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Chapter 16

Social Relationships in Coopetition Among Entrepreneurs on Culinary Tourist Routes

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Abstract

Coopetition, that is simultaneous collaboration and competition between organisations, is a significant phenomenon in inter-organisational relations, particularly in the tourism sector. This chapter explores the role of social embeddedness in coopetition dynamics within the tourism sector. Drawing on qualitative research conducted among members of tourism (culinary) routes in various regions of Poland, the study investigates how social relationships affect coopetition among entrepreneurs. The findings indicate that social embeddedness fosters cooperation by facilitating trust and shared norms among route members, leading them to perceive themselves less as competitors and more as collaborators or even only as collaborators. At the same time, social embeddedness makes it possible to clear the market of competitors who do not comply with certain adopted rules or standards, as well as mitigating competition for employees. Thus, the research findings highlight the complex interplay between social embeddedness and coopetition dynamics in a tourism context. Overall, this research contributes to understanding the perceptions underlying coopetition in the tourism sector and sheds light on the importance of social relationships in shaping inter-organisational behaviour within the tourist industry.

Keywords: Social relationships; social embeddedness; coopetition; inter-organizational relations; culinary tourist routes

Value Proposition to Tourism Coopetition, 235–264



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Introduction

Coopetition is an important and topical subject area in the literature on inter-organisational relations (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017; Corbo et al., 2023) and takes place in various sectors, including tourism. It results from the need to co-create and co-provide tourists with products and services that are part of a comprehensive experience at tourism destinations. Tourism enterprises (mainly SMEs) therefore cooperate with one another, including cooperation with competitors (VonFriedrichs Grängsjö, 2003). Importantly, a common location in tourist destinations is associated not only with geographical proximity but also with cultural and social proximity (Blasi et al., 2022), manifested by the existence of trust, common norms, values and social relationships between cooperating competitors (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012; Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Lascaux, 2020; Raza-Ullah & Kostis, 2020; VonFriedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006). Moreover, these social relationships create emotional intimacy and a social sense of belonging (Tsaor & Wang, 2011).

The above-mentioned elements create an important social context for coopetition. Previously, little attention was paid to the close ties between competitors because, as Ingram and Roberts (2000, p. 388) claim, ‘personalized modes of interaction between competing organizations long have been viewed as illegitimate.’ In recent years, the behavioural antecedents of coopetition and – more broadly – the coopetition social context have become important streams of coopetition research (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017; Czakon et al., 2020). In this line of research, attention has been paid so far, for example, to trust between competitors (e.g. Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Lascaux, 2020), the set of values shared among competitors (VonFriedrichs Grängsjö, 2003) and associations relating to the number of relationships a tourism firm maintains and coopetition (Della Corte & Aria, 2016). Grauslund and Hammershøy (2021) claim that co-location can be a contributing factor to building trust between coopetitors and strengthening their relationships. Thus, in tourist destinations, the above-mentioned elements are interconnected. The theoretical perspective that allows us to look at them is the concept of social embeddedness (relational and structural), which indicates that entrepreneurs make decisions and business activities through the prism of the social relationships in which they are embedded (Granovetter, 1985).

It has been shown that close social relations promote cooperation, e.g. they facilitate the flow of information, the transfer of knowledge, and reduce transaction costs, etc. (Czernek-Marszałek et al., 2023; Uzzi, 1996). However, while there are tourism studies on the importance of such ties for promoting cooperative performance (e.g. Kallmuenzer et al., 2021; Tortoriello et al., 2011; VonFriedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006) or some papers on mitigating competition (e.g. by avoiding conflict – Yuan et al., 2020), they rarely involve analysis of these relations simultaneously. Moreover, the concept of social embeddedness itself has been used in coopetition literature to a limited extent, for example, it was applied to analyse cooperation in tourist destinations (Czernek-Marszałek, 2021). However, coopetition as a completely different form of relationship (related to certain

contradictions and tensions) has still not been sufficiently studied in this context. Moreover, an approach where coopetition is conceptualised through a multi-level perspective – interpersonal and inter-firm – is claimed to be limited, while at the same time it strongly contributes to our knowledge of coopetition mechanisms (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Wolff et al., 2020). A multi-level perspective is used in this chapter, which aims to show how tourism entrepreneurs' social embeddedness affects their coopetition by strengthening cooperation and/or mitigating competition. We present the findings of qualitative research conducted among entities belonging to culinary routes located in tourism destinations in various parts of Poland.

Theoretical Background

The Concept of Social Embeddedness

Social embeddedness is understood in general as the nature, depth or degree of the bond of a given entity with the community (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020b). The author of the concept of social embeddedness is Mark Granovetter, who stated that all business relationships are embedded in a network of social relationships, i.e. specific interpersonal contacts, that entrepreneurs have with other market players (Granovetter, 1985). The sources of such relationships can vary. Czernek-Marszałek's (2021) research has shown that in tourism destinations, especially in small towns, the sources are often family ties, friendships, previous jobs, neighbourhood location, background and even religion. Social and business relationships are therefore intertwined, and one results from the other. Indeed, not only do social relationships lead to business relationships, but strictly business relationships can also give rise to social relations (Granovetter, 1985; Uzzi, 1997).

Social embeddedness conceptualisation is usually done on the basis of Granovetter's (1973) comparison between so-called strong and weak ties. The first are based on frequent communication, reciprocity, emotional intensity and trust, while the latter – weak ties – are their opposite, i.e. they are ad hoc in nature, often leading to one-off market transactions that are not emotionally charged. Their establishment does not require the existence of trust between the parties and certainly not in the affective dimension (Uzzi, 1997). As the conceptualisation of social embeddedness is most often based on the distinction between strong and weak ties, strong ties or strong social/interpersonal/informal relationships or socially embedded relationships are often used as interchangeable terms (see more in Czernek-Marszałek et al., 2023).

There are different types of social embeddedness – relational and structural (Granovetter, 1992). This is important from the point of view of the purpose of this work, because when analysing the role of social embeddedness in coopetition in tourist destinations or trails, one can talk about relational embeddedness – i.e. strong ties between any two actors from the route but also structural embeddedness – reflected in the form of the bond that a given actor from the trail has with a group of other actors from the trail, as well as with the trail/organisation as a whole or with the entire tourist destination where the route is located.

According to Uzzi (1997), social relationships understood in this way (being the result of social embeddedness of business actors) regulate partners' mutual expectations and behaviour, resulting in the parties achieving economic benefits. This is due to the components of social embeddedness, which, as shown by the results of research on relationships built in tourism destinations, are trust, close personal relations, emotional bond, respect for a partner, the willingness to help, reciprocity and so-called 'local patriotism' (Czernek-Marszałek, 2021). For example, trust allows one to enter into a business relationship, e.g. cooperation or coopetition, as trust involves positive expectations of the other party. Close personal relationships, emotional bonding, respect or the willingness to help further strengthen the relationship, allowing, for example, for the transfer of tacit knowledge, creativity and, as a result, increased innovativeness of activities or assistance in crisis situations (Jack, 2005; Uzzi, 1997). In turn, local patriotism, i.e. a bond with a place often found in the case of tourism sector entities – especially in small towns – allows for activities for the development of a given place that go beyond mere market actions serving the development of one's own enterprise (Czernek-Marszałek, 2021; VonFriedrichs Grängsjö, 2003). As empirical research to date has shown (but so far mainly in relation to cooperation per se and not cooperation with competitors i.e. coopetition) all of this serves the initiation, development and results of cooperation in tourism destinations.

Coopetition and Competitors Identification

Coopetition means 'a paradoxical relationship between two or more actors simultaneously involved in cooperative and competitive interactions, regardless of whether their relationship is horizontal or vertical' (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014, p. 182). This relationship therefore refers to cooperation between competitors, i.e. entities that are characterised by market commonality and resource similarity (Chen, 1996).

Market commonality is 'the degree of presence that a competitor manifests in the markets where it overlaps with a focal firm' (Chen, 1996, p. 106). It is determined by two factors: the strategic importance of the market and the share of competitors in those markets. The greater the number of markets where competitors are jointly involved, the higher the degree of market commonality (Dagnino & Rocco, 2009). Importantly, the market is a complex construct and can be understood through the prism of the products (services) provided, the customers served and, crucially in the case of tourism, the geographic area (Day, 1981). In this view, competitors are entities operating in the same sector and offering similar products (services), targeting similar customers and possibly operating in a common geographic area. Importantly, features of competition understood in this way are the subjective perceptions of competitors, the possible asymmetry in these perceptions and the uniqueness of each type of competitive relationship, which is very entity-specific (Czakon & Czernek-Marszałek, 2021).

In turn, resource similarity, the second criterion for identifying competitors, is 'the extent to which a given competitor possesses strategic endowments

comparable, in terms of both type and amount, to those of the focal firm' (Chen, 1996, p. 107). A unique set of resources and their proper use determines achieving a competitive advantage. Organisations with similar strategic resources are likely to have similar strategic capabilities and also be characterised by similar competitive weaknesses in the market.

The presented criteria for identifying competitors are important for further considerations in the chapter. As will be shown, social relationships – influencing coopetition – can both stimulate cooperation between competitors and mitigate competition by reducing the commonality of the market and/or reducing the similarity of resources.

The Role of Social Relationships in Inter-Organizational Competitor Relations

Strengthening Cooperation Among Competitors Through Social Relationships

There are papers in the literature on how social relationships affect cooperation – as one of the two key relationships of coopetition (e.g. Grauslund & Hammershøy, 2021; Ingram & Roberts, 2000; Wolff et al., 2020). In addition to negative consequences such as price collusion, which Ingram and Roberts (2000) argue has previously dominated the literature, or the disadvantages of strong ties that can hinder or prevent cooperation, e.g. personal conflicts, limited innovativeness or greater exposure to opportunistic behaviour (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020b; Mitrega & Zolkiewski, 2012; Uzzi, 1997), overall, numerous positives of social relationships for cooperation are mentioned (an overview of these is presented in Czernek-Marszałek et al., 2023).

With regard to the importance of social relations for the cooperation of competitors in the tourism sector, Ingram and Roberts (2000), for example, emphasise the better transfer of information regarding market conditions e.g. price and occupancy information on a daily basis and strategic possibilities and operations (e.g. regarding planning the entry of a new hotel). Also, Tsaour and Wang (2011) argue that social relationships between competitors can foster cooperation. This is because they not only enable or facilitate the formation of various forms of strategic alliances but also influence their performance.

VonFriedrichs Grängsjö (2003), on the other hand, shows that there are generally two different sets of values represented by entrepreneurs in a tourist destination (so-called Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft). They decide to what extent an entity (more or less related to a given destination) wants to act for its benefit and to what extent it wants to act only for its own business. These values also determine what kind of relationships, including competition and cooperation (based on social or strictly business relationships), an organisation establishes with other market players. The results of the study show that 'the longer an entrepreneur has been involved in the destination the greater the number of personal relationships, even with regard to company contacts. The closer companies come to each other the more personal the relationships become' (VonFriedrichs Grängsjö, 2003, p. 438).

The importance of social embeddedness for cooperation in tourism is summarised by Czernek-Marszałek (2020a, 2020b, 2021). She points to the following benefits of strong ties occurring between entities belonging to a Destination Management Organisation (DMO), being both competitors and non-competitors: faster and easier access to key resources, flexibility of business activities, reduction of transaction costs, easier acquisition and transfer of knowledge, building partners' common identity, positive 'domino effects' in the whole destination, elimination of dishonest entities from the market and limiting inappropriate market behaviour (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020a). Generating these benefits is made possible by trust, which accelerates and facilitates the flow of information, while reducing the transaction costs involved. In addition, reciprocity is also important as it implies a certain commitment to positive behaviour in the future towards a partner. Moreover, an emotional bond and affection for the partner (in the case of relational embeddedness) and for the place (in the case of structural embeddedness), which involve a willingness to act for its (the partner's/destination's) benefit, are also very useful (the way in which strong ties are used in cooperation is described more extensively in Czernek-Marszałek, 2021).

Mitigating Competition Among Competitors Through Social Relationships

Far less often – compared to analyses of cooperation – is literature emphasising the impact of social relationships on coopetition through the lens of the competitive behaviour of partners.

For example, Yuan et al. (2020) argue that the existence of strong ties between competitors implies conflict avoidance in the relationship between them. This tendency to avoid conflict stems from fears that a close relationship will end and partners' trust will be violated. It may also have a broader cause – when an entity operates in an environment where relationship-oriented values prevail, while avoiding direct confrontation in conflict situations (the literature indicates that this may be characteristic of Chinese companies and less typical of Western companies) (Gao et al., 2010). Yuan et al. (2020) show how strong ties between competitors leading to conflict avoidance can weaken a firm's active practice of competitive actions. In doing so, the firm's market orientation is also weakened, leading – as their research results finally showed – to a decline in innovative performance.

Ingram and Roberts (2000) show that friendships formed between competing hotel managers in Sydney can improve the performance of organisations (measured by revenue per available room of a given hotel). This is done not only through the previously mentioned mechanisms of enhanced cooperation (which may create value for customers) but also through mitigation of competition and information exchange, with the latter selected by the authors as a separate element.

In the context of mitigation of competition, Ingram and Roberts (2000) highlight (1) tacit norms against aggressive competitive behaviour and (2) strategic awareness among competitors. The first element is about using strong ties to

create common norms and codes of behaviour, according to which entities behaving inappropriately will be punished by the community (group of competitors) and excluded from it. In the second– strategic awareness – it is about building awareness of so-called ‘strategic dispositions’ among competitors. Through social relations, competitors form a group of mutually understanding entities with a common identity. A feature of such groups is better sharing of information and higher levels of collective actions. Interlocutors in the [Ingram and Roberts \(2000\)](#) study indicated that the awareness of strategic dispositions was instrumental in avoiding bidding wars between hotels.

The authors additionally found that the benefits of social relationships between competitors are best achieved when competitors ‘are embedded in a cohesive network of friendships (i.e. one with many friendships among competitors), since cohesion facilitates the verification of information culled from the network, eliminates the structural holes faced by customers, and facilitates the normative control of competitors’ (Ingram & Roberts, p. 387). The authors also analysed the structure of friendship ties among hotel managers and showed that friendships are more likely between managers who are close competitors.

Affecting Coopetition Through Social Relationships

In contrast, studies on the importance of social relationships for coopetition broken down into its two simultaneously occurring components – cooperation and competition – are virtually absent in the literature. These studies are dominated by works whose authors refer to coopetition as an independent relationship. There are also works in which the considerations are only theoretical or where the influence is analysed of only selected components of social relations on coopetition, such as trust.

Here we should mention the previously cited studies by [VonFriedrichs Grängsjö and Gummesson \(2006\)](#) or [Ingram and Roberts \(2000\)](#), where it was found that social relationships (including community feelings) serve coopetition since they facilitate cooperating effectiveness and efficiency in a strategic competitor alliance. The positive association between social relationships (measured by the number of relationships that a tourism firm maintains) and coopetition has also been empirically substantiated by [Della Corte and Aria \(2016\)](#).

It is also worth pointing out the findings of [Kallmuenzer et al. \(2021\)](#). The authors address the topic of coopetition in SME hospitality family firms in western Austria. Their research findings show that for family-run hospitality SMEs, social relationships are a significant antecedent to coopetition. As they claim, ‘family firms focus on long-term relationships with tight emotional binding and trustworthy personal contacts’ ([Kallmuenzer et al., 2021](#), p. 8).

Meanwhile, [Tsaor and Wang \(2011\)](#) studied senior executives of tour companies in Taipei as competitors participating in horizontal strategic alliances and presented the role of social relationships in such coopetition. They analysed competitive intensity in the relationship between personal ties and performance in

the travel industry. The results of their research indicate that competitive intensity moderates this relationship. Personal ties affect the performance of a horizontal strategic alliance positively in the condition of low competition, but they become insignificant when competition is high (i.e. when there is a high degree of partner market commonality and partners are direct or immediate competitors (Das & Teng, 2003)).

In turn, Grauslund and Hammershøy (2021) investigated patterns of coope-tition in a merged tourism destination in North Denmark. Their findings show that coope-tition takes place on two levels (inter-firm and interpersonal/informal). The actors in the three towns show different motivations (patterns) for engaging in coope-titive relationships: passive, reactive and proactive. Moreover, co-location is a crucial factor in coope-tition. This is an important conclusion from the point of view of the role of social relationships in coope-tition, since it was co-location and the informal ties that came with it that, according to Grauslund and Hammershøy (2021), created the best conditions for frequent communication and thus for competitors to undertake and develop cooperation. They also created the foundation for unplanned cooperation between competitors.

In addition, a number of works refer to the role of social relationships in coope-tition and emphasise this role, but the studies either do not have accom-panying empirical research, or they only look at certain components of social relationships, e.g. trust or reciprocity (e.g. Tsaor & Wang, 2011) and their impact on coope-tition.

Research Methodology

This study presents the findings of qualitative research placed in an interpretive paradigm, in accordance with the methodology proposed by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007). Research of this type allows for the identification of new phenomena, concepts or relationships, contributing to filling gaps in existing knowledge (Graebner et al., 2012).

The research context of this study was broader – it was conducted in four different creative sectors, one of them being tourism. The sector was represented by cultural tourism entities, that is members of different types of culinary routes in Poland (restaurants, producers of food, etc – see Table 16.1). The findings presented in this study relate only to the tourism sector. The research was completed in two stages – in the first stage, 19 individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted and in the second – one focus group interview (FGI) with five people. The IDIs were conducted between February and March 2020 and the FGI in June 2021.

To achieve the research aim, we deliberately selected entities that (1) represent members of different culinary routes in Poland; (2) are diverse regarding: (a) type of services/products (gastronomy, accommodation, farming, etc.), (b) length of presence on the market (the oldest of the companies was established in 1926, and the youngest in 2019), (c) location (the entities were located in big cities, e.g. Poznań, Wrocław, Katowice, Gdańsk as well as smaller towns – e.g. Lipka,

Table 16.1. Characteristics of Entities From IDIs and FGI.

No.	Code	Interlocutor's Position	Year of Firm Establishment	Location-City	Company Size (No. of Employees)	Voivodeship	Range of Activity	Type of Activity
<i>IDIs</i>								
1.	T1	Owner	2004	Koniaków	Small	Małopolskie	European	Providing tourist attractions, handicrafts (providing local cultural products)
2.	T2	Manager	2014	Poznań	Small	Wielkopolskie	Regional	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.); Accommodation (accommodation facility)
3.	T3	Manager	2006	Katowice	Small	Śląskie	Regional	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.)
4.	T4	Owner	2017	Gdańsk	Small	Pomorskie	Regional	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.)
5.	T5	Owner	2019	Długie	Micro	Podkarpackie	Regional	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.); providing tourist attractions; production/ breeding

(Continued)

Table 16.1. (*Continued*)

No.	Code	Interlocutor's Position	Year of Firm Establishment	Location-City	Company Size (No. of Employees)	Voivodeship	Range of Activity	Type of Activity
6.	T6	Head chef	1999	Wrocław	Big	Dolnośląskie	Global	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.); accommodation (accommodation facility); providing tourist attractions
7.	T7	General manager	2008	Gdynia	Small	Pomorskie	Regional	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.)
8.	T8	Manager	2000	Uniejów	Middle	Łódzkie	Regional	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.)
9.	T9	Owner	1962	Karnice	Micro	Dolnośląskie	Nationwide	Production/breeding
10.	T10	Owner	1990	Jaworze	Micro	Śląskie	Local/ regional	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.)
11.	T11	Manager	2009	Świętoszówka	Small	Śląskie	Regional	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.); accommodation (accommodation facility)
12.	T12	Owner	1994	Biała Góra	Middle	Łódzkie	Regional	Production/breeding

13.	R1	Manager	1990	Klementów	Small	Łódzkie	Regional	Production/breeding
14.	R2	Owner	2003	Kombrownia	Small	Podkarpackie	Nationwide	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.); accommodation (accommodation facility); providing tourist attractions; production/breeding
15.	R3	Owner	2019	Gdynia	Small	Pomorskie	Regional	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.)
16.	R4	Owner	1999	Żegocina	Micro	Małopolskie	Global	Accommodation (accommodation facility); providing tourist attractions
17.	R5	Owner	1991	Iwkowa	Micro	Małopolskie	European	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.); accommodation (accommodation facility); providing tourist attractions; production/breeding; handicrafts (providing local cultural products)
18.	D1	Director	2014	Opole	Middle	Opolskie	Global	Providing tourist attractions; handicrafts (providing local cultural products);

(Continued)

Table 16.1. (*Continued*)

No.	Code	Interlocutor's Position	Year of Firm Establishment	Location-City	Company Size (No. of Employees)	Voivodeship	Range of Activity	Type of Activity
19.	D2	Director	1998	Ustrón	Big	Śląskie	European	Gastronomy (restaurant, bar, cafe, confectionery, etc.); accommodation (accommodation facility)
<i>FGIs</i>								
1.	R1	Owner	1926	Pawłów	Micro	Świętokrzyskie	European	Production, breeding: apple orchards, pear orchards, large-fruited hazel
2.	R2	Owner	2009	Dolistowo Stare	Micro	Podlaskie	Nationwide	Accommodation (accommodation facility)
3.	R3	Owner	1996	Lipka	Micro	Wielkopolskie	Nationwide	Fishing farm
4.	R4	Owner	2017	Wrocław	Micro	Dolnośląskie	Regional	Gastronomy, providing tourist attractions, handicrafts
5.	R5	Employee	2013	Stara Wieś, gm. Końskowola	Micro	Lubelskie	Regional	Production of preserves from rosehip and quince petals and fruits

Source: own elaboration.

Jaworze, Świętoszówka, Koniaków), (d) size (most companies were micro-, small- or medium-sized firms, but at the same time, there were also firms of European or even global reach) (Krampus-Sepielak et al., 2020) – see details in Table 16.1. The majority of the interviewees were company owners, while some were managers or other employees, but all research participants had knowledge about the entity's relationships, i.e. cooperation or competition with other entities.

The study used a semi-structured interview containing 17 questions. These questions concerned, among others: understanding the very concept of social relationships; their types, sources and characteristics (building blocks); positive and negative aspects of maintaining and developing social relationships as well as their importance for business activity and inter-organisational relations (including coopetition with competitors and non-competitors). In total, all the IDIs conducted with culinary route entities lasted approximately 27 hours.

In the second stage (FGI), a group interview guide was used. It included open-ended questions and instructions for the interview moderator. The aim of this stage was to expand the knowledge acquired after the implementation and analysis of the IDIs, to explore the examined issues and to discuss them with a larger group of people, which allowed for mutual interactions and group processes to be triggered. The FGI with the representatives of the culinary routes lasted 2 hours and 22 minutes. Both the IDIs and FGI were recorded and then fully and faithfully transcribed.

The entire empirical material (IDIs and FGI) was later coded using abduction, i.e. a combination of deductive codes emerging from the literature review, supplemented with inductive codes resulting from analyses of the content of the interviews (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The codes used in the study are presented in Table 16.2.

It is worth mentioning that in order to increase the credibility of our research (Guba, 1981), the following activities were undertaken: (1) conducting the interviews in places indicated by the interlocutors themselves so as to create conditions for comfortable and free conversation (only the FGI was carried out remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic); (2) the use of thick description (Geertz, 1973) for the analysed phenomena, the use of field notes, and the development of full and faithful transcriptions; (3) establishing a detailed code list to ensure the reliability of the coding process; (4) the use of triangulation (various: type of interviews – IDIs, FGI; type of entities and their specificity as well as size, location and time of existence on the market) in order to ensure different views and perceptions regarding the analysed issues.

The whole material was analysed and then interpreted according to three interrelated activities: data collection, display and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The findings of both stages made it possible to obtain a coherent picture of the issue under study, which allowed the authors to better and more fully understand it. The findings, along with quotes from the interviews, are presented in the next part of the chapter. These quotes enrich the description of

Table 16.2. Deductive (D) and Inductive (I) Codes Used in the Empirical Analysis.

No.	Type of Code	Code
1.	D	<i>Social embeddedness mitigates competition by:</i>
1.1.	D	Sharing the market
1.1.a	D	Sharing customers/resigning from a given customer group
1.1.b	D	Differentiation of products/services they offer; resignation from a given product
1.1.c	D	Sharing the geographical area in which they operate/opting out of doing business in a given area
1.2.	I	Market expansion
1.3.	I	New products, innovations, competitiveness on the market
1.4.	D	Diversifying existing tangible and intangible resources/transferring own resources to a competitor
1.4.a	I	Transfer of information, experience, mutual assistance
1.5.	D	Subjective lack of perception of competitors as competitors, but only as cooperators
1.6.	I	Division of areas of cooperation and competition
2.	D	<i>Social embeddedness strengthens cooperation through:</i>
2.1.	D	Establishing new forms of cooperation
2.2.	D	Development of existing forms of cooperation
2.3.	I	Maintaining relationships for future cooperation
2.4.	I	Development of firms' activities, and thus also the development of cooperation
3.	D	<i>Cooperation and competition relations:</i>
3.1.	D	Establishing cooperation eliminates competition
3.2.	D	The development of cooperation eliminates competition
3.3.	I	Strengthening cooperation (also with competitors) thanks to social relations (also social embeddedness)
3.	D	<i>Social relations (embeddedness) of competitors – features e.g. trust, reciprocity</i>
4.	D	<i>The importance of social relations in tourism – in general</i>

Source: own elaboration.

the research findings and allow the interviewees themselves to speak, which allows the reader to better understand the studied reality (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Research Findings

The Importance of Social Relationships Between Competitors

The research findings indicate the important role of social relationships in the activities of entities belonging to culinary routes. Our interviewees emphasised that interpersonal relationships are the foundation of business development, also influencing decisions regarding establishing inter-organisational relationships, including the selection of business partners. The importance of social relationships between competitors was described by one of our interlocutors as follows:

The restaurant or hotel itself is just a building, exactly in the sense of the word. And in fact, in this case, the company itself is created by people, so interpersonal or social relationships are the basis for developing this business [...]. These relationships often influence the choices of our clients and our business partners [...]. In our case, relationships are the basis. [IDI-D1]

Moreover, as the participants stated, an organisation is made up of people, and changing people in the organisation may affect the dynamics of social relations and lead to difficulties in implementing specific business ideas. The lack of continuation of interpersonal relationships based on sympathy, a kind of ‘chemistry’ or a good ‘climate for cooperation’ may make it difficult to achieve the intended goals:

If you like someone, you want to work with them and come up with some additional ideas together. If you want to work with someone, if you like someone, if you know that – well, I don’t know – that they will understand the topic, that I feel the atmosphere with them, then let’s organize another festival, let’s organize some nice fairs or events here, that is, then as much as you want, yes. And when everything goes like it did in December, you can’t do it, it’s too difficult and it will be complicated, then you don’t want to, yes. We had a great team at the Lower Silesian Agricultural Advisory Center [...], specific people changed – someone retired, someone moved to another job and so on, and suddenly these specific people are no longer there [...]. For me, there is no such thing as an organization, because organizations are made up of people. And it depends on these individual people what this organization will act on and do. These individual people in one organization, when they get along with individual people from the other organization, then something cool will work, or it won’t work if they don’t get along. [IDI-T9]

Participants also indicated that many private relationships, including those with competitors, gradually evolved into business relationships, which contributed to both personal and business benefits:

These relationships may have been my private ones at first, and then they became company relationships, because one is from my group of friends, and secondly, it also brought a lot of benefits for the company itself, so we combined it as a partnership and good cooperation. [IDI-T11]

Perceiving Competitors Through the Prism of Market Commonality, Resources and Social Relations

The interlocutors declared that for various reasons they do not treat each other as competitors. In some cases, the reason for this state of affairs was operating on a different market (including a geographic market); in other cases, it resulted from occupying a leading position in the market and the belief that the entity had no real competitors. This group of interlocutors – indicating the reasons for such a perception of competitors – did not refer to social relations with rivals:

There are different types [of events] – fairs, where we even get to know the competition, because they are, well, everyone is scattered at one end and the other. It is not a competition either, because everyone operates regionally, just like we do in our own region [...]. [IDI-T12]

I'm going to sound a little proud now, but I don't think that [name of the company] has any competition on the market in this city right now. [IDI-T7]

The participants also did not perceive themselves as competitors when they knew, firstly, that there were few of them on the local market and, second, that they satisfied the needs of slightly different customer groups and had different strategic resources. Then, they declared that they were connected by cooperation rather than competition, as if cooperation eliminated or prevented simultaneous competition:

Moderator: Do you have competitors on the market?

Interviewee: Sure, yes.

Moderator: Do you cooperate with them?

Interviewee: Locally, we do not treat each other as competition. We cooperate. Everyone has some specificity. I have families with children, someone there has one for disabled people. Other accommodation units have, for example, small

rooms with bathrooms. So, it's like there's a different target group. We rather try to cooperate. I can't imagine us competing here and somehow lowering our prices. There were such practices in other regions, but these were probably places where there were a lot of accommodations. There is a psychological factor at work here – when there are a lot of us on the market, we start to fight harder. There were five facilities here, now there are even fewer. [IDI-R4]

One interlocutor additionally declared that she cares about the development of local tradition and industry; hence, she is happy with the increase in the number of competitors in the region with whom she cooperates rather than competes:

We have gingerbread makers scattered throughout Lower Silesia, which I am very happy about, because we want gingerbread to come back to life here, but really we cooperate more than compete with each other. [IDI-R2]

There was also a group of participants who declared that they did not perceive rivals as competitors and, as in the previous cases, the fact of cooperation with them puts rivals in the role of partners rather than competitors. At the same time, they were aware of the fact that they operated in the same market and served a similar group of customers, which objectively made them competitors. However, this group of entities admitted that the fact that they have long-standing social relationships based on understanding and willingness to help each other plays a significant role in this perception of competitors:

These contacts with other restaurants are based more on the fact that I know someone who works there – it is more in the sense that I treat them more as people than as business entities, because of course competition is competition, but also people who, whether they used to work here, or we know each other professionally or privately and work in other places somewhere, whether it's some kind of cooperation or exchange, it may turn out that we are missing some goods and they are nearby. However, sometimes we exchange, give or borrow something (...). [IDI-T2]

Social Relations as a Factor Mitigating Competition

Our research has also shown that social relationships play an important role in 'clearing the market' of partners who behave inappropriately – aggressively and rudely towards others. In this context, social relations in the environment served to

eliminate such entities from the market. One of the interlocutors described such a situation. During one of the events, he organised – based on a formal agreement – he made it possible for a tourist entrepreneur to present his own offer. The entrepreneur represented a big company operating on a large scale. At the same time, based on social relations with another small entrepreneur from the local market (which he did not perceive as a competitor to the first one and which he wanted to help promote his offer), he also allowed him to participate in the same event. As a result, the former entrepreneur demanded that the latter be removed from the event, considering him to be his competitor. However, he did it in a very arrogant and aggressive way. The words of our interlocutor, presented below, show the effect of both positive social relations in the environment (allowing to ‘clean’ the market), as well as negative social relations between entrepreneurs that arise as a result of failure to comply with certain standards related to kindness, culture or honesty in running a business:

If we had a positive, mutual relationship [with the “aggressive entrepreneur”], I would help him even more. However, because he behaved like a total boor, he started shouting at me and doing who knows what, [...] in the end the guy disappeared from the market, even though he was in ten companies and came here on purpose, within a month he stopped coming [...]. The guy drove me crazy [...] and it just took one call to a few of my colleagues and the guy wasn’t on the market. There is no mercy [...]. It’s not about showing our strength, I’m just saying how these negative relationships later affect your career, earnings or something like that. As the old saying goes, it’s better to have a hundred friends than one enemy, yes. That’s how it works. [IDI-T6]

Moreover, our research showed that thanks to social relationships it was also possible to limit competition in the form of transferring one’s own customers to a competitor in a situation where it was not possible to serve them (e.g. due to an overbooked facility), while at the same time, they were competitors with whom good social relations were maintained and who provided an offer at a similar and appropriate level (hence there was trust that the customer would be served appropriately):

When we are unable to do something, we sometimes recommend the competition or contact the competition because we know that they can do what we cannot, or we could, but we have an exclusive restaurant or a booked date, and I know they can. [IDI-T2]

Interestingly, the interlocutors pointed out that thanks to social relations between competitors, they managed to develop a kind of ‘code of good practices.’ Thanks to existing long-term private relationships, trust between competitors and reciprocity in relationships, compliance with such a code may limit competition, not so much for the customer but for the employee. At the same time, the

exchange of tacit knowledge in this area allows entities to make important decisions, e.g. regarding the employment of new employees. This is how one of the chefs of one of the hotels described the importance of social relations with competitors in this context:

Five hotels open every year, so it's macabre [...]. I regret to say that for at least five years there have been people who have a completely different view. So let's say, we have had relationships with these people since 2010 and they are paying off [...], these are my friends, as I said earlier, I have positive, proven relationships with them. These are reliable people, not people who might make trouble [...]. So, you can say that we are closed in some kind of group of mutually accepting people, chefs or cooks, well, who value these relationships [...]. With my colleagues, chefs, there is no situation where, I don't know, a chef comes to me from [name of the hotel] and I employ him without my friend's knowledge. So we do not steal employees, it is based on such a code. Of course, if an employee says: "I'm leaving because I don't want to continue" and then says that he wants to work somewhere else, and then the chef says: "listen, an employee has come to me, what's going on?" I say: "listen, he's already here, I don't know, he's burned out, he's coming to you, I'm giving you my blessing" [...]. That's why I say, these relationships between us, the ones that are positive, that we have developed, will pay off later, because I won't get burned anymore, right? Even if it's someone from a completely different company, yes, so he's not from my circle, but I call them my, let's say, colleagues and ask: "have you had contact with him?" What can you say about him? Is he worth investing in?" [IDI-T6]

Social Relations as Conducive to Cooperation Between Competitors

The analysis of the research findings also showed that social relationships between competitors often make them cooperate. The interlocutors cited many such examples, and we cannot present them all in this chapter. However, we will focus on the most important ones.

The interlocutors pointed out, for example, that competitors – thanks to the social relations existing between them, including kindness, sympathy, respect, understanding and reciprocity as important elements of these relations – provide each other with mutual support expressed, for example, by lending each other resources needed in current activities, but also in crisis situations when quick help is necessary:

Maintaining these social relations, when it comes to management, definitely, all the restaurant managers know each other and if we cooperate often – as I said earlier – for example, replacing equipment, for example, my fridge broke down today, and God forbid, I call my friend Paweł from a restaurant at Aleja 40 and I say: “Paweł, lend me a fridge”, so they lend it, such an example, yes. So we all try to support each other and not undermine each other. Such relationships work well in this sense. [IDI-T7]

In addition to equipment, participants also indicated the exchange of promotional materials or valuable information (concerning customers or contractors) as a form of cooperation, stimulated by the existence of social relationships based on a high level of trust, a willingness to help and mutual kindness:

Development is easier because we help each other, because we cooperate, we also exchange our data – in the sense of contacts with customers – listen, it’s worth going there, they are a nice store, or the store asks: do you know any good cheese or flour producer? We also say it’s very nice, we recommend it, so there it is, it’s priceless yes. [IDI-T9]

The research findings also show that thanks to the cooperation among entities from the culinary trail; it is possible for the trail members to exchange experiences (which is especially valuable for new members), and, consequently, to introduce new ideas, techniques and products to their own farms or restaurants. Strong social relationships fostering cooperation can contribute to improving the quality of services and the development of the local community by promoting local cuisine and culinary traditions. As the interviewee’s exemplary statement shows, cooperation on the Podlasie Culinary Trail not only strengthens individual enterprises but also builds a strong community and supports the development of the entire catering industry in the region:

Cooperation meant a lot to me. Our Podlasie Culinary Trail is very young, we founded it in 2017 with over 50 members, but I think we are quite dynamic. As my friend mentioned study trips, from each trip I bring some experience to my farm, which I try to implement here, and at the same time, as we said, trips to some fairs, showing what we have, what products we have, what dishes we have. Such a well-functioning culinary trail is also an experience for those who are just starting out. We can share [experience] with those who have been operating for longer [...] and we exchange these experiences together. I think this is a very good thing. [FGI-R3]

The participants also indicated that thanks to the existing trust between competitors; there is no need to ‘spy on each other,’ and maintaining social relations serves the purpose of organising events in which direct competitors – chefs of several restaurants – take part:

I call, we get along, we have some kind of relationship, there is no need to spy on each other, there is trust [...]. And then we do some joint events like, I don’t know, Europe on the Fork, there are, I don’t know, 10 or 15 of us chefs who have to cooperate with each other. [IDI-T6]

The interlocutors also indicated that thanks to acquaintances from the past, e.g. from school, they have long-term acquaintance with their competitors, and thanks to honesty and trust, they not only exchange tacit knowledge about running a business, but also recommend each other. All this is greatly facilitated by the close geographical location:

We have competitors, until recently we were very happy because we simply had – so to speak – a monopoly in our niche segment, but the competition is growing [...]. When it comes to our products, there is a lot of sauerkraut on the market [...]. This is where we know each other, we cooperate with each other based on helping each other, letting each other know what’s going on, and if someone – just like us, wanted to see what pasteurization looks like at their place, what their halls look like, they invited us – or if we have any contacts, someone wants something, needs to buy something, and we know they can produce it, we recommend them. And it’s very cool, it’s so sincere, honest. It all came about because we established such a deeper relationship because Michał – my brother, who runs the farm – and Tomek, who took over from my father in Ścinawa, went to school together. Today it’s going well and Ścinawa is also geographically close to us and that’s cool. [IDI-T9]

Referring more broadly to the issue of location, the research results indicate that cooperation between competitors based on strong social relationships takes place mainly at the local level. A common location makes it easier to build trust because it allows you to get to know your competitors as both entrepreneurs and private individuals. It promotes frequent and long-term contacts, which in turn strengthens such elements of social relationships as trust, reciprocity and sympathy. At the same time, a common location is associated with so-called local patriotism – the existence of common norms and principles and the willingness to act for the benefit of the local or regional community. All this facilitates coopetition at the municipal or regional level but makes it much more difficult or impossible in the case of ‘outside’ competitors. One of the interlocutors even indicated that she was afraid of competition from ‘foreigners,’ especially larger

companies that do not operate locally, due to their greater opportunities to expand and promote their products on a larger scale, which may pose a threat to the small, local business she runs:

If we had competition that is very close to us, but we know each other, we can cooperate, talk, there is greater trust, but when a competitor enters Lower Silesia under the title [name of the company] – a company that comes from the north, by the sea and tells such stories that they are a small family company and they are starting and opening their own stores in shopping malls and all over Poland, we are afraid, because they have large capital, it is clearly visible, yes. We will never open a [name of interviewee's company] store in a shopping mall in Radom, we simply don't have the budget for it, and here we have one with an offer, active on the Internet, a lot of positive opinions and so on, so we have to be careful and watch. [IDI-T9]

Finally, one of the interlocutors emphasised that thanks to social relationships, it is easier for competitors to define areas of cooperation and competition and to stick to established boundaries, which facilitates better functioning in the industry and avoids unnecessary conflict:

If there are higher-level issues, they need to be sorted out. You need to explain to yourself, to others that at this level we just cooperate, at this level we do not cooperate, and you can say that in this environment it is automatic, because some people like each other very much, cooperate, and some know that they have this advantage [...], it's not like they don't shake hands, but they don't necessarily have to cooperate with each other. [IDI-T1]

Discussion and Conclusion

The Importance of Social Relationships, Their Sources and Components in Coopetition

The aim of the chapter was to show how tourism entrepreneurs' social embeddedness affects their coopetition by strengthening cooperation and/or mitigating competition. To achieve this aim, we fill a few gaps in the literature. We not only use the concept of social embeddedness, which has very rarely been used to date to analyse coopetition but also we analyse coopetition relationships at two levels i.e. interpersonal and inter-organizational, which is highly recommended in the literature (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Wolff et al., 2020). In addition, to date, the role of social relationships has not often been analysed in relation to coopetition, including in tourism.

Our research findings demonstrate that the role of social relationships for coopetition is crucial. They are, as our research participants stated, the basis of running a business, and some even called them ‘priceless’ in this regard. Their importance is also demonstrated by the difficulties described by the interviewees due to the inability to continue important and valuable business projects in the event of a change of people in positions in the companies with which one cooperates.

Our research confirms the results of other previous findings on the components of tourism entrepreneurs’ embeddedness in a network of social relations (Czernek-Marszałek, 2021; Jack, 2005; Tsaor & Wang, 2011). Although the literature has so far focused on the components of social relations of tourism entrepreneurs (both competitors and non-competitors), our research has found that social relations between direct competitors are also primarily based on trust, close personal relations, an emotional bond, respect for a partner, a willingness to help, reciprocity and so-called ‘local patriotism’ (Czernek-Marszałek, 2021). As for the extent to which – compared to non-competitors – these features characterise the social relations of competitors, it would be worth conducting separate empirical studies. However, these findings allow us to conclude that when strategic resources were not at stake, while there was a shared sense of local identity and proximity of location conducive to the building and development of social relationships, these relationships were strong enough to both limit competition in areas that were considered undesirable or unfavourable to the industry and to stimulate cooperation in areas considered desirable and necessary for both the industry and the route or tourist destination. Interestingly, none of our interviewees stated that they had hostile relations with a competitor, only one admitted that she was afraid of such competition, and others at worst stated that they did not have social relations with competitors (but this was never the case, for example, with entities located in close proximity). All of this leads to confirmation of the very important role of location as a factor conducive to building and developing social relations among tourism entrepreneurs (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017; Grauslund & Hammershøy, 2021; Kylanen & Mariani, 2012). It is worth noting that entrepreneurs did not treat these social relationships instrumentally. Rather, they saw these relationships as a value in themselves and were aware that treating this type of relationship instrumentally does not make sense in the long run. This is in line with the research of Ingram and Roberts (2000) about social relationships among competitors in the Sydney hotel industry.

The sources of the social relationships of the coopetitors were, in addition to shared location, membership in common organisations (including the culinary trail, but also the DMO), and graduating from school or workplaces together (former employees, supervisors or co-workers) (Czernek-Marszałek, 2021; Jack, 2005; Uzzi, 1997).

Social Relationships as Stimulating Cooperation

Moreover, the findings of the study show that social relationships between participants in culinary trails affect coopetition by both stimulating cooperation and reducing competition (see Fig. 16.1).

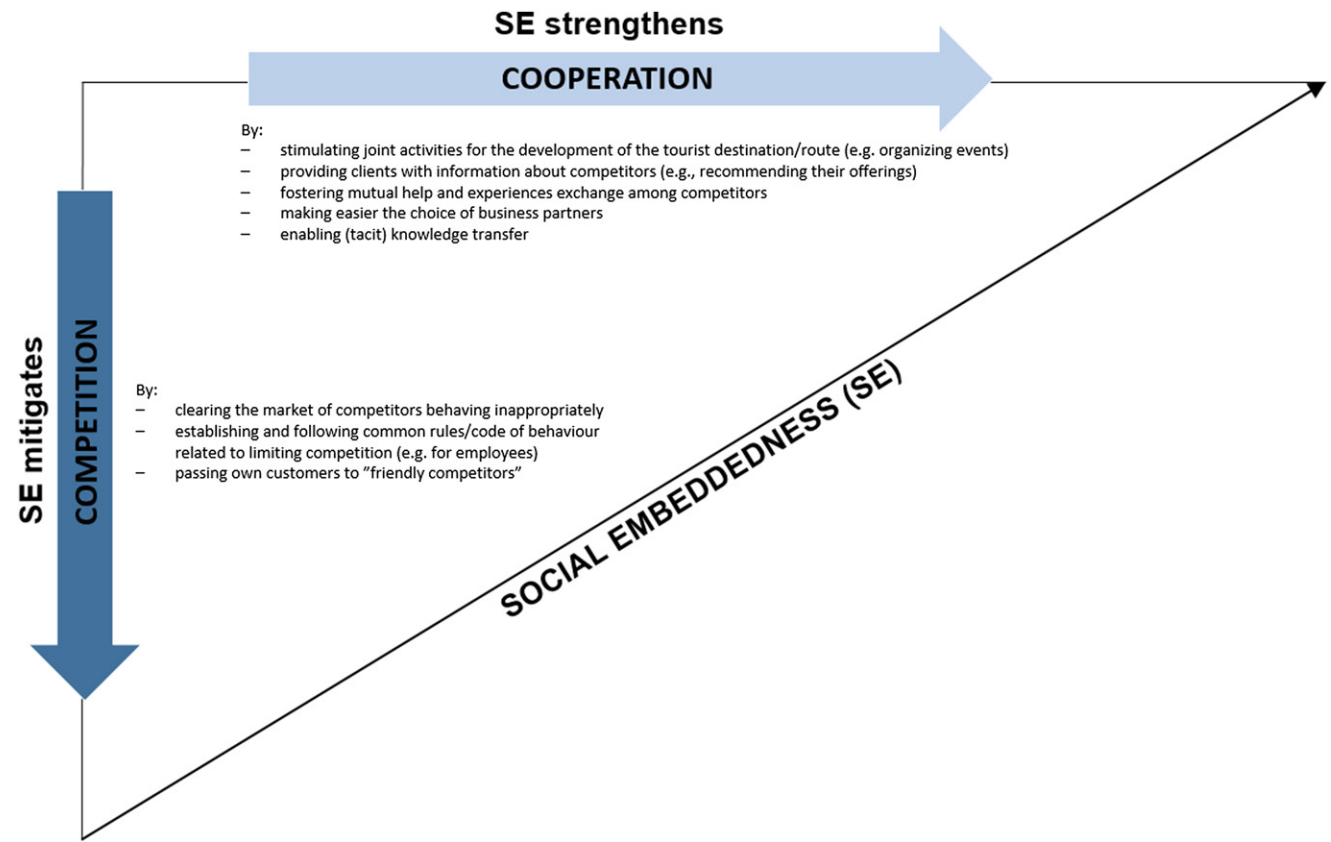


Fig. 16.1. Actor's Social Embeddedness and Its Impact on Cooperation and Competition.

In the case of stimulating cooperation, our research is consistent with other works on the subject, which have shown that social relationships (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020a; Jack, 2005; Ingram & Roberts, 2000; VonFriedrichs Grängsjö, 2003):

- determine the choice of business partners;
- foster mutual assistance between competitors e.g. lending resources to each other in more or less urgent situations, including emergencies;
- serve to provide information about competitors (e.g. recommending their offerings to customers);
- serve mutual promotion;
- enable knowledge transfer, including tacit knowledge about, for example, contractors or employees;
- serve to exchange experience, especially for the benefit of less experienced entrepreneurs (e.g. from a common culinary trail or located in close proximity);
- foster the organisation of events;
- stimulate joint activities for the development of the tourist destination (including strengthening the tourist and cultural offer and the sense of local identity, in the case of structural social embeddedness) and
- facilitate the establishment of areas of cooperation and competition and their respecting.

It should be acknowledged that the importance of social relations for coopetition in the form of facilitating its establishment (selection of partners) or the development of cooperation in a tourist destination is quite similar to that emphasised for entities that are not necessarily competitors (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020a). Our research identified one key reason for this. Namely, the way our participants perceived other entities in terms of competitors or non-competitors. Their subjective perceptions of market rivals were most often at odds with the objective perceptions of competitors resulting from the fulfilment of the conditions of the market and resource community (Chen, 1996). Among other things, our interviewees, due to their social relationships with other entrepreneurs, did not perceive many of them (objectively market competitors) as their rivals. This was not necessarily due to their limited perception capacity. In some cases, they recognised that they were operating in the same market and, for example, providing similar products aimed at similar customer groups. However, when there were few of them on the market, they recognized that the emergence of more similar businesses was not a threat to them – it was even necessary for, e.g. the survival of local cultural heritage (including culinary) or the development of local/regional attractions and thus the entire tourist destination (this local patriotism as a component of structural social embeddedness therefore played a significant role in this regard).

One interviewee even admitted that given the circumstances in which she operates (the lack of entities providing similar services to hers), she was glad to see an increasing number of competitors. In the perception of the interviewees, this combination of mitigating the commonality of the market and/or resources with

the need to act for the benefit of a partner or the local community as a whole (thanks to relational or structural social embeddedness), either did not position competitors as market rivals at all or positioned them more as partners than competitors. In such situations, interviewees declared that they were ‘cooperating rather than competing with each other’ as it were, recognising that cooperation precludes competition or that increased cooperation must entail reduced competition. This view corresponds with perceiving cooperation as antagonistic phenomena of cooperation and competition where they are operationalised as two opposite extremes on a continuum, where one increases at the expense of a reduction in the other (Ricciardi et al., 2022). Importantly, however, the lack of perception of each other as competitors was also due to the existence of often long-standing social relations between them and, as was stressed by participants, the perception of organisations mainly through the prism of acquaintances with people who manage or work in them. Often these were previous employees or people representing organisations located in close proximity with whom the interviewees also maintained friendly relations on a personal level. At the same time, a strong sense of belonging to a route and destination favoured the perception of entities outside the route or destination (not socially embedded in a given location) as competitors.

Social Relationships as Mitigating Competition

Referring to mitigating competition, we did not identify examples of competition being mitigated by avoiding conflict (Yuan et al., 2020) – none of our interviewees stated this directly. However, our research is consistent with the work of Ingram and Roberts (2000), which emphasises the role of social relations in terms of a kind of ‘market cleansing.’ According to an interview with one of the interviewees, when entrepreneurs do not follow certain tacit rules and norms in operating on the market and behave arrogantly and aggressively, social relations with competitors that make up the industry can serve to eliminate such players from the market. According to our interviewee, one phone call from him to a few acquaintances with a lot of clout in the industry was enough for the entrepreneur to be eliminated from the market.

The research also showed that due to existing social relationships, competition was reduced, as entities passed on their customers to ‘friendly competitors.’ This happened when, due to limited resources, they could not serve a particular customer. So, they referred the client to a competitor providing a similar level of service in whom they trust, while hoping for reciprocity – that is, the same behaviour towards them when a similar situation arose for a competitor.

The interviewees also pointed to the interesting role of social relations in developing a kind of code regarding behaviour towards potential and current employees. They said that their competition for employees takes place within boundaries that do not violate jointly established rules, i.e. they do not take each other’s employees, and they use social relations to pass on tacit knowledge about former, current and potential employees. As a result, they are able to make better

hiring decisions, while a lack of social relations can result in decisions that are in perspective unfavourable to themselves as employers.

Practical Implications, Limitations and Future Research

Our research also identified some recommendations of a practical nature. Recognising the importance of social relationships in shaping inter-organizational relations can help in enhancing overall business performance. Understanding the role of social relationships in coopetition can guide businesses in selecting suitable partners. Prioritising relationships built on trust, shared values and mutual assistance can lead to more fruitful collaborations, ultimately benefiting the entire tourism industry. This is because coopetition – driven by social embeddedness – can foster a sense of local identity and contribute to the overall attractiveness and sustainability of tourist destinations. Thus, recognising the multifaceted impact of social relationships on coopetition allows businesses to strategically navigate competitive landscapes, fosters meaningful cooperation and contributes to the sustainable growth of the whole tourism sector. All this means that competitors should treat social relations among themselves as a valuable resource allowing them to stay competitive and adapt to changing market dynamics. At the same time, due to the specific nature of the relationship between competitors (mainly due to tensions), they should build and develop social relationships with the competitor with special attention and care.

Our research has some limitations. The research findings are not representative in nature, so no universal conclusions can be drawn from them. The research is strongly contextual, although it was not conducted in a single region, and the subjects of the culinary trails were located in both small and large cities across Poland. However, it is always the social and cultural context in which the interviewees operate that strongly determines their feelings, as well as their decisions – especially when it comes to the topic of social embeddedness, which is already contextual by definition. However, this does not change the fact that many of the collected statements were similar, which indicates that to some extent the conclusions of the research can be considered more general and therefore more broadly useful. This could provide a starting point for further research in this area – perhaps in relation to other tourist destinations, other types of tourism and other countries and using different research methods, including quantitative ones. Moreover, in the context of future research, it is also worth emphasising that our research focused on the positive role of social relationships for cooperation and on limiting competition. However, social relationships may also have a negative impact on cooperation (too strong ties) and may also favour competition. Such an effect of coopetition should be analysed in future empirical research.

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