

Workshop on Business History in Central and Eastern Europe (WBHCEE)

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, October 27–28, 2023

Business Cooperation in the History of Central and Eastern Europe

Business cooperation has been a vital component of economic development throughout history. From ancient merchants forming trade networks to modern multinational corporations, cooperation has allowed for sharing of resources and expertise to mobilize assets to achieve business goals. Business historians accumulated many examples of how cooperative business ventures have facilitated the exchange of goods, the expansion of markets, and the creation of new industries. By working together, businesses can pool their resources and knowledge, overcome obstacles, and increase their chances of success.

Cooperation has been a key factor in driving business innovation and growth. From joint ventures and strategic alliances to mergers and acquisitions, businesses have utilized a variety of cooperative arrangements to achieve their goals. In the Middle Ages, guilds provided a framework for skilled artisans to collaborate and mobilize resources, and protect their social interests. During the industrial revolution, corporations emerged as a means for investors to pool capital and resources to finance ambitious projects. Firms also cooperate with the aim of controlling markets and limiting exposure to competition, including trade associations that helped introduce technical standards and shared understandings within an industry or national and international cartels that emerged in the late 19th century and have been legal in many countries until the late 20th century.

Many forms of business cooperation, such as cartels (Schröter 1996; Fear 2008; Feldmann & Shenahan 2015), business groups and networks (Fruin 2008; Buchnea 2015; Barbero & Puig 2016; Buchnea et al. 2020), are fairly explored by business historians. Other forms, especially informal networks, are studied to a lesser extent. Over the last hundred years, scholars offered several robust theories, such as game theory and stakeholder theory, helping to develop a more nuanced understanding of business cooperation (Mitchell et al. 1997; Peña et al. 2002; Shapiro 2005). As a result, a suspicious attitude of experts towards business cooperation (focusing on collusion violating public goods) has been added by the discussion about the conditions which result in advantages of business cooperation for a variety of stakeholders (Schwab 2021). Most of the case studies in the history

of business cooperation are still from Western Europe and North America. Other parts of the world remain relatively marginalized in the literature (Feldmann & Shenahan 2015; Barbero & Puig 2016).

This workshop focuses on one of such underrepresented regions, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Central and Eastern European firms and entrepreneurs have been exposed to particular business challenges because large firms often had their origins or financiers often in the Western business world. Domestic business caught up, but development has repeatedly been set back due to wars and regime changes; on a regional or industry level there are, however, many pathways.

This workshop will explore the relations between market actors in the context of cooperation/competition in order to understand how respective approaches shaped their operational and strategic decisions in changing political and institutional environments. The workshop participants will discuss the variety of cooperation within the region and between the business actors from CEE with their foreign counterparts.

The call is open to all topics that fit the general scope of the workshop. However, we suggest some themes that are of particular interest. Papers may address one or more of the following questions:

- **Forms and aims of cooperation between companies.** Employers' associations, trade associations, chambers, and other spaces for entrepreneurial cooperation; business groups and networks; interlocking directorates; national and international cartels; formal and informal cooperation; cooperation between banks and industrial companies.
- **Types of cooperation.** Financial, technological, production, anti-labor, political, etc.
- **Path dependence and cooperation.** The impact of previous interactions and experiences on behavior and decision-making; stability of social networks after political regime changes.
- **Business cooperation in the cultural and political context.** The impact of cultural differences on (inter)national business; the role of family and kinship; communicating across cultures; persuading partners from different cultures; collaboration between state and firms; cooperation with partners from different political systems; disagreeing productively.

The Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, in cooperation with the European Business History Association, invites scholars and Ph.D. students of any relevant discipline to submit paper proposals on a broad range of topics related to the studies of business cooperation in the history of Central-Eastern Europe. To apply, please, send an abstract of 600 words presenting the subject, the conceptual framework, the sources, the analytical approach, and the contribution, along with a two-paragraph CV to Ágnes Pogány at pogany.agnes@btk.elte.hu. **Deadline: April 14, 2023.**

Papers for presentation will be selected following a peer-review procedure. The format of the workshop is designed to facilitate a comprehensive discussion of selected topics. Participants will be invited to send an extended abstract (up to

1,500 words) or a paper (not exceeding 6,000 words). We will distribute these texts among the workshop participants prior to the workshop.

Please feel free to contact the organizers if you have any further questions.

Organizers: Ágnes Pogány and Judit Klement (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest)

Co-organizers: Volodymyr Kulikov (The Ukrainian Catholic University), Tomasz Olejniczak (Kozminski University, Warsaw), Alfred Reckendrees (Copenhagen Business School)

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