

CO-OPETITION AND “CO-OPETITIVENESS” AS A DISTRICT-COMMUNE RELATIONSHIP AND PROSPECTS FOR SELF-GOVERNMENTAL PARTNERSHIP

KOOPETYCJA I “KOOPETYCYJNOŚĆ” JAKO RELACJA I MOŻLIWOŚĆ PARTNERSTWA POWIATOWO-GMINNEGO

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Tomasz Śmietanka

Poland, Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities,
Institute of Management and Quality Sciences
tomasz.smietanka@uph.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-2623-9100

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Abstract: The article presents a brief baseline review of the current state of research on co-opetition, including local government, which still largely constitutes the existing research gap. On the basis of a case study, an analysis of district-municipal co-opetition of the Kozienice district and municipality was conducted as an optional partnership relation between 2010 and 2021. The triangulation of research methods was applied: quantitative analysis of statistical data and official documents of the district and the municipality, qualitative research, the Author's participant observation. As a result of the research conducted, the ability to act based on co-opetition, the Author coined a new term, i.e. "co-opetitiveness", which refers to the relation between the resource potential of the district and the municipality. It has been found that the previous forms of co-opetition (financial, property and social capital) were mutually beneficial, still have unused potential and at the current level of analysis there were no threats of increasing the scope of co-opetition.

Keywords: county-municipal co-opetition, forms of co-opetition, "co-opetitiveness"

Streszczenie: Artykuł prezentuje skrótowy i bazowy przegląd aktualnego stanu badań nad koopetycją, w tym samorządową, która nadal stanowi w znacznym stopniu lukę badawczą. Na podstawie studium przypadku analizie poddano koopetycję powiatowo-gminną powiatu kozienickiego i gminy Kozienice jako fakultatywną relację partnerstwa w latach 2010-2021. Zastosowano triangulację metod badawczych: analiza ilościowa danych statystycznych i dokumentów urzędowych powiatu i gminy, badania jakościowe i obserwację uczestniczącą autora. W wyniku przeprowadzonych badań określono zdolność do koopetycji nazwaną przez autora nowym określeniem, czyli „koopetycyjnością”. Zależy ona głównie od relacji potencjałów zasobowych powiatu i gminy oraz od cech osobowych burmistrza i starosty. Ustalono, że dotychczasowe formy koopetycji (finansowa, majątkowa i kapitału społecznego) przyniosła obustronne korzyści, posiada niewykorzystane rezerwy i na obecnym poziomie analizy nie ma zagrożeń związanych z jej zwiększaniem.

Słowa kluczowe: koopetycja powiatowo-gminna, formy koopetycji, "koopetycyjność"

Introduction

Co-opetition, namely the best and the most adequate combination between cooperation and competition, is a relatively new research area for commercial and business organizations, and even more so for local government and non-governmental organizations. Therefore, this premise prompted the Author to look for such relations of co-opetition on the level of local

government, covering the largest municipality – the capital of the district and the district. Therefore, an important research issue seems to refer to the identification of the main types and basic forms of co-opetition between local governments covering the common territory, e.g., district and its largest municipality. For several decades, the phenomenon of co-opetition has inspired numerous researchers, and is gradually maturing as a new economic paradigm. It was formulated

and developed mainly on the basis of commercial management or co-management in the reality of the market economy. However, to comprehensively develop this paradigm, its cooperative-competitive character can, and indeed must be referred to public organizations, and in particular local governments, to a greater extent than before. Because of the close spatial proximity and even common territory in the case of municipalities within one district, municipalities and districts are naturally predestined for cooperation, which, when supplemented by creative and prudent competition, can become a local government co-opetition, useful for all parties.

The second research issue analysed refers to the potential ability (state, readiness) of local governments to act based on co-opetition, defining the current possibilities and barriers in the co-opetition process. As previously specified, co-opetition is something like prudent competition also in the context of the entire process. Whereas the state of possibilities and barriers in this process is defined as competitiveness. Thus, by analogy, the Author suggests referring to this ability to act based on co-opetition as: "*coopetitiveness*" which may indicate the abilities of local governments to act based on co-opetition. Such terminology seems quite justified and even intuitive, but in the review of Internet databases it is difficult to find the word co-opetitiveness. Therefore, this is the Author's suggestion for academic discussion on specifying the new terminology.

The subject of research covered the municipality of Koźienice and the district of Koźienice – distinguished legally, territorially and statistically (NTS-5, NTS-4) (<https://bdl.stat.gov.pl>), located in the southern part of Mazowieckie Voivodeship. The purpose of study was accomplished through the analysis of source literature, the Author's participating observation (currently a councillor of the Mazovian parliament, mayor of Koźienice municipality between 1998 and 2018) and use of statistical data, including a local data bank, and official documentation provided by municipalities and districts (e.g., development strategies, budgets of local government units). The examined period ranges from 2010 to 2020, including: detailed analysis of the budgets of local government units within 10 years (2010 to 2020) and additionally 2021 as well as draft budgets of the municipality and district for 2022.

Literature review

Brandeburger and Nalebuff (1998, p. 11-39) were the first to offer the definition of co-opetition. In the book entitled *Co-opetition. A Revolutionary Mindset that Combines Competition and Cooperation*, by referring in the main to the assumptions of game theory, it was specified that co-opetition should be understood as the relation between competition and cooperation occurring at the same time. It was assumed that only two parties would participate in establishing and developing co-opetition. The main idea defining co-opetition as a relation-based strategy in the game theory refers to parallelism between competition and cooperation (Hampden-Turner, Trompenaars, 2000, p. 121-122). From the perspective of organizations functioning as complex systems, defining co-opetition only through the concurrent competition and co-operation is an oversimplification of the nature of this approach. For co-opetition is not only a developed theory of competition or a theory of cooperation. It can be related to such a unique nature, characterized above all by a significant level of diversity and complexity, that it seems fully justified to develop a separate theoretical paradigm (Czakoń, Mucha-Kuś, Sołtysik, 2012, p. 49).

For a more complete view of the source literature, a review of international literature was conducted based on the EBSCO database. The preliminary quantitative analysis made it possible to find over 400 publications on *coopetition* or *co-opetition*. This is incomparably less in relation to the previously analysed research on competitiveness (the Author's own research); and additionally it confirms the fact that the phenomenon of co-opetition was formulated relatively recently and requires constant analysis. Among these publications, most attention was devoted to co-opetition in the context of management – ca. 350 publications, competition – ca. 300, cooperation or collaboration – ca. 220, strategy – ca. 170 innovation – ca. 120, resources – ca. 90. In the case of Polish authors, a small number of publications referred to the broadly defined locality (*municipality, local government, city*), but 17 related to the commercial context (including only one related to municipal co-opetition), and 23 related to leadership – and territorial co-opetition in the local (23), regional (18) and national context (30), which confirms the existing research gap regarding co-opetition within territorial governments.

The world literature also provides a "quasi-definition" approach to the phenomenon of

co-opetition. Co-opetition based business means "war and peace" at the same time (*War and Peace Greater Baton Rouge Business Report*, p. 12-13). Whereas whatever co-opetition means, more humorously, it can be seen as "the relationship between Batman and Robin. Although it is never certain who is who? – both, similar „men in tights" (Illing, 2005). Whereas the game theory, the analytical approach to co-opetition, suggests that when you lose a game you have to change the way it is played. "We compete with each other to get customers, but we have to work together because their customers generate traffic on our network", declare e.g., managers of telecommunication companies (Cruz). Whereas J. Cooney (1996, p. 96) observed that "business means cooperation when it comes to making a cake, and competition when it comes to cutting it". L. Morris and J. Long (2017) defined co-opetition differently as: "a modern way to collaborate" and "understanding that people's interests and reputation are aligned with yours." Conducting a comprehensive review of the international literature concerning, in particular, co-opetition strategies, M. Rogalski (2011, p. 17-20) stated that identifying and describing the most characteristic features of the phenomenon and the strategy of co-opetition can be used to develop a research framework for future analyses and to determine trends in research related to this phenomenon. Co-opetition as a newly emerging economic paradigm holds multifaceted exploratory potential.

The database of the Lower Silesian Digital Library (<https://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra> – accessed 23.04.2021) contains over 30 Polish publications with the word co-opetition (*kooperencja*); over 270 with the word coopetition (*koopetycja*) and nearly 370 publications in English written mainly by the Polish authors regarding *coopetition*. For comparison, in the second Polish database BazEkon (<https://bazekon.uek.krakow.pl/>, accessed 24.04.2021) there are 14 publications on co-opetition (*kooperencja*), 40 – on coopetition (*koopetycja*) and over 120 reference publications in English regarding *coopetition*, mainly by Polish authors. This preliminary taxonomic survey of publications proves that the concept of co-opetition (*koopetycja*) is more common than coopetition (*kooperencja*).

Among the Polish research publications regarding this phenomenon there are publications that are important for the knowledge of co-opetition in a broader sense (e.g., W. Czakon, B. Jankowska, P. Klimas and J. Cygler). For the

purposes of empirical research conducted in this article, because of the specificity of the activities of a selected group of entities, it is worth paying attention to the typology (Fig. 1) taking into account the criteria of the level of competition and the level of cooperation that can unambiguously be referred to the number of competitive and cooperative activities within the entire flow of inter-organizational transfers.

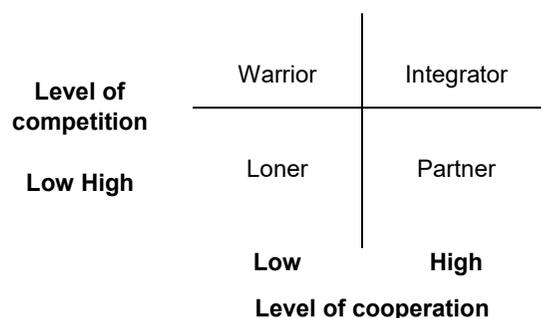


Figure 1: Types of co-opetition by the level of competition and cooperation

Source: J. Cygler et al., 2013, p. 32.

The typology basically defines the nature of the coopetitor. It is a matter of agreement to determine the boundary between low and high levels of competition and cooperation (the number of activities of such nature). A high level of competition and cooperation would point to entities that are defined as "integrators" of co-opetition (high levels of co-opetition, integrated co-opetition). Entities who are characterized by a low level of both competitive and cooperative activities (a passive approach, low level of involvement in developing relationships) are called "loners" (low level of co-opetition – coexistence). The advantage of competitive over cooperation-based activities indicates the role of a "warrior" (competitive co-opetition). Such an approach is characterized by a high level of competitive activity, often as an autotelic objective, showing some level of aggressiveness in behaviour and this may be conducive to the development of opportunistic activities (Fig. 1). The last model situation involves the advantage of cooperative over competitive relationships. In this case, we can refer to a "partner" approach (cooperative co-opetition). Other typologies in the source literature are based on e.g., the criteria of the number of participants in the relationships and the number of activities (Dagnino, Padula, 2002, p. 30) as well as the number of competitors involved in co-opetition and the geographical scope of relationships (Luo, 2007, p. 129-144).

A previous review of two large digital national databases proved that there are few publications on co-opetition in the public sector, and in particular local government sector. This confirms the existing research gap in this area discussed at the beginning of this study and the need to conduct further research in this respect. By conducting research on the strategy of co-opetition in the public sector, L. Goczół (2016, p. 129-144) determined a traceable research gap in local government co-opetition. Polish agglomerations accept challenges regarding joint management of areas such as, for example, public transport, often facing a dilemma: follow the strategy of cooperation or competition? Meanwhile, it can be a strategy of co-opetition, i.e., concurrent cooperation and competition. As the Author confirmed, co-opetition studies in the context of urban agglomeration constitute a complete novelty in the urban and regional economics.

The originality of the presented subject of research related to applying co-opetition in urban agglomerations involves a completely innovative approach, not only in Polish, but also in international regional research. It is a challenge for local governments, which, accustomed to implementing their own competitive strategies, have significant difficulty in undertaking a real cooperation at the agglomeration level (Goczół, 2015, p. 99-115). The subject of such research meets the current trends in managing the agglomeration areas, expressed e.g., the Europe 2020 Strategy. In this strategic approach, the method of integrated territorial investments (ITI), addressed to the functional urban areas (and thus also to agglomerations), is interesting. This method is based on the extensive cooperation of local government units forming a functional area, thus making it conditional upon obtaining support to implement the development projects. Therefore, this pilot instrument somehow requires greater cooperation than before from entities that are mainly in a competitive relationship.

P. Bartkowiak and M. Koszel (2016, p. 11-24) addressed the issue of co-opetition relative to the activities of local government units (municipalities). The research aimed to identify and characterize the key resources sought by the municipalities in the process of shaping social and economic development. To determine an example typology of co-opetition between municipalities, the authors adopted an assessment procedure which involved scaling the response options so that it would be possible to distinguish low and high levels of competition and cooperation. As a result of research conducted, it was established

that out of 345 municipalities and cities, 40.9 percent referred to the partner type relations between municipalities in the Polish metropolitan areas, 40.9 percent to the integrator type, 12.4 percent to the loner type, and 5.8 percent to the warrior type relations within all local governments surveyed. The integrator type co-opetition is more common among medium-sized municipalities in terms of their population, between 10,000 and 50,000 inhabitants, with the highest incidence in OM Poznań (72%). The partner type co-opetition occurs mainly in the largest municipalities – of over 50,000 inhabitants, with the highest incidence in OM Łódź (61.5%). In terms of the population, the "loner" type of co-opetition occurs in small municipalities – less than 5,000 inhabitants and in the group of municipalities between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, mainly in the peripheral zones of metropolitan areas, the highest number in the OM Katowice. The warrior type, the least common, occurred mainly in small and medium-sized municipalities, with less than 25,000 inhabitants, mainly in the OM Kraków (20%) (Bartkowiak, Koszel, 2017, p. 32-35).

Methodology and theoretical grounds

The justification presented in the introduction and the review of source literature proves that the research question may have the attributes of originality and constitute some knowledge and research gaps, the bridging of which may involve adding the elements or entire fragments to the widespread theoretical solutions, also developed based on defined good practices. The basic questions concerning the search for originality in the classic research approach (what?, how?, why?, and then who?, when?, where?, under what circumstances?, and with the help of what) (Strużyna, 2016, p. 52, 78) should refer to the scope of local government co-opetition and "co-opetitiveness".

Based on the theoretical database of source literature, as well as the quantitative and qualitative complexity and multidimensionality of the issue analysed, the triangulation of research methods was suggested; this should ensure higher quality of research and reduce errors in the interpretation of research, by collecting data with the use of different techniques and based on various sources (statistical data, data from official documents, and the participating observation of the Author).

The essence of triangulation involves analysing research questions from two or more perspectives in order to obtain concurrent results

and cross-check the results obtained from various sources (Stańczyk, 2016, p. 245). Triangulation also means using quantitative studies to confirm the results of qualitative research, or the reverse approach (Bryman 2008, p. 608). Triangulation tries to look at the same research questions from different points of view and is generally focused on the relationships between individual results (Jensen, 2002, pp. 254-272).

Results and discussion

Ranking the local government co-opetition as partner co-opetition (high cooperation, low competition, Fig. 1), as presented in the aforementioned nationwide research and the Author's research on local governments in the Radom subregion (Śmietanka, 2015), is the most desirable and at the same time the most frequently applied type of local government co-opetition.

Therefore, it is worth beginning the analysis by determining the co-opetition potential of the Kozenice municipality and the Kozenice district, i.e., as formulated and justified in the introduction to "co-opetitiveness". This was performed through a brief characterization of resources in the municipality and the district. According to the nationwide ranking of wealth per capita by P. Swianiewicz, in 2016 the municipality of Kozenice ranked third among all 267 classified municipalities – district cities in Poland (own research). Thus, it was among the wealthiest municipalities – district cities. The Kozenice district ranked 155th in terms of wealth among 314 rural districts in the country, i.e., it found itself approximately in the middle of the district list. The financial potential of the Kozenice municipality was determined by comparing its selected indicators to other subregional cities of the Mazowieckie voivodship (Table 1).

Table 1: Competitive advantage of the Kozenice municipality against the background of subregional cities of Mazovia as per the strategic financial indicators per capita in PLN

City	Own revenue	EU funds	Debt	Debt / own revenue	Debt / EU funds
Kozenice	4 683,31	1949,02	1 561,00	33.3%	80%
Radom	4 161,15	2057,33	2 281,00	54.8%	111%
Płock	6 357,54	3356,26	4 057,00	63.8%	121%
Ciechanów	3 137,36	4419,66	1 145,00	36.5%	26%
Siedlce	4 520,55	1968,15	3 985,00	88.2%	202%
Ostrołęka	5 172,17	1862,91	1 958,00	37.9%	105%

Source: Own elaboration (status as at 01.01.2018).

In the summary of the local government financial benchmarking, it should be stated that the financial competitive standing of the Kozenice municipality, compared to five subregional centres in Mazovia, was very favourable as per all indicators. The comparative analysis provides the key and strategic information indicating that the municipality of Kozenice had and has got, compared to other cities, the largest reserves in terms of possible and safe further investment indebtedness, in particular the strategic investment projects co-funded from EU programs. For, as the analysis showed, the municipality of Kozenice could and should strive to increase the amount of EU funds obtained, the status of which was updated as at 27 October 2020, almost at the end of the 2014-2020 programming period.

Additional analyses also show the unfavourable trend observed in the new term (2018-2023) of the Kozenice municipality local government. This involved the municipality's withdrawal from large investment projects co-funded from EU funds, e.g., from the construction of a new Kozenice centre or further revitalization of the Palace and Park. By the end of 2021, the council and the current mayor obtained virtually no significant additional funds from the EU from the 2014-2020 programming period. All the previous EU funds were mainly obtained in previous terms of the council by the previous mayor. The same situation was observed throughout 2021.

Despite the facts, the above-mentioned analysis (Table 1) proves that there is a very high potential capacity for partner-based co-opetition

("co-opetitiveness") between the municipality and the district. It is demonstrated by the very good standing of the Kozienice municipality as per all analysed indicators compared to subregional

cities. Is this co-opetitiveness sufficiently used? Information on what the situation looked like over the course of eleven years (2010-2020) is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The value of financial co-opetition of the district and municipality between 2010 and 2020 (in million PLN)

Areas of financial co-opetition	Municipality contribution for the district	District own contribution
Health	5.6	3.6
Public safety	2.8	3.6
Transport	7.2	7.3
PFOŚ – ecology	no funding	4.1 – contribution for the municipality
Total	15.6	14.9

Source: Own elaboration based on the budget of the Kozienice municipality and the Kozienice district.

The calculations presented in the table constitute strong and unquestionable evidence; and at the same time an argument that for the district and the leading municipality it was a mutually beneficial financial co-opetition in the second to last and last term of local governments, as well as since 1999, which is confirmed by official documents, i.e. since the beginning of the Kozienice district in the new organization of local government units in Poland. It was based on the municipality's high capacity ("financial co-opetitiveness"), to act based on co-opetition while sharing the financial resources. This resulted in increased investments for the municipality and the district, as in the case of other external subsidies or investment loans. The district contribution in the health, public safety and road investments, and the district funds for the municipality from the District Environmental Protection Fund constitute a total amount of approx. 15 million PLN. Whereas the municipality contribution totals approx. 15.6 million PLN (health, public safety, transport throughout 9 years. However, in the new term between 2019 and 2021, there was no significant funding for the district from the municipality). Therefore, it can be concluded that the financial co-opetition of the district and the municipality was practically equivalent for a slight advantage in funding (0.6 million PLN) on the part of the municipality. At the same time, the municipality is incomparably more prosperous than the district, and in addition, all the fixed assets of the district (health, public safety and transport) and the municipality

(environmental protection) with a total, estimated value of over 30 million PLN remained permanently within the territory of the Kozienice municipality, improving its competitiveness and at the same time the competitiveness of the district

The financial form of co-opetition between the district and municipality seems to be the most spectacular and quantitatively measurable. It results in multiplying the fixed assets of local governments (asset-based co-opetition). Whereas its existence is conditioned by the ability of the district and municipality local government to establish such relations, i.e., "co-opetitiveness". Here, human and social capital play a significant role.

Conclusions

Co-opetition is a relatively new issue in the scientific source literature. Until now, it has received much less attention than the process of competing or cooperating. However, neither the first nor the other issue, characterized separately, can convey the complexity of the relationship brought by co-opetition, and in particular its most desirable status, i.e., cooperative partnership. This phenomenon has already been quite accurately described in the commercial aspect. Whereas there are very few studies on local governments and non-governmental organizations. To bridge this research gap, scientific research is needed on co-opetition between the local government units, also within the same territory, as well as more networked co-opetition (business, local government, third sector organizations). This will allow for the better use

of public funds, thus improving the inhabitants' quality of life in a more meaningful way. The optional nature of co-opetition also increases the creativity of individual participants, which significantly improves the innovation processes.

A principal issue highlighted in the study; and so far, analysed to a much lesser extent, is the ability to act based on co-opetition which the Author described as "co-opetitiveness". This is a certain state in contrast with the co-opetition which is a process. To determine this state, important are both "hard" factors (financial resources, fixed assets) and "soft" ones (human and social capital). Meaningful co-opetitiveness will contribute to increasing the scale of co-opetition, because, as the research results have shown, district-municipal co-opetition still has a large potential to develop and bring mutual benefits.

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