick (2014, p. 487) as “... consistency of meaning, when two or more independent researchers analyse the same data or material.” If both researchers suggest the same conclusion, then the research is considered as objective.

It is obvious that the authors' backgrounds will have an influence on how a situation is perceived. In order to ensure a valid empirical research, it will be significant for this paper's authors to consider several data sources when doing research, reviewing literature and writing up interpretations. For example, for the results part of the study, it is aimed to stress similar opinions of interviewees and not emphasis information that was merely mentioned once.

Further, there exist strategies for increasing the reliability of a research method as well. The transcripts will be checked for obvious mistakes that may occur during the transcription process. Moreover, both authors will transcribe according to defined transcription symbols to increase the consistency.

The objectivity of the research method can be reached, if findings are supported by both authors. If both authors reach the same conclusion, the probability of an objective outcome increases.

#### **6.5 Language Issues**

The empirical research faces several language issues. For instance, the interview sample consists of people with a Swiss German language background. In order to provide the interviewees with the greatest possible comfort and freedom of speech, the interviewees had

the choice to hold the interview in German, Swiss German or English. All interviews were held in Swiss German. However, with regard to the transcription, only High German or English were used in order to ensure the correctness of all written correspondence. Any in-text citation or reference to the interviewees' statements, were made in English, so that continuity for the reader is guaranteed. Thus, there is the possibility of semantic differences in the translation of the transcripts, although the authors aim to report the interviewees correctly.

## 7 Results of the Empirical Research

### 7.1 The Entrepreneur's Setup Categories

The following sections will point out the empirical findings and synthesize the knowledge acquired from the literature review. The authors categorized the qualitative insights drawn from the interviews into the same setup categories as described in chapter 5 *Results of the Literature Review*. The major findings will be described and mapped into organizational, individual and cooperation specific perspectives. The aim of this empirical research is to further explore the entrepreneur's setup characteristics for the successful establishment of cooperative relationships described in chapter 5 and to test the proposed working hypotheses. The empirical part adds another domain, namely the Swiss hotel industry, to the thesis. This third domain sets restrictions regarding the industry to the intersection of the two domains entrepreneurship and cooperation which were already covered in the literature review.<sup>14</sup>

#### 7.1.1 Operational Setup (Hotel Level Perspective)

Starting with the organizational setup of the entrepreneur, the empirical results will present some insights on three different hotel level categories: The hotel size, its innovative strategy and the hotel's network and cooperation experience.

##### *Hotel Size*

According to the literature, the hotel size should have no effect on the establishment of cooperative relationships. The sample of the thesis represents a broad spectrum in consideration of hotel size. The interval ranges between 85 and 800 beds with a median of 252. In order to empirically analyse this category, hotels which have less than 252 beds are considered to be small hotels and vice versa.

Almost all interview partners define the term cooperation as a contractual relationship in which money have to be invested in order to create a value added. The hotels in the sample of this thesis established informal cooperation only on a temporary and regional basis, in order to promote an event or to support locals. All of them do have relationships on a trustful basis, however they do not define them as real cooperation. Such relations may be memberships in

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<sup>14</sup> In this chapter, the term cooperation refers to cooperative relationships to external business partners only. Statements to internal cooperation are explicitly declared as such.

different local clubs or associations. In their view, a functional cooperative relationship needs to accumulate at least on a letter of intent and in the case of horizontal cooperation, all partners must invest money into it.

If taken this definition, no clear differences in case of numbers and direction of cooperation are found. Therefore, the sample of the thesis supports the hypothesis that the hotel size has no effect on the cooperative behaviour. However, there are differences regarding the area of cooperation. The large hotels are all organized in privately-owned hotel groups and profit from internal cooperation. Due to this fact, these hotels do not always need to cooperate with external partners, such as a buying syndicate or marketing organizations. In contrast, one interview partner in the small group stated that it is essential for them to cooperate in order to position themselves in diverse markets. For them, it would not be possible to survive without external partners. The areas of cooperation are extremely diverse and often linked to the location or strategic positioning of the hotel. Another difference regarding the size of the hotel was found in the origin of the partners. Large hotels more often establish cooperation with international partners than small hotels.

To conclude, the rural hotels are a little bit larger than the city hotels in the sample of this thesis, but no effect on the cooperative behaviour regarding the size of the hotels was found. In some areas, it might be more beneficial for small hotels to enter into external cooperative relationships compared to large firms. Large hotel groups have the scale and resources to centralize such areas and cooperate internally.

### *Innovative Strategy*

If concerning the individual strategic positioning in their destination, all entrepreneurs in the sample see themselves as pioneers. In the regional dimension (geographically limited), the strategic concept of each hotel is indeed truly unique and differentiated. In that regard, one interviewee elaborated that if a hotel wants to be successful in a destination, the hotel has to either follow a niche strategy or achieve a critical size in scale. However, in regard of the national dimension (less geographical limitation), only one concept can be defined as truly pioneer.

In the matter of knowledge sharing, offering, strategic positioning and strategic aspects regarding the value chain, the interview partners are generally open to new cooperative relationships.

All six hotels have already established horizontal cooperative arrangements. The number of horizontal arrangements vary between one and three contractual or equity based memberships.

However, there is no difference between city or rural based hotels and the number of established or entered horizontal arrangements in the sample. To sum up, when the national dimension is taken into account, the working hypothesis for the category innovative strategy can neither be rejected nor supported. If the regional dimension is considered, the working hypothesis is not supported due to the fact that all hotels pursue a pioneer strategy.

### *Hotel Network and Cooperation Experience*

In order to compare the network and cooperation experience between rural and city hotels, the main and most important cooperative relationships are listed in two tables below, one table for each sample group. Moreover, the cooperation characteristics will then be analysed through different dimensions.

<b>City Hotels</b>	
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Motives</b>	Employee sharing/training/education, efficient use of resources, expand offering, concentration on core competences, optimization of costs, public awareness, brand and market positioning, strategic positioning, creation of destination, access new markets, increase income, know-how, reduction of risk
<b>Origin of Partners</b>	Regional, national and international (business and public partnerships)
<b>Forms</b>	Contractual and equity based
<b>Areas</b>	Medical services/wellness, wellness, human resources, social engagement, marketing, sales, distribution, purchase, strategy, social media, public relations, human capital
<b>Direction</b>	Horizontal, vertical and lateral
<b>Industry</b>	Hotel, tourism, media, social institution, event, automotive, schools, food

**Table 2: Cooperation Characteristics of City Hotels**

<b>Rural Hotels</b>	
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Motives</b>	Employee sharing/training/education, efficient use of resources, expand offering, concentration on core competences, optimization of costs,

	public awareness, brand and market positioning, strategic positioning, creation of destination, access new markets, increase income, know-how, reduction of risk
<b>Origin of Partners</b>	Regional, national and international (business and public partnerships)
<b>Forms</b>	Contractual and cooperative shares
<b>Areas</b>	Wellness, marketing, sales, distribution, purchase, strategy, human resources, public relations, human capital, insurance/banking, offering
<b>Direction</b>	Horizontal, vertical and lateral
<b>Industry</b>	Hotel, tourism, event, retail and specialist trade, insurance, food, tour operator, banking

**Table 3: Cooperation Characteristics of Rural Hotels**

By analysing the different dimensions of the two sample tables, the conclusion is reached that the cooperation experience is very rich and diverse. Most cooperative relationships were established in the hotel and tourism industry. While the interview partners entered many and sometimes large horizontal and vertical cooperation, they set up only a few and rather loosely tied cooperative relationships in the lateral dimension (e.g. insurance industry, banking industry, social institution and automotive industry). The areas of cooperation are diverse due to the fact that a cooperation often involves more than just one area. Almost all major cooperation base on contractual agreements and the authors know from two cooperation which are based on either equity or cooperative shares. The hotels established cooperation with regional, national and international business partners and two important destination cooperation are based on public partnerships.

To sum up, the working hypothesis of the category hotel network and cooperation experience is supported by the empirical results. All hotels constantly review their cooperation and analyse the market for new cooperation opportunities to further improve their strategic positioning.

However, the authors found no major difference between rural and city hotels regarding the cooperative behaviour, motives, origin of partners, forms, areas, direction or industry of cooperation.

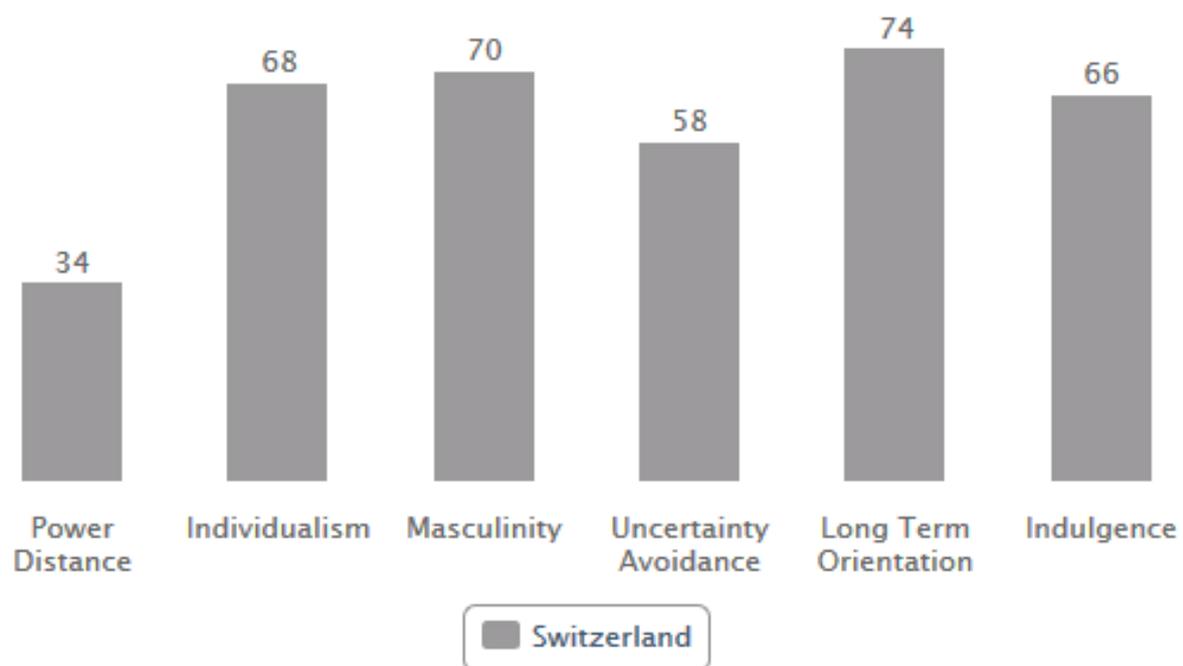
### 7.1.2 Personal Setup (Individual Level Perspective)

The empirical results of the personal setup will be structured in four categories: Culture, human capital, social network and innovativeness.

### Culture

The cultural expression of the entrepreneurs was measured with part of Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions. By asking stereotype questions, the authors tried to evaluate the dimensions, which are mostly discussed in the EC-Domain. Therefore, the extent of the following three dimensions were evaluated in the interview: Individualism (vs. collectivism), masculinity (vs. femininity) and uncertainty avoidance.

The original 6-D model of Hofstede contains six different dimensions and is mostly used to explore the national, corporate or individual culture. *Figure 10*, represents the cultural expression of Switzerland.



**Figure 10: Cultural Dimensions of Switzerland (taken from Hofstede/Hofstede/Minkov, 2010; Hofstede, 2001)<sup>15</sup>**

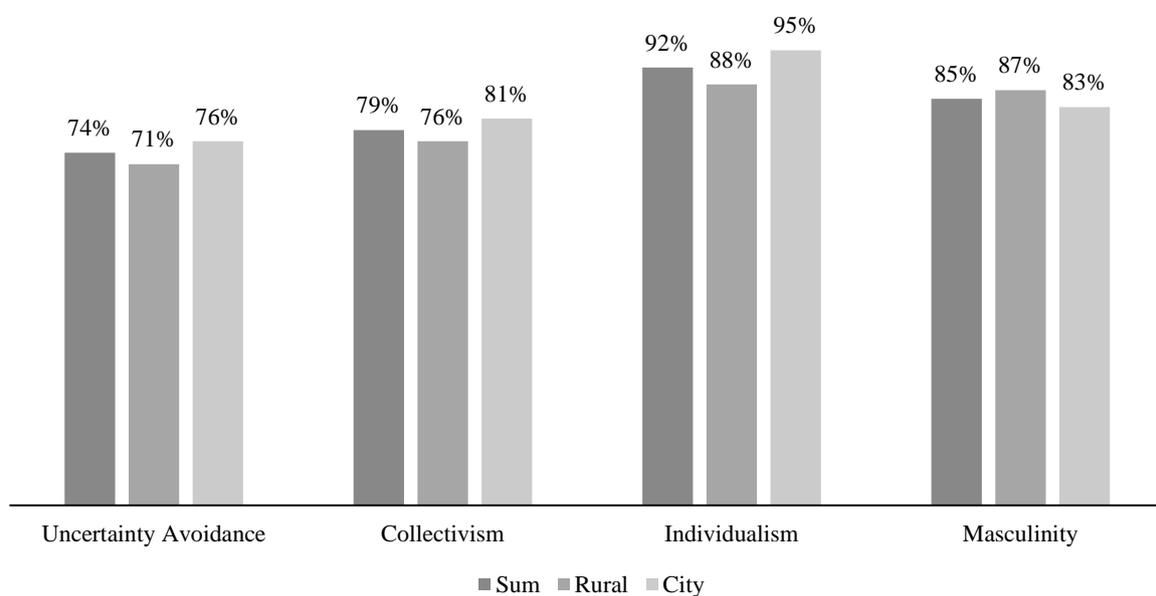
According to the score analysis, Switzerland is considered to have an individualist and masculine society which has a slight preference of avoiding uncertainty. Stereotype individualist societies are assumed to look for themselves and their closest family members only. In collectivist societies, people are loyal members of “in groups” and take care of them.

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<sup>15</sup> The figure was taken from the following source: <https://geert-hofstede.com/switzerland.html> [07.04.2017]. However, due to copyright issues, the website declares that references should be made to the original sources.

A high score on the masculinity dimension indicates that the society is performance-orientated and driven by competition, success and personal achievement. In contrast, a low score would indicate a more feminine society, where caring for others and the quality of life is more important than standing out. In this dimension, the general role of gender values is examined. The dimension of uncertainty avoidance deals with the extent to which a society feels threatened by unknown situations and having the emotional need of trying to control the future by establishing institutions or rules (cf. Hofstede/Hofstede/Minkov, 2010; Hofstede, 2001).<sup>16</sup>

Figure 11 illustrates the three cultural dimensions based on the empirical research data, gathered from the interview partners.



**Figure 11: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions based on the Empirical Research Data**

When analysing *Figure 10* and *Figure 11*, the masculinity, individualism and uncertainty avoidance dimensions did reach a higher score in the sample compared to the Swiss population. However, the results indicate a high score for both, individualism and collectivism, which seems to be a contradicting result. When comparing the thesis sample selection, no substantial

<sup>16</sup> The information was taken from the following source: <https://geert-hofstede.com/switzerland.html> [07.04.2017]. However, due to copyright issues, the website declares that references should be made to the original sources.

differences are found. Entrepreneurs from rural or city hotels do not large disparities, regarding their personal culture. In general, the score for the city sample entrepreneurs is higher, except for the dimension masculinity.

By implication to the working hypothesis synthesised from the literature review, the entrepreneurs in the sample have a high acceptance for cooperative strategies, although indicating a masculine culture. However, the entrepreneurs indicate a preference for avoiding uncertainty too, which is a finding in favour of the working hypothesis. The results for the dimension individualism are contradicting and will therefore not be included in the analysis. In order to conclude the category culture, the working hypothesis cannot be supported by the empirical results, as the majority of the findings are contradicting to the working hypothesis or cannot be interpreted precisely.

### *Human Capital*

Every entrepreneur in the sample is highly educated and has either visited a well-known hotel management school or completed an academic education. Almost all of them have international working experience or studied abroad. During their education, the entrepreneurs have gained widespread experience in the gastronomy and hotel industry by undertaking several internships. After their studies, several interviewees visited an executive management course. The results show that the educational background of the interview partners is very similar.

The professional career paths of the interviewees have a similar nature as well. All of them know the hotel business from scratch and possess a rich professional experience in the business. They passed through several hierarchical levels and working areas before becoming the owner or director of their present hotel. In their previous jobs, nearly all interviewees were in the hierarchical position of a vice director or tenant.

As stated in the beginning of this section, the results are very similar and no considerable differences were found, when comparing the sample selection.

The empirical results support the hypothesis of the category human capital. The well-educated entrepreneurs, with high-level previous jobs have indeed formed several cooperative relationships.

### *Social Network*

Most of the interview partners do actively conduct networking activities. All of them are members in different regional and national hotel and tourism associations. The results indicate that entrepreneurs in the city sample try to strengthen their social network by engaging in

various business, cultural, political or service clubs and committees. They try to accumulate an extensive regional relationship network. One entrepreneur pointed out that he constantly tries to get the optimum out of his social network. The majority of the entrepreneurs in the rural sample focus on networking activities too, but more with the help of events or associations from the hotel and tourism industry. Only one entrepreneur stated that he does not see himself as a networker, although he surely does participate on regional and national events.

Although pursuing extensive networking activities, five out of six entrepreneurs expressed that they do not only enter into cooperative relationships with partners they know personally. One entrepreneur explained that it depends on the intensity of the cooperation. The more intense a cooperative relationship, the more he needs to establish a personal relationship at first.

In conclusion, the working hypothesis of the category social network is supported by the entrepreneurs in the sample. The informal network is important to develop personal trust which in turn facilitates the establishment of cooperative relationships. However, they do not exclusively establish cooperative relationships through informal ties. The most important criteria for entering into a cooperative relationship is the added value generated through the cooperation.

### *Innovativeness*

The working hypothesis of the category innovativeness strongly relies on the research of Larson (1992). The hypothesis was not synthesized from a generally valid belief, but mostly gathered from one scholar's work. Nonetheless, the category is an important component of the entrepreneur's setup and has to be examined. Certainly, entering into cooperative relationships is only one aspect of being an innovative entrepreneur. Every entrepreneur in the sample can be considered as innovative, due to their reputation, experience and constant desire to improve and question themselves.

In every hotel in the sample, the entrepreneurs are the point of contact, regarding the establishment or expansion of cooperation. Five out of six interview partners initiated their largest and most important cooperative relationships by themselves and no difference concerning the sample selection was found. Some stated that they had to take an initiating and more proactive role in the beginning of their work in their hotel. One interviewee explained that he assumes responsibility for acquiring new partners, but the execution of the actual cooperation will be done by others. In general, the entrepreneurs in the sample take on initiating roles if they want to set up own events and offerings or if they want to enter into important and

large cooperation. To Sum up, the empirical results endorse the working hypothesis for the category innovativeness.

### 7.1.3 Cooperation Setup (Cooperation Level Perspective)

Finishing the empirical part of the thesis with the cooperation setup of the entrepreneur, the empirical results will present some insights on one cooperation level category: Cooperation partner.

#### *Cooperation Partner*

The interview partners stated multiple reasons, why they entered into cooperation with their current partners. Most often they emphasized that the cooperation must offer an added value. Five out of six entrepreneurs answered that their horizontal partnerships are the most important. The cooperation offers value in the form of improving public perception, international presence, strengthening the strategic positioning, cross-selling activities and extending the offering. Only one entrepreneur stressed that the vertical cooperation in his destination is the most important. In this special case, the cooperation offers value in the form of extending the offering.

The interview partners agree on the fact that their cooperation partners do have to share similar core values and characteristics. The corporate image as well as the culture of the cooperation partner should be in line with the interviewees' values. One entrepreneur elaborated that it is easier to assess the cooperation partners' true intentions if similar characteristics are shared.

Two interviewees point out that they experienced fear in the form of economic concerns. One stated that it was difficult to successfully navigate through the challenging environment by choosing the right partners. The other expressed concerns regarding former management decisions of his most important cooperation partner. In regard to his strategic positioning it is essential that the management of his cooperation partner makes the right decisions. The interviewee is glad that the management has changed and the cooperation is in a good condition again.

Interestingly, the interviewees of the three large hotels in the sample expressed a hotel should not enter into any cooperative relationship which may result in a lump risk. Furthermore, partnerships that make the hotel too dependent should be avoided.

The hypothesis of the category cooperation partner is not supported by the empirical results. Reputation and recognition are surely important determinants on the partner selection, although

it was not stated as the most important factor for entering into a cooperation by the interview partners. However, the hotels in the sample often collaborate with highly similar peers. Similarity and resources of cooperation partners are considered to be extremely important factors. In the category cooperation partner no meaningful difference between the sample selection of rural and city hotels was found.

## 8 Discussion

The empirical findings of the thesis show that the entrepreneur's setup is a highly important factor regarding the establishment of cooperation. While technical, legal and firm level conditions have been widely explored, the personal prerequisites and interpersonal relationships between the entrepreneurs who set up cooperation still need to be fully elucidated. The following discussion is organized by

- a discussion of the entrepreneur's setup categories
- general limitations of the research conducted
- recommendations for further research

In the first part of the discussion, the major findings of the literature review, the working hypotheses elaborated from the review as well as the practical findings will be listed for each category individually. The findings are critically discussed and reviewed with a short summary.

### 8.1 The Entrepreneur's Setup

As noticed in the literature review, most researches wanted to understand, how cooperation added incremental value to the partners involved and tried to measure the performance of a firm or cooperation in an entrepreneurial context. In order to elaborate an overall and neutral impression of the findings, one has to resolve the debates between the authors and synthesize the most important characteristics and components of the entrepreneur's setup.

In the following discussion, only categories which are relevant for the theoretical and empirical part of this thesis are considered.

#### 8.1.1 Operational Setup (Hotel Level Perspective)

##### *Hotel Size*

The findings from the systematic literature review show that there is no common sense about the effect of firm size on cooperation. Several authors argument that cooperation is beneficial for smaller firms while others claim the opposite or point out that there is no relationship.

***Hypothesis 1:*** *The hotel size has no effect on the cooperative behaviour.*

The empirical results support the working hypothesis. No effect on cooperative behaviour regarding the hotel size was found.

The hotel size in the research sample is relatively large (342 available beds on average) compared to the average hotel in the Swiss population (55 available beds on average). Even the smallest hotel in the sample is larger than the average. Furthermore, different results may

occur when other measures of hotel size are used, such as available hotel rooms, number of employees or financial KPIs. Nonetheless, the category can be identified as an important component of the entrepreneur's setup.

### *Innovative Strategy*

Several aspects of a firm's innovative strategy are discussed in the literature about the EC-domain. The firm's strategic positioning, its behaviour, the effect of cooperative strategies on performance as well as new product development are covered. Innovative strategy is a wide-ranging variable and not every aspect from the literature can be analysed in the Swiss hotel industry. For this thesis, the focus lies on how strategy aspects influence cooperative relationships.

***Hypothesis 2:*** *Hotels which use a follower strategy, more often use horizontal cooperative arrangements with competitors than firms that see themselves as pioneers.*

Each hotel in the sample has established horizontal cooperation. Moreover, all hotels see themselves as pioneers in their destination. Therefore, no statement regarding the working hypothesis can be made.

Statements regarding the hotel strategy are very subjective. If taken the national or even international dimension into account, most of the hotels cannot be identified as true pioneers in their strategic positioning. Furthermore, the definition of the category is slightly vague. The hotel concept or the strategic positioning does not stand for the entire range of a general hotel strategy. Moreover, the working hypothesis for the category innovative strategy was synthesized from academic research which mostly concerned the secondary sector (industry, crafts, construction, etc.). However, this can be regarded as a general limitation of the literature review. While the strategic positioning is highly important for the entrepreneur's setup the category innovative strategy might be neglected.

### *Hotel Network and Cooperation Experience*

The literature about the firm network influence on cooperation focuses on network centrality, network position and network capability of a firm. The firm's position in a network is determined by its prior cooperative relationships. Therefore, the aggregation of the two categories from the systematic literature review to one category for the empirical part is reasonable.

***Hypothesis 3:*** *The higher the cooperation experience the more likely a hotel will enter into new cooperative relationships.*

The empirical results support the working hypothesis.

By analysing the cooperation characteristics in *Table 2* and *Table 3*, it can be summarized that the network and the cooperation experience of the sample hotels are very rich and diverse. Despite having diverse cooperation established, no difference between rural and city hotels was found. At first sight, this finding is rather surprising, due to the fact that even FSO and Hotelleriesuisse often distinguish between rural and city hotels in their research. Even though the hotels in the sample differ in their geographic location, they share other similar aspects. For instance, all six hotels are classified as either four- or five-star hotels. Additionally, all hotels are situated in the Swiss German part of Switzerland (one hotel can be considered to be in the Swiss Romansh part of Switzerland). There might be more similarities across the hotels than differences which might explain the fact that no sample differences were found.

Nevertheless, the hotel network and cooperation experience is an essential firm level category of the entrepreneur's setup.

### 8.1.2 Personal Setup (Individual Level Perspective)

#### *Culture*

In the systematic literature review, findings indicate that culture is one of the most essential individual level antecedent for cooperative relationships. Studies in this area primarily focus on Hofstede's cultural model, whereby the variables masculinity vs. femininity, individualism vs. collectivism and uncertainty avoidance vs. risk-taking are considered.

***Hypothesis 4:** Entrepreneurs from risk-taking cultures that have masculine and individualist values, have a lower acceptance of cooperative strategies.*

According to the empirical results, the working hypothesis may not be supported, due to the fact that some findings are contradicting or cannot be interpreted precisely.

As stated in the results, the cultural dimensions of the sample do have the same tendency as the dimensions of the Swiss population. Culture is a highly important category for defining the personal setup. However, this category is very complex and Hofstede's way of measuring culture is just one of many possible methods. The results are rather surprising and the authors are sure that with a comprehensive cultural interview guideline, a relation between the culture of the entrepreneur and his acceptance of cooperative strategies can be found and inconsistencies would be eliminated. The scope of questions in the interview guideline of this thesis might have been too small to gain a genuinely comprehensive picture of the category domain. Moreover, the measured culture dimensions only account for the Swiss German part, therefore a difference to the Swiss population might be explained.

### *Human Capital*

Human Capital is seen as a positive predictor of cooperative relationships in the literature. However, most of the authors who elaborated this effect focused on the human capital of a firm's top management team. For the empirical part, top management team level characteristics are expected to be found on an individual level of the entrepreneur.

***Hypothesis 5:** Well-educated entrepreneurs with high-level previous jobs are more likely to form cooperative relationships.*

The empirical results support the working hypothesis of the category. If regarding the entire population of entrepreneurs in the Swiss hotel industry, there will be differences found in this category, due to two facts. First, not all entrepreneurs are highly educated and second not all well-educated entrepreneurs have established cooperative relationships.

### *Social Network*

The majority of authors who focus on effects of individual level aspects on cooperation, examined the social network of the entrepreneur. The importance of the informal network is not queried. Nevertheless, other areas in this research direction are covered, such as the networking activities, social skills or the influence of social network on internationalization. However, due to the fact that this thesis focuses on the establishment of cooperative relationships by entrepreneurs, the importance of informal ties in the hotel industry are examined in the empirical part.

***Hypothesis 6:** Cooperative relationships are established through informal ties of the entrepreneur.*

The working hypothesis is supported by the empirical findings, although the cooperative relationships are not exclusively established through the social network. In general, the category is essential to define the personal setup and the findings of the empirical part are fairly straightforward.

### *Innovativeness*

Innovativeness on an individual level is not deeply analysed in the literature. This category is primarily based on one essential study about individual level antecedents for the establishment of cooperation. Nevertheless, the importance of individual level innovativeness should not be neglected and is therefore covered in the empirical part of this thesis.

***Hypothesis 7:** Entrepreneurs who initiate cooperative relationships can be seen as innovative persons.*

The empirical results endorse the working hypothesis for the category innovativeness. As for the innovative strategy category on a firm level, similar criticism can be expressed for innovativeness on individual level. Statements regarding this category are very subjective and the concept of innovativeness might be too comprehensive to fully cover with only one question. Entering into cooperative relationships is only one aspect of being an innovative entrepreneur, nonetheless almost all entrepreneurs have initiated their main cooperation by themselves and are considered as innovative in this thesis.

### 8.1.3 Cooperation Setup (Cooperation Level Perspective)

#### *Cooperation Partner*

Research in this area mostly focused on complementarity, reputation, status and relational embeddedness. These factors are determined by the prior behaviour of a firm and influences the selection of the cooperation partner.

Overall, this selection process is important for the establishment of cooperative relationships and therefore examined in the Swiss hotel industry.

*Hypothesis 8: Reputation and complementary resources are the most important factors for the selection of the cooperation partner.*

The working hypothesis of the category cooperation partner is not supported by the empirical findings. Reputation and recognition were not explicitly stated as most important factors and the interview partners tend to prefer similarity over complementarity in partner choice. It is still unclear which organizational attributes are most important for partner selection.

Once again it is interesting that no meaningful difference between the sample selection was found. More differences are discovered, when comparing the size of the hotels in the sample.

## **8.2 General Limitations**

Contrary to the authors expectations, no meaningful differences between rural and city hotels were found. The expression of the different setup categories in the sample were very similar and might be explained due to three different causes. First, the Swiss hotel industry and its environment is very similar. The articles in the systematic literature review often investigated the EC-domain in the secondary sector. Therefore, the synthesis of the secondary literature does not necessarily account for the hotel industry as well. Even if scholars further examine the EC-domain in the tertiary sector, the conditions for the hotel industry and its environment are extremely unique and can hardly be compared to another industry situated in the service sector (e.g. banking industry). Moreover, the sample size of the empirical research was rather

small. Finding substantial differences by investigating six different hotels might be pure coincidence. However, the results of the thesis have to be seen as exploratory, while bringing new issues and possible relations to the fore. Eventually, the authors conducted an online research in order to find appropriate interview candidates. All of the selected entrepreneurs have prominently displayed some of their successfully established cooperation. Thus, only successful cooperative relationships were integrated into the thesis, which ensures substantial content, while also bearing the risk of getting one-sided insights into the hotel industry.

### **8.3 Recommendation for Further Research**

Since the beginning of EC-research, management science has made big steps in understanding this research field. Researcher in the field of EC still need to know more about the effect of individuals on cooperation, the human element within the cooperation process is eventually what sustains competitive advantage for a firm. Nowadays, the organizational success comes from a firm's intangibles and it is knowledge and abilities of individuals that form the platform for cooperation. In case of the hotel industry, it would be important to know, how a hotel director's job has to be designed or defined to improve the cooperation process. Furthermore, it would be interesting to know, when it is suitable for a hotel to promote cooperation activities. Research should focus on creating more concepts, which define, when a hotel needs to invest its resources into cooperation activities and how it should be done.

Based on the abovementioned limitations, the entrepreneur's setup can be fully explored, if further primary research in the field of EC will be conducted in the Swiss hotel industry.

While the operational setup is vastly investigated in the literature, the cooperation setup, specifically the partner selection process would be an important area for further academic research. Generally, research on individual and cooperation level is scarce in the field of hotel and tourism research. In particular, personal conditions for establishing cooperation are highly important in practice and have to be studied extensively.

## 9 Conclusion

In a first step, the three domains entrepreneurship, cooperation and the Swiss hotel industry were analysed and defined in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. In addition to the three domains, the underlying theoretical perspectives were examined and built the fundament of the thesis. The theory consists of an economic perspective with TAC, RBV and IOL, as well as a social perspective which mainly consists of the embeddedness theory.

In order to genuinely understand the setup of an entrepreneur, the thesis combined entrepreneurship and cooperation literature and analyses the intersection between the two dimensions in a systematic literature review. The third domain, the Swiss hotel industry was included in the empirical part of the thesis to explore the intersection of the three domains.

The systematic literature elaborated ten different setup categories. According to the EC-domain, these setup categories represent the most essential characteristics and components of the cooperative entrepreneur.

In order to comprehensively highlight the setup from all directions, the operational setup on a firm level perspective, the personal setup on an individual perspective, the environmental setup and the cooperation setup on a cooperation level were analysed. 102 papers with an A or B rating were included in the scope of the literature review. The analysed papers led to a categorisation of the findings which characterize the cooperative entrepreneur:

### *Operational setup (firm level perspective)*

- Firm size
- Innovative strategy
- Firm network
- Cooperation experience

### *Personal setup (individual level perspective)*

- Culture
- Human capital
- Social network
- Innovativeness

### *Environmental setup*

*Cooperation setup*

- Cooperation governance
- Cooperation partner

The synthesis of the relevant literature formed the theoretical foundation for the establishment of several working hypotheses for the empirical part of the thesis. In this part, the third domain, namely the Swiss hotel industry was introduced. Due to an existing research gap in the intersection of the three domains entrepreneurship, cooperation and the Swiss hotel industry, an empirical method of qualitative-explorative interviews was chosen. The thesis aims to identify the elaborated entrepreneur's setup in the Swiss hotel industry. In addition to this, differences between hotel entrepreneurs in rural regions of Switzerland were compared to hotel entrepreneurs in Swiss cities.

The sample consists of three hotels in Swiss cities and three hotels in rural and mountain regions in Switzerland. Therefore, six interviews were conducted in total. Entrepreneurs in the Swiss hotel industry were asked about their experience and knowledge in the establishment of cooperative relationships. These semi-structured interviews were directed by pre-defined interview guidelines.

The qualitative interviews gave insights on their behaviour and provided a look behind the surface. The results from the empirical part support five out of eight working hypotheses. However, no major findings regarding regional differences were found.

The value of thesis lies in its exploratory nature. The creation of the intersection between entrepreneurship and cooperation research and the Swiss hotel industry offered some new and relevant insights, namely the entrepreneur's setup within cooperation in the Swiss hotel industry.

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