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## Tourism coopetition: An introduction to the subject and a research agenda

Adriana F. Chim-Miki<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Rosa M. Batista-Canino<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> Capes Foundation, Ministry of Education, Brazil<sup>b</sup> Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to verify the current status of the research on coopetition applied to Tourism. In order to overcome the lack of tools for analyzing competitive advantage generated by relational components, this paper suggests the use of the coopetition construct as a methodological tool for analyzing the cooperation in networks for the management of tourism destinations. To that end, we performed a bibliometric analysis on 'tourism coopetition' in scientific research papers published from 1995 to 2015 and indexed in the Web of Science and SciVerse Scopus databases. This helped us to conclude that coopetition is a behavior representing the key organizational methods of tourism destinations, especially when considering the interdependence and complementarity of this sector; thus, it should be a fundamental topic of tourism research. In this sense, the paper presents a research agenda in order to establish coopetition as key to understanding the behavior of all those involved in tourism at a particular destination.

## 1. Introduction

Literature recognises the terms *coopetition* or *co-opetition* as a new way of doing business in which cooperation occurs between competitors (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Della Corte & Sciarelli, 2012; Fang, 2006; Lado, Boyd, & Hanlon, 1997; Luo, 2007; Lorgnier & Su, 2014; Wang & Krakover, 2008; and others). The word was used for the first time by the businessman Raymond Noorda in 1992 in relation to the technology industry.

Two books, targeted to non-academic audiences, were the first works that presented the term as a concept or as a management system. These books inspired many academic studies that followed later. The most famous is the book '*Co-Opetition*' written by Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1996) and considered the seminal work on this subject (Stein, 2010). However, the book '*Coopetition: Global Tourism beyond the Millennium*' by David L Edgell and Todd Haenisch was published a year earlier, in 1995 in the United States, and was especially focused on tourism. The authors presented coopetition in the tourism environment as a process and as an attitude that must prevail if tourism was to become the giant in industry as acclaimed by economic forecasts. Written in a non-technical language, it introduces the term to the tourism sector, although it does not show how to implement a coopetition system in the management of tourism destinations in a practical way (Taylor, 1996).

Nevertheless, some issues should be clarified if one wants to understand how this new concept can improve the management of a

tourism destination. Firstly, the tourism destination is a unit of analysis in which the internationalization process is part of its development path. In this context, the construct does not yet have a paradigm status (Padula & Dagnino, 2007; Rusko, 2011, 2014), but the evolution of markets and networks indicates that it is a key point in the "*octopus strategy*" used by global corporations (Cygler, Gajdzik, & Sroka, 2014). In this sense, coopetition allows the corporations to create an environment where competition exists among networks and no longer among companies individually, thus belonging to one network that covers most of the players in an industry is seen as a successful strategy (Castro & Roldán, 2013; Cygler, Gajdzik, & Sroka, 2014).

Secondly, the tourism sector is of great importance to many countries because it forms a large productive chain that involves many actors and industry sectors. In fact, the total amount of direct and indirect activities that interact in the tourism industry forms a large system with different sub-systems. In this context, the sector allows interdependence among stakeholders when developing a destination, therefore building a coopetition environment.

Finally, in this sector Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) frequently promote the development of a tourism destination by setting a local and global strategy to enhance the destination in the international scene. This approach brings together a wide variety of firms that complement each other when developing a tourism destination, and where the stakeholders share a common goal (Della et al., 2012; Hitt, Dacin, Levitas, Arregle, & Borza, 2000; Rispoli & Tamma, 1995).

\* Corresponding author at: Capes Foundation, Ministry of Education, Brazil.

E-mail addresses: [adriana.chimmiki@gmail.com](mailto:adriana.chimmiki@gmail.com) (A.F. Chim-Miki), [rosa.batistacanino@ulpgc.es](mailto:rosa.batistacanino@ulpgc.es) (R.M. Batista-Canino).

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Despite this verifiable reality, the research in tourism based on cooptation perspective is very scarce (Bouncken, Gast, Kraus, & Bogers, 2015; Kylänen & Rusko, 2011). We are convinced that it is important to develop new research based on relational component to study the tourism destinations. It is a complementary way for the traditional approaches about tourism destinations that are worried about the natural assets or infrastructure. All these considerations alert us to the fact that a review of cooptation in tourism in isolation of other sectors is still necessary.

As a first step, this paper presents a brief theoretical review and the status of studies on tourism cooptation through the analysis of scientific papers indexed in the *Web of Science* (WOS) and *SciVerse Scopus* (Scopus) databases from 1995 to 2015. Although, we found few papers that applied cooptation in the tourism sector, we have defined some features of the current state of research on 'tourism cooptation', including: the number of papers on tourism cooptation over time; the main journals which have published articles; the analytical perspective used for researching tourism cooptation, the countries and researchers university affiliation that have published papers related to cooptation; and the main topics that the researchers relate to cooptation. Additionally, this paper proposes a concept of tourism cooptation and a research agenda for applying the construct to the context of destination management.

## 2. From “cooptation” to “tourism cooptation”: highlighting the relational component of tourism destinations

In academic literature, the concept of cooptation is elementary. It is applied to a relationship between two companies or to inter-organizational networks. The existence of cooperation and competition at the same time is what differentiates cooptation from other interactions among companies (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014). Therefore, cooptation is a behavior that generates a network relationship where cooperation and competition coexist. When this relationship occurs among a network of companies or in the economic sector, and it is managed as a continuous process, the result is a system.

Similarly, Padula and Dagnino (2007) consider cooptation to be an actor's system whose interaction is based on a partial goal – pursued by each individual-, and a congruent and joint interest. They explain that cooptation is a more realistic view of relationships among enterprises than competition. It is a coupled system where participants maintain some interdependence without losing organizational separation (Luo, 2004).

The initial model proposed by Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1996), shows this concept as a network in which cooptation occurs horizontally (among competitors and complementary enterprises), and vertically (among suppliers and customers). Indeed, it is a management strategy looking for better returns (Castaldo & Dagnino, 2010). In this sense, Lorgnier and Su (2014) claim that this hybrid neologism should occur within an organization, among organizations, or on a network scale, aiming to create value for protecting the same from competitors and to share resources, knowledge, and new ideas.

The relational component underlying this concept could also be considered under a perspective of capital social, being a network of relationships that adds value to its participants, by allowing them to access network-embedded resources (Adler & Kwon, 2002). In this sense, Castro and Roldán (2013) defined three key dimensions in inter-organizational relationships for performing better in international markets: the structural, relational, and resources. Cooptation is a construct that focuses on the relational dimension that acts as a mediator of the other two dimensions in order to improve the system results. This relational component is key in applying the concept to the tourism sector. In this sector, cooptation is a suitable perspective to its analysis due to the existence of a large number of networks that cooperate, despite competition. These networks are formed especially when the objective is to enter an international market, as well as, to

improve the performance in this market. It is important to note that when a tourism destination seeks to improve its ability to attract international flows, the cooptation network includes local and multi-national companies. Along these lines, there are also several studies on the importance of inter-personal relationships on the firm's competitiveness to enter the international context (e.g., Harris & Wheeler, 2005).

Thus, the firm and its suppliers or complementary organizations compete by the distribution of ordinary income (profits), and consequently, the negotiations between them are a form of competition (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Stein, 2010). Furthermore, when we focus on the tourist, there is also a common goal among the firms: They need to improve the tourism attractiveness and productivity; however, at the same time, they compete for the tourist's individual budget. In summary, the tourism destination is a unit of analysis that forms a strategic network with a shared goal, representing a collective enterprise. That is why it can be considered a suitable context to generate cooptation networks, because its structure often has:

(1) High presence of SMEs, which get better returns and business opportunities through network operations (Della et al., 2012; Maulet, Lazzarretti, & Petrillo, 2006);

(2) High presence of different companies with complementary products and services creating a degree of interdependence between the companies (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Gnyawali & Park, 2009).

(3) A form of government or an organization that gathers several companies in the sector in order to promote the development of the destination (Della et al., 2012; Wang & Krakover, 2008);

(4) Co-location, cultural proximity, and interconnection (Kylänen & Mariani, 2012; Lazzarretti & Capone, 2006; Maulet et al., 2006).

(5) High external competition generating the need for unity among the players in order to compete in the market, leading to sharing promotion costs, to designing marketing strategies together, and to sharing risks and knowledge (Czakon, 2009; Poulis, Yamin, & Poulis, 2012; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009).

(6) High internal competition between enterprises in different sub-sectors, because the tourist's budget is unique, therefore, all companies compete with each other, although they form networks of complementary or competing businesses (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014).

## 3. Theoretical background: cooptation framework

Due to the interest of this concept for tourism destinations, it seems necessary to first review what has been published about cooptation in literature on management and organizations.

On the one hand, most of the models that represent cooptation are based on the behavior of participants according to the different tendencies to cooperate or to compete (Lado et al., 1997). Other models deal with the different positions and contexts in the productive chain that can generate cooptation (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Garrafo, 2002; Luo, 2004). However, it should not be forgotten that the driving force of cooptation relationships is the heterogeneity of resources of the companies involved. This driving force sometimes gives the company, acting alone, competitive advantages, but other times requires a joint effort when accessing resources which are not available to all (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). Thus, more recently, authors are analyzing the critical success factors in management strategies based on cooptation (Chin, Chan, & Lam, 2008), as well as, the influence of cooptation in the competitiveness of a region or destination (Della Corte & Sciarelli, 2012).

On the other hand, the perspective of Systemic Competitiveness (Esser, Hillebrand, Messner, & Meyer-Stamer, 1996; Esser, Hillebrand, Messner, & Meyer-Stamer, 2013) distinguishes four levels of analysis: Micro, Meso, Macro, and Meta. This perspective applied to the set of cooptation systems (Fig. 1) considers the policies, the public administration and society at a Meta level, which would mean an optimization

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