

SPONSORSHIP IN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

The Finnish Comics Society

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| Abstract <p>The Finnish comic scene has gained recognition both in its homeland and abroad, and should therefore be considered as a valuable part of the culture export. The growing industry has also an increasing amount of productions organized each year.</p> <p>The aim of the thesis was to form a general view of the Finnish Comics Society's current situation regarding the sponsorship co-operations, and find the ways to make them more effective and profitable for the association.</p> <p>The theoretical background was formed by using the existing literature of the subject. The main focus points were on the consumer relationships, marketing and corporate co-operations. The research itself was implemented by interviewing three persons playing an important role in the sponsorship relations of the Finnish Comics Society. The collected material was then utilised as a primary data. The information was analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method by dividing the answers into three different categories.</p> <p>The results indicated that the Finnish Comics Society could develop its sponsorship co-operations to be more efficient by having sustainable agreements that have more reciprocity. The informants also pointed out the importance of preparation and throughout planning.</p> | | |
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| Tiivistelmä <p>Suomalainen sarjakuva on niittänyt mainetta sekä kotimaassaan että ulkomailla, ja onkin siksi tärkeä osa kulttuurivientiä. Lisäksi kasvava sarjakuva-ala tuottaa vuosittain ohjelmaa yhä enenevässä määrin.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli muodostaa kokonaiskuva Suomen sarjakuvaseura ry:n, ja erityisesti sen ylläpitämien Sarjakuvakeskuksen ja Helsingin Sarjakuvafestivaalin tilanteesta sponsoroinnin ja yritysyhteistöiden osalta, ja etsiä mahdollisuuksia saada kyseiset osa-alueet palvelemaan tarkoitustaan paremmin.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön teoriapohja perustettiin eri alojen kirjallisten lähteiden analysointiin, keskittyen varsinkin kuluttajasuhteisiin, markkinointiin ja sponsoriyhteistyöhön. Kirjallisuusanalyysin jälkeen tutkija haastatteli Suomen sarjakuvaseura ry:n sponsoriyhteistöiden kannalta avainasemassa olevia henkilöitä. Haastattelut toimivat opinnäytetyön ensisijaisena tutkimusaineistona. Niiden tuloksia analysoitiin jakamalla vastaukset neljään eri kategoriaan, tiivistäen haastattelujen olennaisin sisältö.</p> <p>Saatujen tulosten perusteella Suomen Sarjakuvaseuran sponsoriyhteistyötä voitaisiin kehittää parhaiten luomalla pitkäkestoisempia ja vuorovaikutukseltaan monipuolisempia yhteistyökumppanuuksia. Haastateltavien mukaan myös sponsoroinnin suunnittelua tulisi tehostaa.</p> | | |
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1 Introduction

In the past years, comics have improved their position as a form of art and media. For decades, comics have had a reputation of a childish hobby suitable for boys and jocular grown up men to carry out their super hero fantasies. Slowly they have been freed from its mores, giving them space to raise their status as a valuable form of culture that suits for every generation and gender. Nowadays it is not rare that comics are used as a tool to editorialise social issues, or present the world even in a mordant way. Comics industry has become a serious business.

The Finnish comic scene has gained recognition both in its homeland and abroad and many Finnish comic artists and other comic professionals have an international career. Finnish comic should therefore be thought as a valuable culture export product.

The author of the thesis worked as an events production intern in Comics Center during the autumn 2013. The assignments included helping with the production of the different projects, such as a residency program seminar that was held just before Helsinki Comics Festival. The idea for the thesis came from the authors own working experiences and discussions with other people working in the Finnish Comics Society. The purpose of the research is to investigate the current sponsoring situation of the Finnish Comics Society and if there is room for improvement. The most important focus points are the already existing sponsorship co-operations and their relationship with the acknowledged needs of the association.

The relevant terminology and the basic concepts are introduced with the theoretical background that is formed with a literature review. This is followed by the methodology of the research. The results of the gathered data, as well as the discussion of the subject, are presented in the end of the thesis.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Sponsoring

Sponsoring is a co-operation through marketing communication that happens between two or more parties, each of them having their own interests and needs. (Muhonen & Heikkinen, 2003) In the ideal situation both parties of the co-operation benefit equally from this relationship, even though not necessarily the same ways. As Moler (2000) puts it: “gone are the days when not-for-profits could expect donations or goods simply because they have a great cause or are in need”.

Sponsoring can give both material and immaterial benefits to the partners of the co-operation. The most traditional of these benefits is money and other material that can be utilised directly to cover the costs of the product or service. However, sometimes the immaterial goods, such as accessibility to target group, can be even more valuable to the party. Taking an advantage to each other's brands might make ones product or service more appealing to completely new audiences, which then affects the overall visibility of that certain party. According to a research of the Association of Finnish Advertisers by Hanski-Pitkääkoski (2013), the target of the sponsoring was often selected because of its values and objectives that supported the values and objectives of the company.

As the technology advances, the sponsorship co-operations evolve as well. When some time ago sponsoring a big event provided sponsors only a visible market place in the venue to boost their sales amongst the local audience, nowadays it is almost a requirement to have something new and innovative to catch audience's attention and to get the consumer engaged to the offered product. As in every section of marketing, the challenge is to find these new

ways to stand out. To succeed, one has to be aware not only of the current trends of the marketing but also the strategies of its competitors.

Sponsoring as a Fundraising Method

If the quality of the production requires higher budget than the company can afford by itself, alternative funding methods need to be taken under consideration. Sponsorship co-operation can be very effective way to raise funds for any kind of business with a smaller equity.

However, sponsoring is far from charity and the sponsor has to gain something from the relationship as well. As Vuokko (2010) says, it sets obligations to both parties. When thinking about possible sponsorship deals, one has to also keep in mind the so-called “in-kind gifts”, which are according to Moler (2000) “as important as cash gifts”. These are the products and services that the sponsor is providing to the target of the sponsoring, for example aid in marketing, printed materials, or equipment such as tents and computers. The sponsored party should think how these goods could be utilised to provide the visibility promised for the sponsor. For example universities can have auditoriums named by the corporation that sponsored the building costs. Of course these kinds of sponsorship deals can also be based on committed reciprocity in terms of marketing but one should think if it really benefits the sponsored party rather than creates extra work.

If the sponsored party has a small budget for its overall activities and amount of the employees is rather small as well, it might not have the resources to upkeep larger scale sponsorship co-operations. This also shows in a research Pekka Oesch (2002) made about 17% of the 194 cultural field operators that answered the questionnaire did not have sponsorship co-operations. Most of them were small cultural operators, and 63% of them were located in Helsinki metropolitan area. The other factor they stated to be the reason for not having

a sponsorship co-operation was the difficulty of finding a company whose business field would be linked to cultural production.

Sponsoring and Branding

Sponsored event can be a very effective way to reach the target audience. (Muhonen & Heikkinen, 2003) This makes sponsorship deals one of the most important marketing tools when it comes to branding.

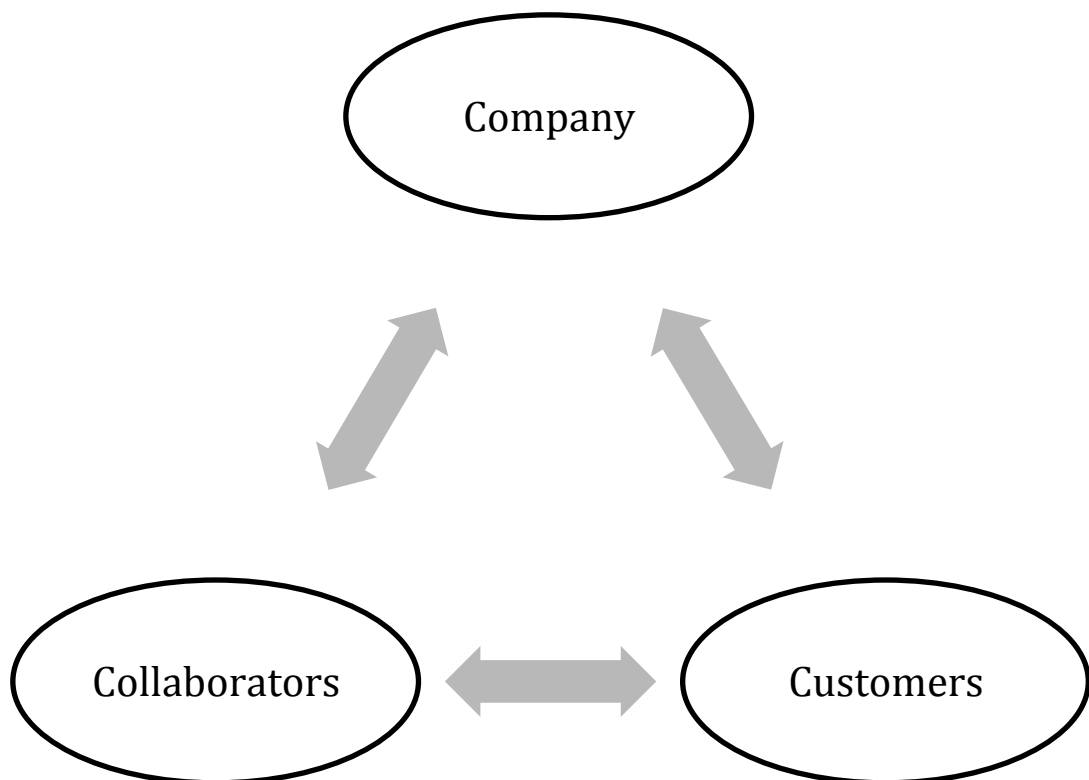


Figure 1 Triangle of branding (Kotler & Waldemar, 2006)

As Figure 1 Triangle of branding illustrates, the brand is a combination of the relationships between the company, its co-operators and customers. (Kotler & Waldemar, 2006) Therefore, one of the ways to use this marketing tool is to benefit from the other party's image amongst the customers and other consumers. In other words, sponsors often want to take the advantage of the good reputation of the sponsored party to strengthen their brand image. One

example of this kind of co-operations is the sponsorship deals in sports. The athlete or sports group is provided money and the company sponsoring them gets a status that can be utilised in marketing purposes. This also works in a bigger scale: The Coca-Cola Company has been sponsoring Olympic movement for a remarkably long time, since 1928. (The Coca-Cola Company)

The co-operation with these two parties holds certain kind of contradictions but not enough to stop the sponsoring. Coca Cola Company has been widely criticized by its unhealthy products that cause obesity, whereas Olympics represent healthy lifestyle. The Coca-Cola Company responses for this critique in a FAQ section dedicated just to answer the question why these two have a sponsorship co-operation in a first place. The company states that 73% of the beverages they sold during the Olympics “were water, juice or smoothies or low- or no-calorie options.” (The Coca-Cola Company)

2.2 Cultural Productions and Sponsoring

Sponsoring cultural productions in Finland started in the 1980's. (Oesch, 2002) Since then, there has been great development in the area. When few decades ago it was enough for a sponsor to have some advertisement space, nowadays it is really important to stand out. Because advertisements and product placements are so common, everyone has to think about something fresh and new to catch the consumers' attention.

The development in these co-operations has come to a point where the sponsored parties are creating whole new product or service sections for the sponsor purposes only. Rather than being just a logo on the wall, the sponsors are now becoming a part of the actual concept. This can mean anything from a tent named after one co-operation partner to a section of a programme that somehow benefits and markets the sponsor as well. For the past few years, co-operations like these have been especially popular in

music events such as large festivals during the summer. The largest music festival in Northern Europe, Roskilde, signed a five-year contract with Tuborg in 2012. Tuborg is now the main co-operation partner of the festival. The beer has also been sponsoring the Eastern European GreenFest from the year 2005. (Carlsberg Group, 2013) Another example of this kind of co-operation is the beverage company Heineken, which has been highly visible in many European music festivals, Finnish music and arts festival Flow Festival being one of these events.

Heineken Open Source Stage, also called Heineken OSS, has been one of the stages in Flow Festival since 2011. (Hartwall, 2013) The concept of the co-operation is very straightforward but stands out because of its interactivity the consumers. The customers of the festival can suggest and vote their favourite artists to perform on the festival. As the consumers get the feeling of actually being involved and taken under a consideration with the programme planning, the artist benefits with the publicity it gets. When the people who suggested the artist share their own favourites in the social media sites, such as Facebook, the festival and Heineken gain more visibility.

Of course this kind of co-operation requires a well functioning communication between the parties. Vuokko (2010) describes this relationship: "It is not enough that one acts as the other party, one has to also realise the motives and needs of another party." If the sponsor has no interest in the area the sponsored party is operating in, the communication and setting common goals is probably much harder than in the situations where the sponsor and the sponsored party share common values and interests.

Nonprofit Organisations and Sponsoring

Nonprofit organisation is often mistaken to be an operator that does not have anything to do with business, and whose funding comes entirely in forms of different subsidys. But even though the government might support many of

these organisations, it often is not even nearly enough to secure the continuity. Therefore it is important to find extra funding.

One way to gain more funds is to apply for grants from other parties, such as different international institutes. This does, however, take a lot of time and there is only a limited amount of suitable grants to apply. The competition of these grants is also tough, especially in the field of the cultural productions. Another disadvantage of these grants is the fact that besides the money, they do not offer any extra value for the organisation. This is why nonprofit organisations can, and often will have own business, for example by selling merchandises. (Vuokko, 2010) For some organisations selling goods does not provide enough funding, or is otherwise unsuitable model to do business. Therefore sponsorship co-operations often play a massive role in the nonprofit organisations operations.

Companies' willingness to build their brand benefits nonprofit organisations. In the previous years, many of the Finnish companies expressed their interest towards sponsoring social operators working in fields such as arts and crafts. According to Hanski-Pitkääkoski's research (2011), 39 per cent of the companies participating in the survey were interested in sponsoring in fields that were not directly involved with business activity. This helps the competition caused by the increasing numbers of the nonprofit organisations.

To gain sponsors more efficiently, the nonprofit company should focus on its own brand building. Kotler and Waldemar (2006) state that company's real value resides more in its intangible marketing assets: brands, market knowledge, customer relationships, distribution coverage, intellectual property, and partner relationships, as in its balance sheet. The key is to make oneself appealing for businesses.

2.3 The Finnish Comics Society

The Finnish Comics Society is a nonprofit organisation founded in 1971. The society works to promote comic and acts as a connecting association for the comic collectors, readers and the people working in the comic industry such as artists, critics and translators. The aim is to increase the veneration of comics as a cultural form. Apart from acting as a binding force in the Finnish comics industry, the association also publishes books not only in Finland but also around the world. The Finnish Comics Society is the mother association of Helsinki Comics Festival and Comics Center.

One of the main missions of the association is to inform the consumers about the industry related events. The Finnish Comics Society has many channels to fulfil this aim. One of these channels is “Comics Information Center”, Sarjakuvan tiedotuskeskus in Finnish. The Finnish Comics Society, the interest group of comic professionals Sarjakuvantekijät ry and few comic communities founded it in 2009 to unite the operators in the field of Finnish comics industry and strengthen the reputation of Finnish comics. (Sarjakuvan tiedotuskeskus ry, 2012) Since 2009, the association has produced few projects to reach this vision. One of them was the Finnish comics 100th year of celebration in 2011. The purpose of the project was to conserve the cultural inheritance of Finnish comics.

The Finnish Comics Society also publishes journal Sarjainfo, the only journal related to the comics industry in Finland. The first issue was published in 1972, and since then the magazine has been issued four times a year. Each issue converses broadly on industry related happenings, phenomena and new publications. (Suomen Sarjakuvaseura ry, The Finnish Comics Society)

Each year one commendable Finnish comics artist is awarded with Puupäähattu prize. The prize from the Finnish Comics Society was first

awarded in 1972. The origin of the award is in Finnish comic: it is an honour for Olaf Fogelberg's character Pekka Puupää, one of the most classic characters in the history of the Finnish comics. The award has got a lot of recognition both in Finland and abroad. (Suomen Sarjakuvaseura ry, The Finnish Comics Society)

Besides the multicultural quests taking part of Helsinki Comics Festival, the Finnish Comics Society is also involved in many international projects. Comics Union of Northern Europe, also known as CUNE, organises international meetings to develop and further advance comic in European culture. Its residency program CUNE Comics-in-residence offers European comics artists and other comic professionals an opportunity to widen the occupational expertise and time to focus their new projects in the new inspiring environment. The residence in Finland is located in Suomenlinna, Helsinki. (Comics Union of Northern Europe)

Helsinki Comics Festival

Helsinki Comics Festival is the biggest comic industry related festival in the Northern Countries. (Suomen Sarjakuvaseura ry, The Finnish Comics Society) As the name tells, the festival is located in Helsinki. The venue has changed many times in the events history but in the past few years the main festival area has been at the Lasipalatsi Square, which is build to be weather proof with tents. The smaller festival exhibitions were then placed in the smaller venues, such as galleries and art centres, all around the city.

The festival is organised for its 29th time in 2014. It lasts from the 5th of September to the 7th of September and is expected to attract even more consumers than before. The amount of the visitors in the year 2013 broke all the previous records as well. During the festival weekend there were a total of 28 000 visitors in all the festival venues. This was around 8 000 visitors more

than in the year 2012. (Helsingin Sarjakuvafestivaalit / Helsinki Comics Festival)

Every year the festival has two themes to bind the festival program together. In 2013, these themes were North America and children's comics. The international guests list consisted of artists such as Patrick McDonnell, David B., Ulli Lust and Fabio Civitelli. For the year 2014, the themes are Germany and gender and sexual diversity. The guests of honour are yet to be announced. (Helsingin Sarjakuvafestivaalit / Helsinki Comics Festival)

The festival programme consists of panel discussions, interviews with people working in the comic industry, gallery exhibitions, workshops and performances. The main tent in the Lasipalatsi Square is focused on selling books and it holds the festival's main stage. For the individual publishers and other smaller press, the so-called "Small press heaven" area rents space for selling smaller publications and other merchandise. In the year 2014, this small press market is implemented with several smaller tents that hold six or seven tables each. (Helsingin Sarjakuvafestivaalit / Helsinki Comics Festival) In the previous years, the small press market has been in one or two larger tents placed next to the main tent.

The annually selected festival artist designs the festival's visual image. In the year 2013 the artist was Katja Tukiainen, Puupäähattu prize winning Finnish comic artist. The festival artist for the year 2014 is Joonas Rinta-Kanto. (Helsingin Sarjakuvafestivaalit / Helsinki Comics Festival)

Comics Center

Helsinki Comics Center was founded in May 2008. At first it was located in Kallio but during the summer 2010 Comics Center was relocated to a bigger property in Arabia district, Hämeentie 150.

Comics Center organises comic education both in its own classrooms as leisure time activity and as pre-booked courses. Parties that book the courses are most commonly kindergartens and schools, retirement homes and other health care related institutions. Comics Center also acts as a link between the comic teachers and parties interested in the course activity. (Sarjakuvakeskus, Comics Center)

The center has its own art gallery for exhibitions. The gallery is mainly used to promote the artists working in a co-operation with Comics Center or the Finnish Comics Society. The gallery space is often expanded to the “window gallery” that is next to the main entrance of Comics Center. The gallery, as well as the classrooms and other working areas of Comics Center, can also be rented for different events and exhibitions from professional meetings to birthday parties.

Besides the classrooms and the art gallery, Comics Center runs a bookstore and a small café that provides non-alcoholic beverages and small snacks. The Comics Center, as well as its bookstore and café are open five days a week. (Sarjakuvakeskus, Comics Center)

3 Method

3.1 Research Problem and Questions

The Finnish Comics Society operates mainly with the funds it gets from the different grants. This limits the budget and forces to focus on the necessities more than to the other brand advancing segments such as marketing. The situation also applies to all the sub operators under the Finnish Comics Society, especially to Helsinki Comics Festival and Comics Center.

Because the purpose of this research is to find out how the sponsorship co-operations of the Finnish Comics Society should be developed, one should take a look at the previous and already existing sponsorship co-operations, as well as the association's current needs in that area. This can be done via examining the following questions:

1. What have been the largest stumbling blocks in the previous sponsorship co-operations of the Finnish Comics Society?
2. Which operational segments need the most support from the sponsorship co-operations, and how is this need manifested?
3. What should be taken under a consideration when planning new sponsorship co-operations?

3.2 Overview of the Research Method and its Reliability

After the research question was specified, the author started to go through the possible methods to gather the data and implement the research. Because the aim was to understand a certain phenomenon rather than just prove a certain

theory, the qualitative research method was found to be the most appropriate.

The primary data collection method was a semi-structured interview.

Therefore the themes of the questions were pre-set but the order and the wording of the questions were left undefined, as well as the overall time spent to the interview. Both the interviewer and the interviewee could ask any additional or corrective questions to achieve in-depth answers. (Mason, 2002)
The attention between different topics varied as well.

The author selected three persons involved in the sponsorship co-operations in The Finnish Comics Society and interviewed them. The interviews were originally agreed to execute in the face-to-face situations. However, because of the unexpected sick leaves and other issues that affected the time management, one of the interviews was implemented via e-mail.

The questions were open-ended and covered subjects from the past and current state of the sponsoring to the ideas for the future development. The answers were then used as a primary data and analysed by comparing them to the other answers of the same person, as well as the answers of the other interviewees. The findings were also compared to the material gained from the literature review. Finding the differences between the gathered information helped then to find the unitive parts. (Mäkelä, 1990)

Even though the research method was chosen based on the research questions and the aim of the research, and therefore was estimated to be the most suitable one to fulfil this research, the author recognized points that could affect on the trustworthiness of the research. The credibility of qualitative data analysis is often based on the rigor of the actual strategies used for collecting, coding, analyzing, and presenting data when generating theory. (Hair; Bush; & Ortinau) This applies the research in question as well.

One of the factors affecting to the reliability of the research is the interaction

between the interviewer and the informant. The unintentional nonverbal communication of the interviewer, as well as different tones of voice might have a leading impact towards the informant. Having all the interviews done via e-mail could have prevented this but on the other hand the total absence of the nonverbal communications could be counted as an issue of reliability as well.

Also the possible previous conversations the interviewees had with each other concerning the research could have affected the answers, and therefore the reliability of the research. Even though the interview questions were not given to the informants before the actual interview, discussions with other informants might have added social pressure to answers so they support the answers of the other interviewees, even if they would actually conflict with person's own opinions and experiences. (Mason, 2002)

3.3 Informants

The informants were chosen based on the author's own experiences and the informants roles in the Finnish Comics Society. All of the informants have experience of both Helsinki Comics Festival and Comics Center from many years, and even though their tasks differed from each other, they have been working closely together in the Finnish Comics Society and its projects.

Karri Lehtonen is Comics Center's youth leader in charge, taking care of the projects related on the youth work and education. He also works as a technical coordinator in Helsinki Comics Festival, year 2014 being his 3rd year in this position. Apart from the technical side, his tasks include program coordination and getting sponsorship co-operations to cover the costs.

Maura Manninen is the international coordinator working in the Finnish Comics Society. She is working with the international program in Helsinki

Comics Festival and is the person in charge of the international guests. In Comics Center, Maura works with different international projects, Comics-in-Residence being one of them. Getting the funding for these international projects is partly her responsibility as well.

Kalle Hakkola is the executive director of the Finnish Comics Society and therefore in charge of the operation strategies of Comics Center and Helsinki Comics Festival. His main area of responsibility is managing the overall budget.

3.4 Contents of Interviews

In the beginning of the each interview, the informants introduced themselves. They were also asked to explain their main tasks and duties in the Finnish Comics Society.

The second set of questions was about the current situation of the sponsorship co-operations and the development in that area in the past three years. Informants were also asked if they think the changes have been for better or for worse, and what has caused these changes. The aim of these questions was to discover the previous development the Finnish Comics Society has had in their sponsorship co-operations.

The third section was about the areas of sponsorship co-operation that had most issues to deal with. The questions' common purpose was to find the points that need attention the most, and are therefore the primary targets to aim the focus at. The informants were also asked if they had come up with the ideas that could solve or otherwise help these situations of the sponsorship co-operation.

The last section of the questions focused on the things that needed to be taken under a consideration when looking for new potential partners for sponsorship co-operations. The aim of this section was to gather the interviewees' proposals and ideas for the future development.

3.5 Interview Procedure

As stated earlier, two of the interviews were implemented in face-to-face situations, and one of them via e-mail. The face-to-face interviews were recorded. This way the author did not need to have any breaks for writing the notes during the interviewing situation. The recordings prevented the information loss as well.

Each of the interviewees had a brief explanation about the topic of the thesis and the interview. This was done so that the informants were able to prepare themselves for the actual interview situation if they saw it necessary. Although the interviewees were informed about the subject of the thesis and therefore also the aim of the research, the interview questions were not provided in advance.

The two face-to-face interviews took place in Comics Center. The location was chosen because it was easily reachable for both parties. The interviews were performed in Finnish, in order to guarantee the interviewees as casual and relaxed interview situation as possible. The translated versions of the interviews can be found as appendixes.

3.6 Analysis of Data

After the interviews were over, the author of the research analyzed the data using the qualitative content analysis method (QCA). This means that the collected data was systematically summarized so that the essentials of it are

easier to be interpreted. (Schreier, 2012) After that the interview materials were divided into different categories and compared to each other. The aim was to find the similarities and differences between the answers.

The collected materials were also compared to the literature to see if the theoretical background supports the findings. The data's division by the subject helped with this part of the process as well, as it ensured the objective approach towards the subject.

All the data was divided into a four different categories: 1. The current state of the sponsorship, 2. Long term planning, 3. New sponsorship co-operations and 4. Future Development. The division of the data was made based on the core ideas of the data's essential content that were found in the QCA phase. The same division was also used in presenting the results of the research to guarantee the continuity of the thesis.

4 Results

The Current State of the Sponsorship Co-operations

Most of the sponsorship co-operations of the Finnish Comics Society are based on in-kind gifts and public relations. According to Kalle Hakkola *'getting sponsors from necessity basis has so far proven to be an easiest form of sponsorship co-operations.'*

In the year 2013 Helsinki Comics Festival had a sponsorship deal with Gigantti. The electronic store provided the festival with big screens, which were utilised for visualisation- and informing purposes during the festival. DLX Deluxe Music sponsored the PA systems for the festival. Karri Lehtonen stated:

Helsinki Comics Festival has improved its sponsorship co-operations quite a fair amount in the past 3 years. The technical costs, such as PA systems, of the last years festivals were entirely covered with the sponsors. Overall there are quite a many different sponsorship co-operations going on with Helsinki Comics Festival.

Maura Manninen agreed with him stating that *'the actual sponsoring is more emphasized in the equipment side of the production.'*

Comics Center has an ongoing co-operation with the art supplier Tempera and the marker manufacturer Molotow. Both of the companies supply Comics Center with different art equipment that is then utilised in education. According to Maura Manninen the *'equipment providing sponsors are valuable to Comics Center.'* She also thinks there could be more of this kinds of co-operations. Karri Lehtonen supports this idea of in-kind gift providing sponsors saying *'there could be more sponsorship, as there sure is more potential for it.'*

Another on-going contract is with the van rental company Vuokraapaku.fi, which gives the Finnish Comics Society a logistical aid in exchange of the advertisement space. Both Lehtonen and Manninen found this beneficial to all the projects under the Finnish Comics Society as it eases the logistic processes.

The Finnish Comics Society also has sponsorship co-operations based on customer relations. During Helsinki Comics Festival, the journal Voima published a supplement introducing the festival programme. *'The supplement published during the festival time provide Helsinki Comics Festival with a lot of publicity.'* said Karri Lehtonen. The changing themes of the festival attract different co-operating partners for this side as well. Maura Manninen stated an example of this kind of co-operation:

Seta (The Finnish LGTBI association) is celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2014, and Helsinki Comics Festival is part of their official year of celebration programme. The Finnish Comics Society then markets Seta in its news mediums.

According to the informants, the progress has been made in many other levels as well. *'In the cultural political level, there has been a huge development. Comics are no longer just a subcategory of visual arts, as they are now recognized as their own array.'* said Maura Manninen. This has been visible in sponsorship co-operations as well. *'In the past three years the situation with the sponsorship co-operation has been developed slowly but steadily.'* Kalle Hakkola stated.

Long Term Planning

Despite the fact that the Finnish Comics Society does not currently have a sponsorship plan, planning long term was mentioned in the every interview. *'When it comes to the Finnish Comics Society, there has not been that much of premeditated actions in gaining new sponsors. This is because the themes*

and quests of Helsinki Comics Festival vary each year.' said Maura Manninen. The lack of the structured approach of the sponsors was seen to be a weakness. Kalle Hakkola states: *'The expenses should be examined and analysed better in order to find out which of them could be covered with in-kind gifts.'*

The reason for the unpremeditation was also recognized: the small association has only a limited amount of employees and therefore a limited amount of time to use for the sponsoring purposes. Karri Lehtonen gave his opinion about the subject: *'More efficiency is needed for finding more sponsors, and more planning should be involved – the biggest issue so far has been the lack of time to do so.'* Kalle Hakkola agreed by saying *'getting sponsors takes time and needs a full concentration. This has shown to be a challenge.'*

The informants stated that so far the majority of the sponsorship co-operations were only for a short period of time. Currently the most of the on-going sponsorship deals were made with Comics Center. These deals benefit the Finnish Comics Society with different materials. All of the informants agreed with the importance of the continuity and hoped to have longer lasting sponsorship deals in the future. According to Kalle Hakkola *'the overall continuity is the key issue when looking for new sponsorship co-operations.'* Maura Manninen supported this statement: *'the sponsoring should be more focused in fulfilling the needs in longer period of time.'*

New Sponsorship Co-operations

When thinking about the new sponsorship co-operations for the Finnish Comics Society, the values of the association should not be forgotten. Maura Manninen suggested *'because the main goal of the Finnish Comics Society is to give a general education, and it aims to fulfil this goal eco-ethically, some*

kind of sponsorship manifest would also be beneficial. The reason for this is to clarify the aims and needs of the Finnish Comics Society. *'After that it would be easier to make the decisions concerning sponsorship co-operations, as the sponsor needs to share same ethical values either way.'* Manninen continued. The non-profit nature of the association has its own impact on sponsorship co-operations as well. Maura Manninen reminds that *'the non-commercial nature of the event zones the possible sponsors a lot.'*

Kalle Hakkola points out the importance of keeping in mind the size and resources of the association before starting a co-operation with a potential sponsor. *'One should also consider sponsoring co-operations carefully and make sure that they are actually beneficial for the Finnish Comics Society.'* he said. Karri Lehtonen gives another point of view for the sponsorship planning: *'It would be ideal that the party who starts to work in a sponsorship co-operation with the Finnish Comics Society has some sort courage to try different things and ideas.'*

Longer lasting sponsorship co-operations were seen to benefit the Finnish Comics Society. According to Maura Manninen *'the reciprocity of the co-operations should also be emphasized more.'* Karri Lehtonen sees an opportunity in the new content of Helsinki Comics Festival. *'There has been discussion about an electronic comics tent, which is planned to be implemented just with sponsorship co-operations. Even though it is still in the planning phase, it could escalate some long lasting sponsorship co-operations to the Finnish Comics Society.'*

Future Development

The clear plan for sponsoring should be implemented. The Finnish Comics Society should also make a clear statement of what they want from their sponsors and what are the things they are willing and capable to offer for the

other party. Kalle Hakkola states: *'The strategy plan for the sponsorship co-operations is vital. It would make the work much easier and support the continuity.'* Maura Manninen sees a point in this as well. *'All in all, the main issue to be improved in the sponsorship co-operations is to make it more systematic and planned.'* she said.

All the informants seemed to agree with the fact that the lack of resources in the work force has affected to the sponsorship co-operations of the Finnish Comics Society. Karri Lehtonen commented the issue:

There should be someone focusing just to the sponsorship co-operations. Helsinki Comics Festival could get a lot more of co-operation offers even from surprising operators if someone would just concentrate on the subject properly. -- Sponsorship issues take quite a lot of time, so if one does it just on the side of everything else it is hard to get the things done in throughout way.

5 Discussion

5.1 Summary of the Results

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>The current sponsors of the Finnish Comics Society</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the current co-operations are not continuous. • Provide mostly in-kind gifts. |
| <p>Long term planning</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So far there has been a lack of a long term planning. • The importance of the detailed plans is still acknowledged. |
| <p>New sponsorship co-operations</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has to be in line with the values and goals of the Finnish Comics Society. • The amount of extra work compared to the benefits is reasonable |
| <p>Future development</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person to concentrate only on the sponsorship co-operations. • A detailed sponsorship plan. |

Table 1. Key points of the collected data

Table 1. shows the key points of the collected data, organised in four different categories. The division is the same as shown in the section 5. Findings.

The literature review made it clear that the key for successful sponsorship co-operations is to have a continuous relationship that benefits both of the parties. Only then can the co-operation be used as an effective marketing method. This could be seen from the answers of the interviewees in the

research as well. Therefore it can be said that the literature review supported the other findings of the research.

Continuity of the sponsoring is very important, as it does not only provide a certainty but saves time. If even some of the co-operations are able to continue with the already existing contracts, there is more time left for seeking potential new co-operations and creating the actual content for the productions. This comes especially vital when the most of the previous issues have been caused by the lack of time and resources, as in the case of the Finnish Comics Society. The interviews showed that association's previous problems in finding long lasting sponsorship co-operation relations were mostly caused by the lack of time to seek the potential sponsors and approach them in effective way.

One way to solve this problem is to hire an intern to concentrate on sponsorship co-operations only. Based on the overview of the budget, this person would then make a detailed plan about how the sponsors should be contacted and what kind of deals the Finnish Comics Society could offer. The sponsorship plan should also include a list of the previous sponsors and deals made with them, the current sponsorship deals and the possible future co-operation partners.

Part of the sponsorship plan is to make the preparations for approaching the potential sponsors. The details such as the demographic data, the schedule of the events, and the benefits that one is able to provide should be listed, as well as the things that are expected from the potential sponsor. (Moler, 2000) It would also be important to make a sponsorship statement based on the values and interests of the Finnish Comics Society. This would help to find the partners that share the same interests and are most suitable on the other ways as well. It is hard to work with someone who does not share the common goals and values. (Vuokko, 2010)

When looking for the new potential sponsors, one needs also to keep in mind the size of the association. If the potential co-operation would require a lot of additional time-consuming actions, the benefits of these co-operations should match that. Otherwise the association might end up in the situation where the amount of the utilities might have as well been achieved in more efficient ways. Moreover, if the focus of the work is in something that does not give enough extra value, the quality of the other sections might suffer.

5.2 Limitations

Even though the subject of the thesis was relatively relevant for the culture production industry, only a little previous research had been made. This meant that there was only a very limited amount of information and literature that could be used to complete the theoretical background of the research. Because of this, delving deeply into every section of the subject was infeasible. That being said, the thesis created a good base for further investigation the issues behind the sponsorship co-operations in the cultural productions, especially in the case of the Finnish Comics Society. Therefore it is an essential foundation for the future research.

The association already identified some of the problems in the sponsorship co-operations of the Finnish Comics Society and therefore the research did not provide that as much new information as it was expected. However, the research provided some important information about which points requires the most attention when starting to develop the sponsorship co-operations. This kind of an extra understanding of the case is a great benefit when the actual development phase of the process starts.

The number of the informants could have been counted as an issue of reliability as well. Having more interviews done could have provided a broader perspective on the issues discussed in the research. However, the answers of the informants were quite coherent with each other, and therefore having more

interviewees working closely together might not add any extra value to the interview.

This research is valid for the Finnish Comics Society and its projects in the current state. In case the nature of the association faces drastic changes, such as commercialisation, the research might lose its accuracy. If that happens, the author would recommend further research of the subject by implementing a survey that targets both the customers of the Finnish Comics Society as well as the other consumers. The future investigations towards the subject should also focus more on how the relationship between the sponsors and the sponsorees affects the consumer targeted marketing of the culture productions.

6 Conclusions

The current situation of the Finnish Comics Society's sponsorship co-operations is mostly based on the in-kind gifts, when the actual funding comes from the grants and scholarships from the different institutions. Therefore, the biggest stumbling blocks are all related to the fact that many of these sponsorship co-operations are only temporary, which makes it more time consuming to find the suitable partners each year. The lack of a throughout sponsorship plan adds more unnecessary workload as well. Because the association already has a limited amount of work force, this is not desired. Therefore the sponsorship co-operations should be developed to be longer lasting. Another issue to develop is to have co-operations that would have more reciprocity. This would then benefit both of the parties in more ways than just offering funding would.

The solution for the situation would be having someone focusing on just the sponsorship co-operations of the Finnish Comics Society and its projects. That person should then write a sponsorship plan that would guide the implementation of the future sponsorship co-operations. Planning ahead would also guarantee that the benefits of the potential new co-operations exceed the additional work it causes for the association. It would also make finding the new partners with same interests and values as the Finnish Comics Society easier.

As the research was premeditated to be valid in the current situation of the Finnish Comics Society, any drastic changes in the nature of its projects can make information of the thesis out-dated. Therefore, after writing a functional sponsorship plan for the Finnish Comics Society, it is advisable to research the subject more in depth in the different points of view. Only then can one receive a perfectly formed picture of the strengths and opportunities of the sponsorship co-operations of the association.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview with Karri Lehtonen

There is some sponsorship co-operation with the educational side of Comics Center. Most of it comes in the form of different materials and equipment. This kind of sponsors are essential for the Finnish Comics Society. However, there could be more sponsorship, as there sure is more potential for it. More efficiency is needed in finding more sponsors, and more planning should be involved – the biggest issue so far has been the lack of time to do so.

Helsinki Comics Festival has improved its sponsorship co-operations quite a fair amount in the past 3 years. The technical costs, such as PA systems, of the last years festivals were entirely covered with the sponsors. Overall there are quite a many different sponsorship co-operations going on with Helsinki Comics Festival. A lot of co-operations with different art galleries and other exhibition spaces such as Annantalo and provide the festival programme with different locations for holding courses and other events. Sanoma media has a co-operation deal concerning Sanomatalo. Magazine Voima is also co-operating, and the supplement published during the festival time provides Helsinki Comics Festival with a lot of publicity.

Comics Center has also been improving from what it has been before. The newest continuous deal is with Vuokraapaku.fi, which has benefitted the Finnish Comics Society in many different projects.

There should be someone focusing just to the sponsorship co-operations. Helsinki Comics Festival could get a lot more of co-operation offers even from surprising operators if someone would just concentrate on the subject properly. Sponsorship issues take quite a lot of time, so if one does it just on the side of everything else it is hard to get the things done in throughout way.

There has been an discussion about an electronic comics tent, which is planned to be implemented just with sponsorship co-operations. Even though it is still in the planning phase, it could escalate some long lasting sponsorship co-operations to the Finnish Comics Society.

It would be ideal that the party who starts to work in a sponsorship co-operation with the Finnish Comics Society has some sort of courage to try different things and ideas. This is because the association itself is very innovative and willing to try new ways to implement projects. Helsinki Comics Festival is also a very visual event. Getting the sponsor involved with the themes and other visual aspects would be counted as a very positive factor.

Appendix B: Interview with Maura Manninen

Actual sponsoring is more emphasized in the equipment side of the production. For example, the 28th Helsinki Comics Festivals that were held last year got big screens that helped with the visualisation of the programme as well as informing consumers on the event side. The biggest commercial sponsors providing these kinds of equipment were Gigantti and DLX Deluxe Music. The sponsorship operations providing money have played a much smaller role.

Maura has mostly taken care of the grants, which have been one of the biggest ways to gain funds for the Finnish Comics Society. And of course the costs of the international quests are often covered with the scholarships from different embassies and cultural institutes. In a way these are sponsorship co-operations as well, because usually then these parties are being advertised in the festival programme and such printed media.

Helsinki has many cultural events and other cultural productions, so gaining grants is not that easy. In the national level, the ministry of education provides the biggest funding for Helsinki Comics Festival but even that does not cover the majority of the costs. The grants provided by the city of Helsinki are relatively small and harder to get because of the competition. The overall budget is build form the smaller sections, including the scholarships gained from embassies as mentioned earlier. As the Finnish Comics Society has so many projects, the grants are often applied for the combined and the content of the programme is bound together. The residency programme is one of these projects, and it is used to produce different seminars for Helsinki Comics Festival. It also helps to gets more financial support for the international quests.

Rakkautta ja Anarkiaa film festival is one of the partners Helsinki Comics Festival has had for the PR purposes. Because one of the themes in the year 2014 is gender and sexual diversity, Finnish LGBTI rights organisation Seta is also one of the main co-operation partners. Seta is celebrating its 40th anniversary and Helsinki Comics Festival is part of their official year of celebration programme. The Finnish Comics Society then markets Seta in its news mediums.

In the cultural political level, there has been a huge development. Comics are no longer just a subcategory of visual arts, as they are now recognized as their own array. However, this has not been seen in the size of the grants and therefore new funding models should be taken under consideration when promoting comics.

When it comes to the Finnish Comics Society, there has not been that much of premeditated actions in gaining new sponsors. This is because the themes and quests of Helsinki Comics Festival vary each year. Also the non-commercial nature of the event zones the possible sponsors a lot. The

sponsors should be thought well in advance so that they would not be against of the image of the festival or the organisation.

In general, all the changes so far have been for the better. As Helsinki Comics Festival has now been held in Lasipalatsi square for few years, the organisers are now more aware of the technical issues that might have to be taken under a consideration. This makes the planning of the budget easier.

Comics Center has a co-operation contract with art supply store Tempera as well as marker manufacturer Molotow. Both of these co-operations provide equipment needed for the course activity and other educational purposes. Comics Center also has a window advert of the car renting company Vuokraapaku.fi. In exchange the Finnish Comics Society can rent the vans for free. This helps with the logistic costs of many different projects, Helsinki Comics Festival being one of them. These have so far been the only longer lasting sponsorship co-operations of Comics Center. Smaller productions have then had some brief co-operations with different companies, as an example 24H Comics has had a agreement with energy drink manufacturer Red Bull.

Equipment providing sponsors are valuable to Comics Center and there could be more of them. However, it would require someone to make a functioning plan for the sponsorship co-operations in general. Because the main goal of the Finnish Comics Society is to give a general education, and it aims to fulfil this goal ecoethically, some kind of sponsorship manifest would also be beneficial. After that it would be easier to make the decisions concerning sponsorship co-operations, as the sponsor needs to share same ethical values either way.

All in all, the main issue to be improved in the sponsorship co-operations is to make it more systematic and planned. The sponsoring should be more focused in fulfilling the needs in longer period of time. The reciprocity of the co-operations should also be emphasized more.

Appendix C: Interview with Kalle Hakkola

Sponsoring situation of the Finnish Comics Society is right now moderate and some parts of the equipment and funding can be covered with sponsor co-operations. Getting sponsors from necessity basis has so far proven to be an easiest form of sponsorship co-operations. On the other hand, getting sponsors takes time and needs a full concentration. This has shown to be a challenge.

In the past three years the situation with the sponsorship co-operation has been developed slowly but steadily. Especially the earlier mentioned sponsors for necessities have been growing. The changes have been positive and caused mostly by the development of the Finnish Comics Society and its projects. The whole association has been developing.

In order to make the sponsorship co-operation more efficient, there should be more planning in the long term. The expenses should be examined and analysed better in order to find out which of them could be covered with in-kind gifts. One should also consider sponsoring co-operations carefully and make sure that they are actually benefittial for the Finnish Comics Society.

The strategy plan for the sponsorship co-operations is vital. It would make the work much easier and support the continuity. The overall continuity is the key issue when looking for new sponsorship co-operations.