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COOPETITION IN THE OPERATING OF THE TRADE FAIRS MARKET

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Abstract

Background. Polish trade fairs organizers are looking for new methods to optimize achieved results and more effective methods of development. Coopetition as a management strategy is used in many areas of the economy. Enterprises applying this strategy achieve better financial performance, and are able to more flexibly respond to market changes. Therefore, the question whether it is possible to apply the coopetition strategy on the Polish exhibition market becomes appropriate today.

Research aims. The aim of this paper is to assess the legitimacy of applying the coopetition strategy on the trade fairs market in Poland and to identify potential areas of cooperation between the trade fairs organizers as part of this strategy.

Methodology. The research took the form of a case study of selected trade fairs organizers, during which analyses the content posted about them on the Internet and other secondary information about their activities.

Key findings. In the research process the group of the trade fairs organizers performing a vital role on the Polish exhibition market was extracted. It was found that there are potential areas of coopetition on the trade fairs market and it is reasonable for organizers of trade fairs to look for opportunities to cooperate with one another. Coopetition should help pay attention to trends that appear on the trade fairs market and allow early adaptation to them. This will give the organizers the chance to increase the competitive advantage of companies outside the agreement. Analysis results of cooperation between organizers of trade fairs should help identify activities that will be satisfactory for all partners of the agreement.

Keywords: trade fairs, coopetition, exhibitors, cooperation, trade fairs market.

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INTRODUCTION

In the literature, trade fairs are most often presented as tools supporting the development of trade, stimulating innovation and competitiveness of participants (Bathelt et al., 2014; Kirchgeorg et al., 2010). In the macroeconomic dimension, they support economic growth and are the source of a number of social and economic benefits (http://polfair.pl/files/201604021122372013_Influence_of_The__Exhibition_Industry…_CEG_-_translated_by_Marcin_Domiter.pdf). In order to be able to benefit from their permanent and stable presence on the market, one has to, above all, optimize the strategies for their management. The Polish exhibition market, when compared to other European markets, is considered to be small but mature and constantly developing. In 2016, the Polish trade fairs industry recorded a 7.2% increase in the number of visitors compared to the previous year, a 1.3% increase in the number of exhibitors and an increase in the exhibition space by 9.6%. (http://polfair.pl/files/20171903105539Raport_PIPT_Targi_w_Polsce_2016-e-final.pdf).

The effects of trade fairs organizers' activities depend on the activity of exhibitors and visitors as well as the development potential of the region in which they operate (Blythe, 1999; Geigenmüller & Bettis-Outland, 2012; Kirchgeorg et al., 2009; Li, 2006; Rosson & Seringhaus, 1995). In order to achieve success, they must learn to use the opportunities resulting from cooperation with the city and regional authorities, fit in with its specificity, and, at the same time, attract the exhibitors and visitors of a given industry from the largest area possible (Proszowska, 2015).

However, the optimization of cooperation with business partners is not enough to achieve success in sectors with a balanced level of competition. Nowadays, more and more ambiguous (and, therefore, more risky) forms of functioning of enterprises on the market are sought for. Additional opportunities include searching for areas of coopetition with entities perceived traditionally as competitors. The presence of conflicting interests and tensions accompanying the application of this strategy result in the fact that these activities are called paradoxes (Czakon, 2013) and the strategy itself is often described as paradoxical (Czakon et al., 2014). Creation of joint projects that will benefit all partners is a difficult challenge but, looking at the popularity of coopetition in other industries (Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2013b), one can presume that it would also be beneficial for the exhibition market.

The aim of the article is to assess the legitimacy of applying the strategy of coopetition on the exhibition market in Poland and to identify potential areas of cooperation between the organizers of trade fairs as part of this strategy. The study is of both a theoretical and empirical nature. The theoretical presentation of the strategy of coopetition is accompanied by the analysis of the activities of trade fairs organizers from the Polish exhibition market based on the information published by the surveyed entities and reports of the Polish Chamber of Exhibition Industry, coordinating the functioning of this market.

COOPETITION – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The rapidly changing reality makes it increasingly difficult for modern enterprises to predict the future and guarantee their success on the market. Global competitive struggle with all market rivals is very exhausting, because it is increasingly difficult for companies to rely solely on their own resources and potential. The phenomenon of imitation makes it even more difficult to achieve a lasting competitive advantage, which significantly shortens the time during which one can benefit from being an innovator. It is natural to look for sources of success outside the enterprise and not only among partners, but also among existing competitors (Waśkowski, 2017). Therefore, more and more often companies choose simultaneous cooperation and competition, which boils down to seeking common benefits by creating cooperative areas within the scope of a coopetitive system. (http://www.uwm.edu.pl/egazeta/koopetycja-wspolczesna-forma-wspolpracy).

In the 90s the phenomenon of simultaneous co-operation and competition between market participants was referred to (1995) as coopetition by Brandenburger and Nalebuff. Further development of research on this strategy allowed for noticing that the specificity of a competitive relationship influences the shape of this strategy, making it more complex and multidimensional. Cygler (2007, 2010) defines coopetition as a set of streams of simultaneous relations of cooperation and competition between entities that maintain their own separateness, arise in order to achieve specific goals, in a given time interval and affect the parties involved. (A wider set of definitions of coopetition is presented, among others, in studies: Romaniuk, 2016; Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2013a).

The increase in the popularity of coopetition is a consequence of the growing importance of dynamic human abilities and intangible assets of the enterprise in the resource stream. The ease of moving these resources increases the role of network connections between organizations, and thus also the coopetition itself, which helps explain the changes in the nature of existing relationships (Koszel, 2014).

Figure 1. Types of coopetition depending on the intensity of cooperation and competition

		Collaboration	
		high	low
Competition	high	high intensity coopetition	competition dominated
	low	cooperation dominated	low intensity coopetition

Source: Czakon et al., 2014, pp. 121–150.

Depending on the intensity of occurrence of the elements of cooperation and competition in the activities of enterprises, the nature of the strategy of coopetition may differ. The example distinguishing the types of coopetition presented in Figure 1 is an obvious simplification of its dimensions. In fact, both competition and cooperation have a number of intermediate states between high and low. The lack of balance between competition and cooperation is quite often the reason why this strategy fails, which is why researchers suggest one should focus on its monitoring (Bengtsson et al., 2010). Also looking at coopetition in terms of the process, one can notice that with the passage of time, the shape of the agreement being its basis changes. The fact that the participants of the strategy of coopetition are usually natural competitors may point to the short-term dimension of these activities (because in the long run it is more difficult to find common goals), but market practice shows that they are often assigned a strategic dimension (Costa et al., 2009).

Due to the complexity and multidimensionality of coopetition, different types of this relationship can be distinguished. Taking into account the number of activities in the value chain (material scope) and the number of companies (subjective scope), one can distinguish: simple bilateral coopetition (two enterprises, one action) and complex bilateral coopetition (two enterprises and several activities connecting them). The next division distinguishes simple network coopetition (more participating entities and one selected function) and complex network coopetition (more than two enterprises and several functions of the value chain). The criterion of the intensity of the component relations distinguishes the loner coopetition (low intensity of cooperation and competition), the lumberman coopetition (poor cooperation, strong competition), the partner coopetition (strong cooperation and weak competition) and the integrator coopetition (strong competition and cooperation) (Romaniuk, 2016).

Entrepreneurs reaching for the strategy of coopetition want to benefit from the competitive struggle in some areas and cooperation in others. An example of such activities is the creation of a coopetition system for the needs of development research in the high technology industry when launching a new product for sale, as well as coordinating promotional activities of cooling beverages in the phase of the introduction of the offer onto the market (Czakon, 2013). Thanks to such moves, the offer of coopeters becomes more cost-competitive in relation to the products of entities that did not participate in this agreement.

Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1995, s. 29), characterizing the strategy of coopetition, stress that despite the fact that business is compared to a market game, it is not a game in the traditional sense in which the winning of one participant must mean the failure of the other. In business, the prize pool is not constant. It can either increase or decrease. They believe that the strategy of coopetition is just a tool that increases the prize pool. However, the literature notices difficulties in achieving the planned benefits, when direct competitors cooperate. Czakon (2013) emphasizes that the level of relational competence of participants has a significant impact on the results achieved. The basic benefits of using the strategy of coopetition include (Loebecke et al., 1999; Margani & Adawiyah, 2016; Mosad, 2004):

- scale effect,
- lower operating costs,
- professional development of employees,
- acceleration in the area of research and development by sharing knowledge with partners,
- access to new markets and technologies,
- higher consumer added value,
- profits for all participants of the undertaking.

The strategy of coopetition also has its limitations and they include (Mosad, 2004):

- building and developing new relationships requires investing certain resources and is always burdened with the risk of not only financial loss, but also a different way of interpreting their results;
- lack of experience of cooperation with a new partner may generate additional costs related to getting to know a new partner and adapting organizational procedures and is a potential source of conflicts during coopetition;
- actions for economic, cultural, psychological or administrative adaptation generate quite significant costs which concern only a part of the market activity of the company and are, therefore, subject to a higher risk of an unattractive rate of return on this investment;
- the more intense connections within the framework of coopetition, the more difficult it is for a single partner to control it, or even break the cooperation.

The conflict of the interests of entities whose core relationship is competitive is a threat to the strategy of coopetition. In order to eliminate it, the conditions of the resulting coopetition system should be very strictly determined by identifying the function of the value chain in which this cooperation will take place, as well as its duration and detailed conditions (Bengtsson & Kock, 1999).

STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT CONDITIONS OF THE TRADE FAIRS MARKET

The internal structure of the trade fairs market is quite complex and is designated by its participants and connections between them (Tafesse & Skallerud, 2017). The basic units operating on it include the following groups of market entities: trade fairs organizers, exhibitors, service companies, clients, guests and visitors (Szromnik, 2014, p. 28).

Between these groups of entities there is a series of intense connections, which are accompanied by the flow of various material and non-material streams. For the purpose of this study, trade fairs organizers are distinguished as a group of competitors potentially the most predestined to implement the strategy of coopetition, and their activities are the subject of further research presented below.

Precise identification of the development perspectives of the trade fairs industry (and thus the legitimacy and method of implementation of the strategy of coopetition) is the basis for shaping the policy of the organizers and will directly affect the level of interest in participating in organized events in other participants. The development of this industry will be influenced by a number of macroeconomic (Szromnik, 2014) factors, which will not be presented due to the volume restrictions of the publication. The detailed factors (Tafesse, 2016; Tafesse & Skallerud, 2015) shaping the market situation, related to the behaviour of the trade fairs participants, include primarily the increase in expenditure for marketing activities in general, the decline in the effectiveness of other forms of marketing communication, the use of trade fairs to monitor the industry and its representatives, and the treatment of trade fairs as a source of innovation – ideas for new products and enterprises.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE POPULATION EXAMINED

The research took the form of a case study of selected trade fairs organizers and exhibition facility operators. Within the research the content published on the Internet and other secondary information about their organizational activities were analysed. The selection of subjects for the study was made on the basis of the reports from the Polish Chamber of Exhibition Industry (PCEI; an entity associating key participants of the exhibition market in Poland and coordinating the organization of significant trade fairs on this market).

The condition for the functioning of the strategy of coopetition is the awareness of entities providing similar services, analysis of their activities and readiness to contact and cooperate. The first step in this direction, clearly facilitating the implementation of this strategy, is affiliation to an organization that coordinates the functioning of the entire sector. Event selection was made indirectly using the results of the PCEI analyses in Poznan. The research covered mainly trade fairs organizers (the list also includes operators of exhibition facilities) whose events were awarded certificate “Exhibition recommended by PCEI”. On May 20, 2016, this certificate was awarded for the next three years to 97 trade fairs in Poland. Of course, there are a number of different trade and exhibition events on the Polish market, but not all allow for being used as part of the long-term marketing policy of potential exhibitors (not cyclical, local nature of the event, etc.). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the list compiled by the Polish Chamber of Exhibition Industry was used as an initial list of trade fairs events.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the surveyed trade fairs is purposeful and includes only those characteristics that could positively influence the application of the coopetition strategy within the sector under examination.

In the vast majority of trade fairs cities, one key organizer (trade fairs operator) of exhibition events can be distinguished (in fact only in Lodz and Warsaw there are more than one trade fairs organizer). The dominant role on the Polish exhibition market is played by Poznan (and within it the Poznan International Fair Ltd.), which clearly overtakes other trade fairs cities (Table 1). The organizers of the listed trade fairs differ in the scale of their operations and organizational potential, and thus their expectations regarding coopetition differ. The basic area of activity of the surveyed entities is the trade fairs facility within which the company organizes its exhibition events, which, at a first glance, can exclude competition between centres. However, trade fairs events organized by them (at least the flagship ones) have a much larger range than the region in which the trade fairs is located. Therefore, it can be assumed that the enterprises distinguished conduct operations that are competitive with one another. Organizers of trade fairs events focused on similar topics have common potential customers and thus one should seek coopetitive links within common industries of the events organized.

As part of the PCEI report (Table 2), "Exhibition recommended by PCEI" were divided into 21 industry categories gathering events in a similar way. In connection with the above, it can be presumed that they will arouse interest of similar groups of both exhibitors and visitors and thus they are a kind of competition for themselves. So as such they can provide the basis for coopetition. The categories discussed are, of course, very broad and list the events of various themes and topics. However, it would be expedient for the organizers of trade fairs within particular industry categories to analyse the possibility of

Table 1. List of information about trade fairs in Poland in 2016* by trade fairs cities**

No.	Fairs cities	Number of trade fairs	Number of *** certified fairs****	Number of all exhibitors	Number of exhibitors at the certified fairs	Number of all visitors	Number of visitors at the certified fairs
1.	Poznan	55	49	9,873	9,768	617,250	562,017******
2.	Lublin	29	7	1,467	686	118,398	60,155
3.	Ostroda	15	0	875	0	100,996	100,996
4.	Krakow	10	9	4,064	4,003	121,857 + free admission*****	119,994 + free admission*****
5.	Torun	10	4	425	280	8,769	4376 + free admission
6.	Gdansk	8	6	1,580	1,351	71,842	71,613
7.	Warsaw	7	2	463	217	23,076 + free admission*****	21,713
8.	Lodz	6	4	709	618	25,454	21,339
9.	Katowice	4	0	439	0	10,814	0
10.	Bydgoszcz	2	0	70	0	free admission*****	0
11.	Sosnowiec	2	1	191	59	10,471	1,061
12.	Bielsko-Biala	1	1	768	768	10,965	10,965
13.	Janow Lubelski	1	1	119	119	5,159	5,159
14.	Rzeszow	1	0	45	0	free admission*****	0
15.	Wilkowice	1	0	27	0	11,928	0
16.	Wrocław	1	1	140	140	2,401	2,401

* The last full year, which includes the PCEI report containing information on the Polish exhibition market.
Source: http://polfair.pl/wyroznienia/targi-z-rekomendacja-pipt (access: 15.01.2018).
** The study used does not include reports from some trade fairs centres in Poland, such as, Grono Targowe Kielce (communication difficulties between PCEI and GTK). Nevertheless, it is the most comprehensive list of information on trade fairs organised in Poland. Moreover, for the purposes of the analysis of the possibility of using the strategy of coopetition on the exhibition market in Poland, some information limitations are not so significant as to make it impossible to draw conclusions on this topic.
*** Certificates were granted in May 2016, so not all the events from this year could get such a certificate, hence the differences in information provided in various parts of the report.
**** "Exhibition recommended by PCEI."
*****Free admission made it impossible to record the number of trade fairs visitors.
****** The results are not entirely precise. In a few cases, this organizer provided the total number of visitors of both certified and not certified trade fairs events.

Source: own study based on the report "Exhibitions in Poland in 2016" published on http://polfair.pl/files/20171903105539Raport_PIPT_Targi_w_Polsce_2016-e-final.pdf (access: 15.01.2018).

Table 2. Information about trade fairs in Poland in 2016 by industries ("Exhibition recommended by PCEI")

No.	Trade industry *	Number of fairs in a given industry category	Number of organizers of these events	Cities where these fairs take place
1.	safety, fire protection, defence	4	2	Gdansk (2), Poznan (2)
2.	jewellery, watches and accessories	2	1	Gdansk (2)
3.	construction, infrastructure	6	3	Lublin (1), Lodz (1), Poznan (4)
4.	chemistry	1	1	Poznan (1)
5.	education	4	3	Krakow (2), Lublin (1), Poznan (1)
6.	energy and environmental protection	5	3	Bielsko-Biala (1), Lublin (1), Poznan (3)
7.	industrial engineering, machinery, tools, ironmongery	9	4	Gdansk (1), Katowice (1), Krakow (2), Poznan (5)
8.	furniture and interior furnishings	4	1	Poznan (4)
9.	real estate	1	1	Torun (1)
10.	leisure, hobbies, entertainment	14		Gdansk (1), Lublin (1), Lodz (1), Poznan (10), Torun (1)
11.	travel	2	2	Poznan (1), Torun (1)
12.	printing industry, packaging, machinery and equipment	3	2	Poznan (2), Torun (1)
13.	agriculture, forestry, fishing	3	3	Lublin (0.5), Lodz (1), Poznan (1.5)
14.	cars, motorcycles	3	2	Krakow (1), Poznan (2)
15.	social fairs	6	2	Lublin (2), Poznan (4)
16.	textile, clothing, fashion	2	1	Poznan (2)
17.	transport, logistics, maritime economy	3	2	Gdansk (1), Krakow (2)
18.	beauty, cosmetics	2	2	Gdansk (1), Poznan (1)
19.	business services, retail	2	1	Poznan (2)
20.	health, optics, medical equipment	7	3	Krakow (2), Lodz (2), Poznan (3)
21.	food and drinks, HORECA	12	3	Gdansk (2), Krakow (3), Poznan (7)

* The division of economic fairs by industry was adopted in accordance with the PCEI methodology.

Source: own study based on http://polfair.pl/dla-wystawcow/targi-z-rekomendacja-pipt (access: 15.01.2018).

cooperation in the area of joint activities related to the organization of subsequent editions of trade fairs. Of course, cooperation would not have to involve the organization of the entire trade fairs event, but common actions at particular preparatory stages, such as, creating common address databases with the data of potential exhibitors and visitors, or exchanging experiences relating to customer service and organization of events accompanying specific trade fairs. The research on the level of customer satisfaction – both in the area of research methodology and research results – could become the platform of the exchange of experiences.

Table 3. Number of potential industry connections between trade fairs cities in Poland

	Bielsko-Biala	Gdansk	Katowice	Krakow	Lublin	Lodz	Poznan	Torun
Bielsko-Biala	–	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Gdansk	0	–	1	3	1	1	5	1
Katowice	0	1	–	1	0	0	1	0
Krakow	0	3	1	–	1	1	5	0
Lublin	1	1	0	1	–	3	6	1
Lodz	0	1	0	1	3	–	4	1
Poznan	1	5	1	5	6	4	–	3
Torun	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	–

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3 presents the number of potential industry links between trade fairs cities in Poland, separated based on the analysis of list "Exhibition recommended by PCEI". The given numerical values show the number of industry categories within which a given trade fairs city (and, in fact, the organizers located there) has a similar exhibition offer. The higher value shows the direction of searching for cooperation opportunities to be analysed in the first place. At the same time, during the analysis organizers should take into account not only the subject and nature of events that would be the subject of coopetition, but also the business potential of a possible partner. The dominant position of Poznan as a trade centre on the Polish market may pose a serious threat to other participants of the exhibition market. MTP sp. z o. o. (Ltd.), working on a joint project with a smaller partner, may strive to dominate this cooperation and ultimately take over its know-how, or even to absorb the smaller edition of the event. From this point of view, cooperation between enterprises of similar size and position on the market seems to be safer, although the opportunity to benefit from the leader's experience is also very valuable for a less-significant market participant. Therefore, all the options are worth considering.

CONCLUSIONS

The cooperation of organizers of trade fairs on the Polish market, often addressing their offer to the same exhibitors and visitors, is quite a new phenomenon. So far, only a few of the organizers have decided to organize the fairs outside their home base, or considered organizing subsequent editions of the events in changing destinations. Establishing cooperative relations between trade fair organizers should facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge sharing by entities that will make such a decision, despite the fact that they compete with one another on a daily basis.

In conclusion, it should be recognized that there are potential areas of coopetition on the exhibition market (examples of which were discussed earlier in the article) and it is reasonable for organizers of trade fairs on the Polish market to look for opportunities to cooperate with one another. Coopetition should help pay attention to trends that appear on the exhibition market and allow early adaptation to them. This will give the organizers the opportunity to increase the competitive advantage of companies outside the agreement. Detailed analysis of opportunities and threats resulting from cooperation between organizers of trade fairs should help identify activities that will be satisfactory for all partners of the agreement.

The results of these considerations may also be the starting point for the continuation of research aimed at a more complete application of the strategy of coopetition on the exhibition market, which could serve the development of the entire trade fairs industry.

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KOOPETYCJA W FUNKCJONOWANIU RYNKU WYSTAWIENNICZEGO

Tło badań. Polscy organizatorzy targów cały czas poszukują nowych metod optymalizacji osiąganych rezultatów i bardziej efektywnych metod rozwoju. Koopetycja jako strategia zarządzania jest wykorzystywana w wielu dziedzinach gospodarki. Stosujące ją podmioty osiągają lepsze wyniki finansowe i są w stanie bardziej elastycznie reagować na zmiany rynkowe. Dlatego zasadne staje się dziś pytanie, czy możliwe jest zastosowanie strategii koopetycji na polskim rynku wystawienniczym.

Cel pracy. Celem artykułu jest ocena zasadności stosowania strategii koopetycji na rynku wystawienniczym w Polsce i wyodrębnienie potencjalnych obszarów współpracy między organizatorami targów w ramach tej strategii.

Metodologia. Badania miały formę studium przypadku wybranych organizatorów targów, w ramach których analizowano informacje zawarte na stronach internetowych wybranych podmiotów i w innych wtórnych źródłach informacji na temat ich rynkowej aktywności.

Kluczowe wnioski. W procesie badawczym wyodrębniono grupę kluczowych organizatorów targów gospodarczych na polskim rynku wystawienniczym. Stwierdzono, że istnieją potencjalne obszary koopetycji na rynku wystawienniczym i zasadne jest szukanie okazji do współpracy ze sobą przez wymienione podmioty gospodarcze. Zastosowanie strategii koopetycji powinno pomóc organizatorom targów zwrócić uwagę na trendy, które pojawiają się na rynku wystawienniczym, i dać możliwość wcześniejszego przystosowania się do nich uczestnikom tego rynku. To da im również szansę na zwiększenie przewagi konkurencyjnej poza ramami umowy koopetycyjnej. Analiza rezultatów współpracy organizatorów targów powinna pomóc zidentyfikować działania, których realizacja będzie satysfakcjonująca dla wszystkich partnerów umowy w przyszłości.

Słowa kluczowe: targi gospodarcze, koopetycja, kooperacja, rynek targowy.

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