

Critical role of cluster organisations to overcome SMEs' liabilities of size, resources, newness, and foreignness in their internationalisation

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study is to find out how clusters can assist small- and medium enterprises (SME) s to expand their business to the international market. A qualitative approach was used in this study where the primary data was collected from five cluster organizations in the region of Gävleborg in Sweden with ten semi structured interviews with key personals in the five cluster organizations. The analysis was done with the help of concepts identified in the literature as well as new themes that was found in the empirical investigation. The findings in this study have shown that the clusters can provide support to the SMEs to overcome obstacles related to capital, learning, innovation, networking, sales and strategy. The clusters can also help the SMEs in terms of sustainability. The weakest link is to help the SMEs to gain social capital where the clusters abilities are low. Each cluster has their niche competence so a collaboration within the clusters is required to help the SMEs in their international journey. The study extends the knowledge around the support system known as clustering as the study shows that only one cluster may not be able to help the SMEs in all the given areas required for their internationalization but a collaboration between clusters can help the SMEs to overcome most of the barriers towards internationalization. Future studies can focus on longitudinal research in this area to be able to follow the journey of the SMEs between the clusters but also to be able to capture and compare if the SMEs and cluster are experiencing the same pros and cons of the support system. We also suggest replicating this study in another region of Sweden to see if the results can be generalized or if it is a very local context regarding the help the SMEs can receive for internationalization.*

Keywords: *Cluster, Support system, Small- and medium sized organizations, SME, Internationalization.*