

Social Ties and Mutual Trust Driving Coopetition Networks for Regional Development

Laços Sociais e a Confiança Mútua Impulsionando Redes de Coopetição para o Desenvolvimento Regional

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Abstract: This paper aims to extract the elements and dimensions of coopetition in the context of social ties as the basis for the coopetitive network. Data were collected through interviews with managers from nine participants in cities that offer a tourism circuit. Data were analyzed through quantitative techniques and, for qualitative data, using the IraMuTeQ software and its interface with R. The result generated from the Descending Hierarchical Analysis indicated two dimensions. The first dimension represents the coopetition network formation, with elements of Belonging, Social Ties and Associations. The second dimension is the coopetition network consolidation with elements of reputation, legitimacy and intentionality. In turn, the Similitude Analysis

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points out cooperation as a central element with four branches arising: Social cohesion, Empowerment, Co-production and Coopetitive strategic adjustment. This finding is a newness and contributes to the coopetition literature by introducing empowerment as a factor for consolidating competition networks in regional tourism development.

Keywords – Competition; Mutual Trust; Social Ties; Tourism; Touristic Circuits.

Resumo: Este artigo objetiva extrair os elementos e dimensões da coopetição em contexto de existência de laços sociais como base da rede coopetitiva. As entrevistas com gestores de nove cidades integrantes da oferta de um circuito turístico foram submetidas a técnicas de análise quantitativa para dados qualitativos através do software IramuTeQ e sua interface com o R. O resultado gerado a partir da Análise Hierárquica Descendente indicou uma dimensão de formação da rede de coopetição, com elementos de Pertencimento, Laços Sociais e Associacionismo, e outra dimensão de consolidação da rede de coopetição com elementos de reputação, legitimidade e intencionalidade. Por sua vez, a Análise de Similitude indicou a cooperação como elemento central com quatro ramos decorrentes: Coesão social, Empoderamento, Co-produção e Ajuste estratégico coopetitivo. Este achado contribui com a literatura ao introduzir o empoderamento como um fator de consolidação das redes de coopetição em contexto de desenvolvimento turístico regional.

Palavras-chave – Orientação Empreendedora; Universidade Empreendedora; Terceira Missão Acadêmica.

Introduction

Coopetition is a subfield of strategy discussed in the academic literature since 1996, considered a hybrid behaviour that brings together two constructs previously conflicting, cooperation and competition or contest (Tidström, 2014). Many factors are pointed out in the literature as reasons or contexts that lead to this organizational strategy. At the heart of the inducing factors are mutual dependence and the search for shared interests (Czakon, Klimas, & Mariani, 2020).

There is an intrinsic tension in coopetition, derived from the duality of the construct (Tidström, 2014), and thus, a factor that acts both as an inducer and as a barrier: mutual trust (Araújo & Franco, 2017; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009); becoming a central point of conflicts and tensions resulting from coopetitive relations (Lascaux, 2020). Trust, mutual interest and commitment are success factors for coopetition (Morris, Koçak, & Ozer, 2007). Similarly, Mira, Le Roy and Robert (2017)

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proved that coopetition environments must be based on a typical mentality, personal ties and mutual trust, as well as belief in specific standard rules.

The study by Wang and Krakover (2008) showed that trust is present in all phases of a collaboration process with rivals, but they assume different nuances in each stage. Czernek and Czakon (2016) focusing on trust-building mechanisms, defined repeatable patterns of actions and responses in specific contexts, demonstrating that there are five trust-building mechanisms that lead to the formation of coopetition networks: visualization of individual benefits versus costs; assessment of the coherence of objectives; assessment of the motivations and skills of the partners; partner's reputation and legitimation by third parties.

However, despite many studies on the factors of coopetition, there are still few that are dedicated to examining the mechanisms underlying the construction of mutual trust (de Araujo & Franco, 2017; Lascaux, 2020). Even rarer are the works that analyze social ties (Durach, Wiengarten & Choi, 2020) and the sense of belonging (Mira et al., 2017) that can promote trust, boosting coopetition strategies.

Research carried out with companies and institutions in the tourism sector indicated that physical proximity contributes to stronger ties between participants in the tourism network (Kylänen & Mariani, 2012). Still, studies were related to the existence of shared attractions. Conversely, Chim-Miki e Batista-Canino (2017) proved that in some cases of coopetition network in tourism, personal networks' development can replace physical proximity and accelerate the creation of common bonds. Which leads to the question: can social ties contribute to the generation of shared objectives and boost the commitment to the coopetition strategy for regional tourism development?

Seeking to collaborate with this gap in the coopetition literature, this work aims to analyze the context of tourist circuits that generally involve more than one city or tourist destination; therefore, partnerships are essential elements (Pilving, Kull, Suškevics, & Viira, 2019). The case under analysis is that of a coopetition network involving nine cities located in the Brejo Paraibano region, Northeastern Brazil, which form the tourist circuit “Caminhos do Frio”, also known as Destino Brejo.

The present study aimed to extract the elements that form the dimensions of coopetition in the context of social ties as the basis of the cooperative network. To achieve this goal, it used qualitative

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methodology with data collection through in-depth interviews with the nine cities' leading managers that make up a successful tourist circuit. These data were subjected to quantitative analysis techniques for qualitative data using the IraMuTeQ software and its interface with R.

Theoretical Background

Coopetition, Social Bonds and Mechanisms of Mutual Trust: Theories and Propositions

Coopetition as a dyad behaviour of simultaneously competing and cooperating can be established between partners in the horizontal, vertical or mixed chain who share a common goal. Still, this behaviour demands the existence of trust between them. The establishment of interorganizational networks based on a coopetition strategy is considered the new frontier in the context of competitiveness (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2018; Czakon, Klimas, & Mariani, 2020). However, it requires commitment from partners with collective goals and individual ones, or even a strategic adjustment between the partners (Czakon et al., 2020).

Several sectors have operated in coopetitive arrangements and are studied in the academic strategy literature, such as in the Higher Education sector (Dal-Soto & Monticelli, 2017), wine industry chains (Monticelli, Garrido, & de Vasconcellos, 2018), the tourist chain or destinations (Czernek & Czakon, 2016; González, González, & de León Ledesma, 2015), technology industries (Hameed & Naveed, 2019) and others. One of the most favourable sectors for forming coopetition networks is tourism due to the interdependence and complementarity between organizations to create the tourist destination's comprehensive offer (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2018). However, even with high interdependence, complementarity, and even a strategic adjustment, the consolidation of an effective coopetition network is mediated by factors such as commitment and mutual trust (Czakon et al., 2020).

The interpersonal commitment between organizations in the context of small tourism companies that operate cooperatively was studied by Pesämaa, Pieper, Da Silva, Black, and Hair Jr. (2013), who identified that trust and reciprocity are precursors of the commitment to the formation of coopetition networks. In turn, mutual trust is a determinant present in most coopetition models regardless of the

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sector in which the network operates (Bouncken & Fredrich, 2012). Still, in most of them, it is studied as one among the various elements that generate coopetition.

Studies dedicated to understanding the formation of mutual trust in coopetition contexts are still few in the literature, and the most recent ones show similar results. For example, Araujo and Franco (2017) defined, in the context of dyad coopetition in the sector of mechanical engineering industries, five confidence-building mechanisms: mutual dependence, previous experience and reputation, awareness of the risks of opportunistic behaviour, contractual agreement and, dynamic process. The results of these authors are partially aligned with the findings of Czernek and Czakon (2016) in tourist coopetition networks, which also demonstrated five elements for building trust: visualization of individual benefits versus costs; assessment of the coherence of objectives; assessment of the motivations and skills of the partners; partner's reputation and legitimation by third parties.

Ritala and Hurmelinna-Laukkanen (2009), in the context of innovation, demonstrated that the low level of confidence weakens the results that the coopetition strategy can obtain. Its products are in line with Brolos (2009), who stated that trust is one of the social lubricants that can improve collaboration between various partners. Likewise, Lascaux (2020) said that there is a positive reaction between intergroup trust and radical innovation conceived in multifunctional cooperation. Thus radical innovation develops as collaborative practices between units to promote mutual trust (Lascaux, 2020). In this perspective, a recent study developed by Muthusamy and Dass (2021) showed that inter-firm trust is a relevant factor in developing strategic alliances, which are stronger among partnerships with great mutual influence coopetition and weaker among international partnerships.

Still in this same context, but bringing together the elements of trust and dependence, Bouncken and Fredrich (2012) found that they are inherent elements that always affect coopetition relationships. This statement was corroborated by Hameed and Naveed (2019) when applying a model of structural equations in coopetition networks of technology industries whose result indicated that trust is a mediating variable between the relationship of coopetition and performance in innovation, together with dependence; therefore, both variables increase the positive effect of coopetition.

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Affective and cognitive conflicts' roles in B2B coopetition relationships were also investigated. The findings of Chai, Li, Clauss, and Tangpong (2019) indicated that trust moderates the indirect effect of coopetition and its efficiency through cognitive conflicts, but not because of affective conflicts. On the other hand, the existing opportunism in coopetition relationships is reduced by using coopetition strategies mediated by a mutual trust (Yu, 2019). Therefore, other factors come into play for the generation of trust, such as the social cohesion generated by similarity among the participants, which according to Coote, Forrest, and Tam (2003), can be based on physical, social or economic characteristics among the network participants. This similarity captures the belief in the existence of common interests and values, representing an approximation to the notion of shared values, previously identified by Morgan and Hunt (1994), or social ties (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2016).

Social ties represent the individual's insertion in society and his interaction with other individuals and groups. Granovetter (1973) indicates two types of relations, the weak and the strong. From this perspective, weak ties are more superficial, but they are sources of information, ideas, behaviours and innovation. They exist in networks that connect people in society, even though they are relationships of little emotional depth. On the other hand, strong ties occur between groups with greater proximity, such as family and friends. However, they are deeper but add little value in terms of information, innovation and resources (Granovetter, 1973).

Some types of tourism, such as community-based tourism, are recognized for their high level of cohesion and social bond, in addition to the collective sense of life in society, and, according to Irving (2009), they contribute to promoting quality of life, sense of inclusion, appreciation of local culture and the feeling of belonging. Tourist networks, in general, rely on factors ranging from social ties to the purpose of belonging and the shared vision of the development of the tourist destination. This shared vision generates the common goals that drive tourist coopetition (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2016; Della Corte & Sciarelli, 2012).

The shared vision stems from mutual trust, social ties and common values, being a pillar for the formation of interorganizational networks of coopetition (Baruch & Lin, 2012). The relationship between these factors and the success of coopetition is accentuated when the network covers an entire

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society, as is the case of alliances for the formation of destinations or tourist circuits (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2018). A study of multiple cases of tour operators in Macau indicated that tour operators adopt an institutional logic of coopetition that goes through five stages: prospecting, exploration, bridge, sharing and widening borders, generating coevolution for the tourism economy (Fong, Wong, & Hong, 2018). Mutual trust permeates these phases and can result from numerous factors present in interorganizational relationships, such as benevolence (Ganesan, 1994), honesty and integrity (Smith & Barclay, 1997), equity (Dyer & Chu, 2000), credibility or reputation of the partner (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Czernek & Czakon, 2016; Ganesan, 1994), competence (Czernek & Czakon, 2016), responsibility (Smith & Barclay, 1997), among others.

Trust, interaction and shared vision were treated as part of the relational dimension of social capital in the coopetition model proposed by Baruch and Lin (2012) that analyses knowledge sharing between teams. These variables are considered mediators and drivers of team performance. Associated with coopetition, social capital represents social organisations' characteristics, such as networks, norms, and social trust, which facilitate coopetition and obtain mutual benefits (Baruch & Lin, 2012).

Another study related to coopetition and social ties was developed by Tsai (2002), who considered social interactions an essential element of social capital's structural dimension to promote knowledge transfer between organisations. He hypothesised that informal relationships generate trust, create social bonds, and facilitate cooperation mechanisms and synergistic benefits between competitors (Tsai, 2002).

As exposed in this brief theoretical review, the coopetition literature indicates dimensions that bring together network enhancing elements, which have been adapted from various theories for coopetition studies. Table 1 presents a systematization of these elements along with the corresponding theoretical basis.

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Table 1.
Potentializing dimensions of coopetition networks.

| Guiding Elements | Theoretical Basis |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Mutual trust | Araujo and Franco (2017), Ritala and Hurmelinna-Laukkanen (2009), Bouncken and Fredrich (2012), Hameed and Naveed (2019), Chai, Li, Clauss, and Tangpong (2019), Yu (2019) and Chim-Miki and Batista-Canino (2017; 2018) |
| Social ties and social cohesion | Chai, Li, Clauss & Tangpong (2019), Coote, Forrest and Tam (2003) and Chim-Miki and Batista-Canino (2017) |
| Shared values | Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Chim-Miki and Batista-Canino (2018) |
| Interpersonal commitment | Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Pesämaa et al. (2013) |
| Mutual dependence | Bouncken and Fredrich (2012), Araujo and Franco (2017) and Hameed and Naveed (2019) |
| Previous experience | Araújo and Franco (2017), Smith and Barclay (1997) and Czernek and Czakon (2016) |
| Partner reputation | Araújo and Franco (2017), Ganesan (1994), Czernek and Czakon (2016) and Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah (2016) |
| Awareness of risks and benefits | Araújo and Franco (2017), Fong, Wong, and Hong (2018) and Czernek and Czakon (2016) |

Source: Author's elaboration.

The guiding elements of the dimensions that enhance coopetition behaviour can be found in networks or productive arrangements and at different levels, such as intra-organizational, inter-organizational, or society (Oliveira-Ribeiro, 2020). An example in the literature of coopetition is the networks for the development of destinations or tourist circuits.

Tourist circuits are arrangements that bring together the public and private sectors and organized civil society and may include more than one city or tourist destination and multisectoral partnerships (Pilving et al., 2019). They start from the identification, formation, construction and operationalization of agglomerates based on tourist activity in a regional dimension (Santos & Pereira, 2018; Souza, Pena, & Moesch, 2017) therefore having the coopetition strategy in its operational base. Thus, the consolidation of partnerships is essential and understanding the relevant social aspects of the levels of cooperation and internal or external influences (Czernek, 2013).

As previously indicated, this research focuses on identifying the hierarchy of elements and dimensions of coopetition in the context of social ties. It is assumed that social relations and a sense of belonging contribute to consolidating tourism (Irving, 2009) and coopetition networks for regional tourism development (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2016; Della Corte & Sciarelli, 2012). Based on the arguments presented so far, six propositions were elaborated, namely:

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Proposition 1: The categories of coopetition indicated in the business literature, namely, Mutual trust, Social ties and social cohesion, Shared values, Interpersonal commitment, Mutual dependence, Previous experience, Partner reputation and Awareness of risks and advantages, also reproduce as the main dimensions of coopetition in Coopetition networks for Regional Development.

Proposition 2: Social ties and mutual trust have a higher hierarchy than the other elements in the Coopetition networks for Regional Development.

Proposition 3: The existence of social ties drives coopetition networks to offer tourist circuits.

Proposition 4: The shared vision on regional tourism development provides for associationism and, consequently, coopetition networks.

Proposition 5: Community empowerment is perceived as one of the coopetition network products aimed at tourism development.

Proposition 6: The sense of belonging to a tourist destination tends to produce the community's acceptance and involvement in the tourist activity. Therefore, it compels the formation of the coopetition network aimed at tourism development.

After the theoretical discussion is finished, the study continues with the description of the methodological procedures.

Research Method

Techniques

O This study is classified as exploratory, with a qualitative and quantitative method. Two techniques based on linguistic analysis were used, the Descending Hierarchical Classification (CHD) method and Similitude Analysis (ADS), both using the software IRAMUTEQ. The main advantage of using these methods is reducing the researcher's bias in the analysis of qualitative data, increasing the reliability of the results.

Assuming that words used in similar contexts are associated with a single lexical context (Reinert, 1983), the CHD method consists of the hierarical classification of small portions of text in classes that group elements classified according to the highest frequency and highest values of Chi-

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square in the class forming a Dendrogram. The Chi-square test (χ^2) is used to verify the element's association to a specific category; therefore, the higher its value, the greater the association. Also, $p < 0.001$ was used to indicate a significant association (Camargo & Justo, 2013).

Therefore, when the CHD technique is performed, the algorithm first divides the texts into approximately similar context units: sentences or fragments of sentences. Then, the algorithm checks the occurrence and co-occurrences of content words in each division and reports the results in a matrix. The occurrence and co-occurrence of words in units is the basis for assessing the similarity between the units summarized using a grouping procedure. The result is a hierarchical tree diagram (dendrogram) that groups units into classes that mirror a similar lexical context (Reinert, 1983).

In CHD, the classes and factors that best represent a specific linguistic context are detected. The units' classification allows to automatically identify and extract only parts of the texts referring to the same topic. For each class, the list of the most significant words is determined using the measure χ^2 (Reinert, 1983). The main advantage of this technique is the opportunity to quickly investigate the entire corpus of interviews to obtain an automatic classification of small pieces of text in a limited number of clusters that reflect their main content (and should reflect the central area of investigation interviews). Besides, this classification provides a first assessment of the corpus' general characteristics and should not be affected by the analyst's bias (Sbalchiero & Tuzzi, 2016).

To group the content of the interviews, CHD needs measures of (de) similarity capable of assessing the extent to which each interview can be considered similar to (or different from) another (Labbe, 2007; Cortelazzo, Nadalutti, & Tuzzi, 2013). The list of words with the corresponding number of occurrences reflects the linguistic profile of each interview. According to Labbe (2007), the distance is based on a sum of differences between the word frequencies in two texts. Given a pair of interviews A and B of size N_A and N_B with $N_A \leq N_B$, the distance d is:

$$d(A, B) = \frac{\sum_{i \in V_{A \cup B}} |f_{i,A} - f_{i,B}^*|}{2N_A}$$

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Where V_{AUB} represents A and B vocabularies (as a whole) and the $f_{i,B}$ frequency of each i word at the largest B interview is reduced accordingly to the size of the shortest A interview using a simple proportion:

$$f_{i,B}^* = f_{i,B} \frac{N_A}{N_B}$$

The distance between A and B is equal to the distance between B and A; that is, it is symmetrical, and the distance between each interview and itself is equal to zero and, more, if the interviews of two research subjects contain the same words with the same frequency, their distance is equal to zero (Labbe, 2007; Sbalchiero & Tuzzi, 2016). The intertextual distances calculated for all pairs of respondents were evaluated using an agglomerated hierarchical cluster algorithm; that is, the distance between pairs of clusters was obtained as the maximum distance between all pairs of elements of the clusters (Cortelazzo et al., 2013; Sbalchiero & Tuzzi, 2016).

The second technique used was ADS (Analysis of Similarity), based on graph theory, conventionally used to describe social representations, based on research questionnaires (Vergès & Bouriche, 2001). The purpose of ADS is to study the proximity and the relationships between the elements of a set in the form of maximum trees (Flament & Rouquette, 2003). According to Vergès & Bouriche (2001), the similarity is calculated considering greater or lesser proximity of the elements (variables) measured by the covariance weighted by a coefficient calculated on the variations of the elements, according to the formula:

$$r(i,j) = \frac{CoVar(ij)}{\sqrt{Var(i) \times Var(j)}}$$

Thus, it considers the greater or lesser proximity of the profiles of the variables i and j according to the covariance of the values obtained by i and j . For this, it is necessary to establish the similarity between the two elements i and j of X based on their response profile's similarity with the elements of the second set Y: the responses of the interview subjects. This construction involves calculating a “similarity index” between i and j of X, which depends on the calculation of the responses of all subjects for each of the variables (Vergès & Bouriche, 2001).

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The similarity analysis result shows a tree graph in which the leaves (respondents) hanging from the same branch form clusters of the closest interviews, and the branches originating from the same forks represent groups of similar respondents (Cortelazzo et al., 2013).

Data Collect

Data collection took place between August and October 2019 through semi-structured interviews with the tourist circuit managers Caminhos do Frio in each of the nine participating cities in Paraíba, namely: Alagoa Grande, Alagoa Nova, Areia, Bananeiras, Pylons, Sawmills, Solânea, Remígio and Matinhas. The interviews were conducted in person, recorded and later transcribed.

The interviews were conducted with open-ended questions considering the context of a sense of belonging and local social ties to identify the Caminhos do Frio Touristic Circuit's operational form. We sought to extract the elements that provide the alignment of cooperative strategies between the partners, which generated the tourist circuit's success and led to the consolidation of Destino Brejo. The interview script was developed based on cooperative elements indicated by the literature review summarized in Table 1.

A total of 270 minutes of interviews was transcribed and analyzed using IraMuTeQ software, which generated the separation of the corpus into 78 text segments (ST) and 2,692 occurrences (words, forms or words), using 83.33% of the initial corpus; therefore, only 16.67% was not used. After 60%, the textual corpus is considered acceptable; therefore, these analysis results are above the minimum level to be valid (Marchand & Ratinaud, 2012).

Analysis Accuracy and Quality

The study's constructive validity was guaranteed through the use of models and bases on cooperative that generated the pre-established categories of analysis. In contrast, the internal validity was guaranteed by using an evidence chain and identifying patterns in the various interviews' findings. In turn, the external validity was covered by the analysis via Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), eliminating the researcher's subjective bias in the analysis of qualitative data.

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According to Poupart (2008), the subjects' speeches may not be easily understood or interpreted. The lack of scientific criteria or parameters to contribute to the analysis of textual data is criticized by several researchers. Therefore, the use and dissemination of data analysis software have emerged as a solution to resolve these criticisms since they enable the organization and ordering of data so that its interpretation can happen (Santos et al., 2017).

Iramuteq uses lexicometry to analyse the text based on statistical calculations on the studied corpus's vocabulary. According to Salem (1986), lexicometry is defined as a set of techniques that apply statistical treatment to textual data, making it possible to analyse structural characteristics and content in texts based on the vocabulary used. This approach identifies trends, regularities and discursive styles through the association between words, expressions and concepts (Leblanc, 2015).

Finally, the reliability and rigour of the research quality were obtained by using two complementary analysis techniques. The interpretive consistency was achieved by applying theoretical elements relevant to the phenomenon as a filter for the results but keeping an eye on possible emerging categories of data.

Analysis of the Results

In the Descending Hierarchical Classification (CHD), the textual domains were identified and analyzed from the most significant words (Chi-square values) and grouped according to their respective meanings in classes, forming the Dendrogram shown in Figure 1.

All segments of text that belong to the same grouping (class) relate to the same topic but are part of the interviews of different people, who, in turn, may reflect different opinions. The processing result divided the corpus into two groups that categorized six classes (Figure 1). A list of the most significant words was used to describe the main topic of each class.

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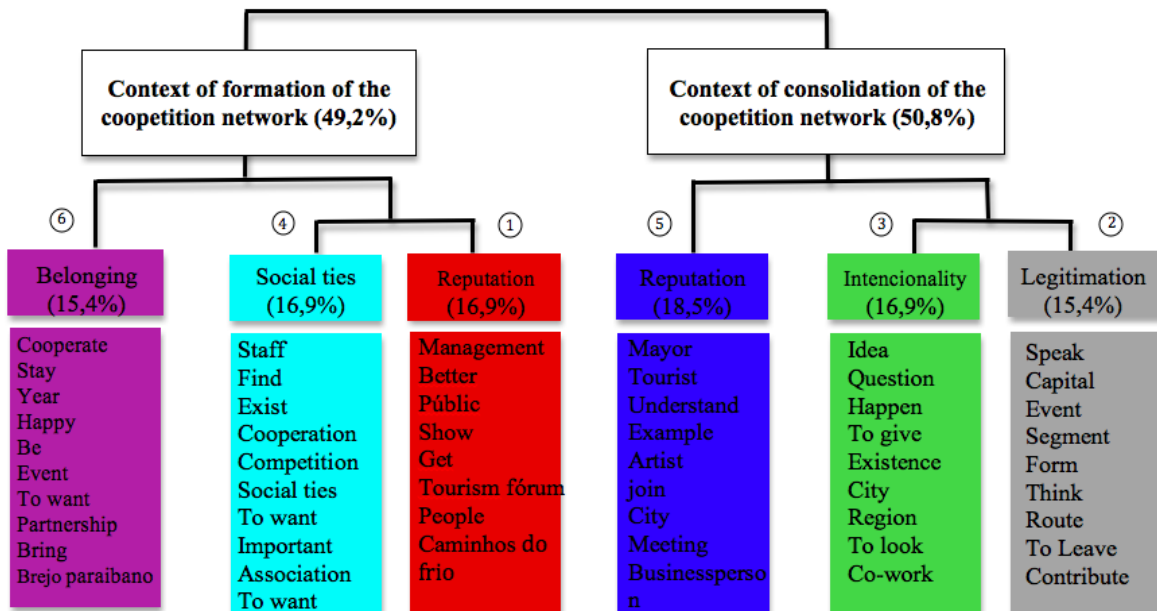


Figure 1. Descending Hierarchical Classification (CHD) of the elements of coopetition in the context of social ties.
Source: Author's elaboration based on IraMuTeQ.

There was a balance between the two groups indicating that half of the coopetition elements are related to the coopetition network formation (49.2%). The other half is related to the context of consolidation of the coopetition network (50.8%). Thus, the elements are divided into coopetition as a process and as a product.

The first group was called 'Context of formation of the coopetition network' and includes three classes of elements, called 'Belonging' (Class 6), 'Social ties' (Class 4) and 'Associations' (Class 1).

Class 6, called Belonging, has 15.4% of explanatory power and represents the willingness to cooperate that exists among Caminhos do Frio participants related to the feeling of belonging to the region, the pride of the place, the happiness of being in Brejo Paraibano and recognition of the other as a colleague, partner. The results are in line with the vision of shared values previously defined by Morgan and Hunt (1994) in interorganizational networks and indicated by Chim-Miki and Batista-Canino (2018) as a dimension that induces coopetition in tourist networks.

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Class 4 was called ‘Social Ties’ and obtained 16.9% of explanatory power from the analysed corpus’s set. The textual elements grouped in this class indicate that despite the existence of competition, cooperation prevails because respondents recognise its importance and want to maintain relationships at a personal level showing the existence of community and social ties between them. These are findings that corroborate the recent literature of coopetition studies (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2018), despite partially contradicting the findings of Chai, Li, Clauss, and Tangpong (2019), which showed the role of affective conflicts less important than cognitive ones in coopetition relationships in B2B contexts. They also represent the so-called weak social bonds defended by Granovetter (1994) that generate information and innovation, cohesion, and the social bonds and cohesion defended by Irving (2009) that occur in the development of community tourism.

Class 1 entitled ‘Associations’ with a 16.9% index, explains alliances and tourist associations that are very present in the analyzed context. Creating a tourism forum as a unique management association for the nine cities in the circuit conducted by the public sector in partnership with the private sector is widely recognized as the mediating element of coopetition, generating an inclusive network for all. These results indicate the alignment between interpersonal commitment derived from trust and reciprocity, as defined by the study by Pesämaa et al. (2013).

The second group was called ‘Context of consolidation of the coopetition network’ and includes three classes of elements, called ‘Reputation’ (Class 5), ‘Intentionality’ (Class 3) and ‘Legitimation’ (Class 2).

The Reputation (Class 5) obtained the highest level of explanatory capacity of the whole group formed by this CHD (18.5%). Elements of the social vision prevail, demonstrating in the elements of this class's textual corpus that there is confidence in the reputation of managers and entrepreneurs who drive the development of the Brejo Paraibano, considered as an example for the region. The partner's reputation for promoting coopetition alliances has been discussed more recently in the literature and, according to de Araujo and Franco (2017), Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah (2016) and Czernek and Czakon (2016), it is a fundamental point for the formation of the coopetition network; also it indicated the results of the present analysis.

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Class 3 was called ‘Intentionality’ and explains 16.9% of the textual corpus. It demonstrates that the strategy used revolves around a single idea or common objective developed purposefully in spontaneous cooperation that seeks a greater good for the region. It coincides with the several points highlighted in the coopetition literature, such as the adjustment of partners with collective goals in addition to individual goals (Czakoń et al., 2020) and the awareness of the risks and advantages in coopeting defended by Araujo and Franco (2017), Fong et al., (2018) and Czernek and Czakoń, (2016), among others.

Finally, class 2 called ‘Legitimation’, aligns with the theoretical assumptions of previous experience defended by Czernek and Czakoń (2016), de Araujo and Franco (2017) and Smith and Barclay (1997), but goes further. The results indicate that the community recognizes Caminhos do Frio as a cultural event at the region’s capital. They show that this tourist route has strengthened the nine cities’ union because of thinking and speaking of all local society around this economic segment. Thus, this finding indicates an inversion of what a priori is advocated in the literature, where the existence of partners with previous experience generates confidence and consolidates the coopetition network. In the analyzed case, the experience was built together thanks to the pre-existing mutual trust derived from the social ties creating a legitimation of the event and the actions planned jointly between managers and the community.

To add more depth to the analysis, a Similitude Analysis was performed, allowing us to see the connection between the elements of the interviews carried out (Figure 2). In this analysis, it is interesting to observe the interconnected words and the level of relationship between them, whose co-occurrence rate may be stronger or weaker according to the Chi-square test. This means that the thicker the lines are joining two variables, the greater their dependencies within the textual corpus (Marchand & Ratinaud, 2012).

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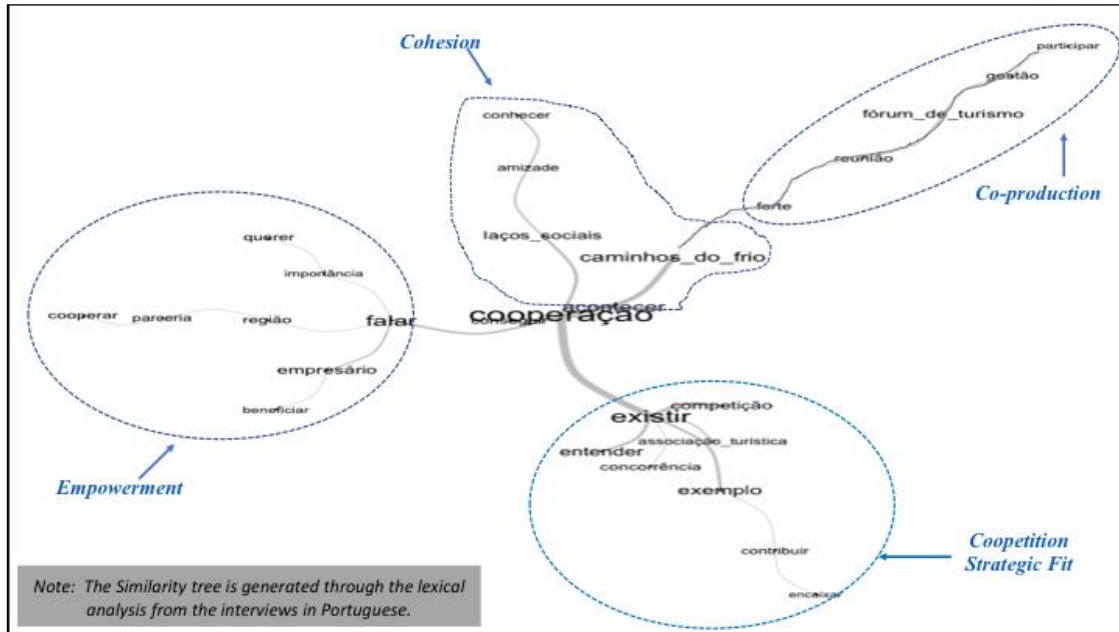


Figure 2. Tree of similarity of the elements of cooperation in the context of social ties.
Source: Author's elaboration based on IraMuTeQ.

Thus, this last analysis showed the strong relationship between cooperation (central word), with happening, existing, speaking and achieving. This makes sense in the context of Caminhos do Frio, whose cooperative behaviour among those involved involves actions focused on the events of the events, meetings and debates on the tourist region. The couplings pointed out from the word exist to demonstrate competition, competition, and, to understand, to contribute, to fit. They express cooperative behaviour and the strategic adjustment necessary for maintaining the network, in line with the findings of Czernek and Czakon (2016). From these results, it is also noted that the actors seek, through the tourist association, to articulate the interests of the participants, bringing more equity to the network, and, in this way, it provides the balance between competition and cooperation, which should be one of the benefits of using tourist cooperation strategies (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2018).

The connections resulting from the word happen are ways of the cold, strong, meeting, tourism forum, management and participating. As extracted from the textual corpus analyzed in CHD, the event takes place through several actors, such as mayors, secretaries, associations, tourism forums,

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businessmen, local artists, and the population, who together want to strengthen the region's tourism. The connections pointed out from the word 'achieve' directly connect with speaking, region, partnership, cooperating, importance, wanting, entrepreneur and benefiting. It follows from this nucleus the importance of communication between those involved and actions that favour the entrepreneur and the entire population, ensuring the maintenance of the sense of belonging, social ties, and the empowerment of the community that legitimizes tourism development an economic activity.

The words social ties, friendship, and knowledge directly connect with the word cooperation (central); therefore, the relevance of friendship and social ties in coopetitive behaviour is noted. From these results, it follows that, in contexts of a sense of belonging, social ties are strengthened and consequently become the moderator of mutual trust for coopetition networks and assume the role of driving force.

In summary, the findings of applying this method of analysis follow the graph theory, conventionally used to describe social representations, based on research questionnaires (Vergès & Bouriche, 2001). The similitude tree resulting from this analysis showed four groupings of words indicated by their proximity and relationships, classified as branches of social cohesion, empowerment, co-production, coopetitive strategic adjustment (Figure 2). This finding contributes to the literature in the area by identifying a new element in coopetition networks that involve society. It introduces empowerment as a factor for consolidating coopetition networks in the context of regional tourism development.

Validation of Propositions

Proposition 1 states that the categories of coopetition indicated in the business literature, namely: Mutual Trust, Social Bonds and Social Cohesion, Shared Values, Interpersonal Commitment, Mutual Dependence, Previous Experience, Partner Reputation and Awareness of Risks and Advantages, also reproduce as the main dimensions of coopetition in Coopetition networks for Regional Development. According to the results obtained by the Descending Hierarchical Classification (CHD), this proposition is partially validated, since CHD showed a dimension of formation of the coopetition network, with

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elements of Belonging, Social Ties and Associationism, and another dimension of consolidation of the coopetition network with aspects of reputation, legitimacy and intentionality. In this way, two elements coincide in full (social ties and reputation of the partner); however, the other elements do not reproduce in the analyzed context or reproduce with changes.

Proposition 2 considers that social ties and mutual trust have a higher hierarchy than the other elements in the Coopetition for Regional Development networks. To verify that proposition, evidence from the CHD was also used. Hierarchically, the top feature was Reputation (18.5%), while Social Ties, Intentionality and Associations share second place in the hierarchy of elements, all three with 16.9% of representativeness. Mutual trust does not appear as an element in CHD, even though it is a variable in the coopetition network. Thus, proposition 2 has not been validated.

The existence of social ties driving the coopetition networks for the offer of tourist circuits (proposition 3) was verified through the analyzed evidence in the interviewees' statements and the results of the descending hierarchical classification dendrogram (Figure 1). Proposition 3 was validated, as social ties appear as a class of their own, evidencing their importance in the analyzed context related to coopetition and the tourist offer. Besides, it seems that the interviewees consider that it was through community ties, that is, weak social ties to identify under the theory of Granovetter (1994), that the circuit was created and consolidated. The excerpts from the interviews below show such aspects:

The existence of social ties influences and leverage the Caminhos do Frio [...] there is the formation of social ties and not only here in the city but also the itinerary (Secretary of Tourism in the town of Remígio – PB).

Yes, there are social ties, and it is growing more and more, and people are waking up because many times, even people from the city here are sometimes even excluded. But from the moment that she sees the event happening and that she can contribute, it fits. It fits in a workshop, and it fits in qualification; it fits in the presentation (President of Associação Rural de Areia).

Likewise, Proposition 4 is considered validated, in which the shared vision of regional tourism development provides associationism, and consequently, the formation of coopetition networks. Although the shared vision does not appear as a dimension of its own, it is an element identified in the

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interviewees' speech and permeates all CHD dimensions. The similarity tree underlies cohesion and co-production. The interviewees' statements reproduced below exemplify this context:

We still didn't have that vision. After we started participating in the Tourism Forum, we began to see that tourism has a better vision for the city (Secretary of Tourism of Bananeiras).

It is very peaceful because we also have a vision of the objectives of favouring another city. Matinhas can hire a band from Alagoa Nova. As we hired Alagoa Nova, we hired the Matinhas band. There we can bring from Alagoa Grande, as it happens (Secretary of Tourism of Matinhas – PB).

You have to show everything you have, our culture, our art, our gastronomy too. So if you have not joined, there is no beautiful event. The participants can see this now (Secretary of Tourism of the city of Areia – PB).

(...) so whoever is involved in tourism is in the association; he is connected and tuned in, knowing what is happening, what will happen, where he can participate, where he can improve (President of the Rural Association of Areia).

In turn, Proposition 5 states that community empowerment is perceived as one of the coopetition network products aimed at tourism development. This proposition was validated based on the evidence obtained in the interviewees' speech and the result of the similarity tree that describes social representations based on research questionnaires. Respondents show this result in their statements, for example:

Caminhos do Frio makes us have a sense of belonging, of empowerment. The community's involvement came about when the government said, look, we can no longer support the event. And then everyone got together, associations, cultural groups said I put on my show. Then it became stronger. Who took this step was Areia because Areia is the first city. The mayor said he did not want to do the event; hence an association called the tourist and rural association of Areia took over. (Secretary of Tourism of the city of Solânea – PB)

Our florist was the first in the state. That is why Pilões became the city of flowers. So since that time, we entered, but the persistence of staying on the Caminhos do Frio route is precisely the region's innovation and tourist development (Secretary of tourism of the city of Pilões).

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We must work precisely with the owner of those large properties, which is what we are doing. So that is why the enrichment of this community's tourist development makes the Caminhos do Frio impact more and more developed, more attractive (Secretary of tourism of the city of Alagoa Nova).

The foremost accountable for the economic development of tourism is the network of partners. That is our strong point. Every meeting that we hold, including at the Tourism Forum, is attended by the community (Secretary of Tourism of the city of Pilões – PB).

Finally, Proposition 6 considers that the sense of belonging to a tourist destination tends to produce the community's acceptance and involvement in the tourist activity. Therefore, it compels the formation of the coopetition network aimed at tourism development. This proposition is validated from the evidence extracted from the interviewees' speech.

And even other mayors report this today, and now with Caminhos do Frio, there is tourism, there is a word that we talk about a lot in the Tourism Forum called belonging. What belongs to you belongs to the city. Nobody can take it away. Its culture, the root culture (President of the Rural Association of Areia).

There is a compromise. The city embraces Caminhos do Frio because it is the feeling of belonging. So we see the population itself embraces Caminhos do Frio and is very proud to be part of this event (Secretary of Tourism in the city of Alagoa Grande).

It is an event that brings the feeling of belonging, high self-esteem and we are here evolving more and more. When we think of Caminhos do Frio, we think of showing what is best (Secretary of Tourism of the city of Remígio – PB).

We like to use the term “belonging”, that people use this space to participate in this territorial development, do you understand? Everyone is part of a whole (Secretary of Tourism of the city of Solânea – PB).

The sense of belonging unites all the actors involved in Caminhos do Frio here in Areia (Secretary of Tourism of the city of Areia – PB).

Therefore, according to the obtained results, five propositions were validated, indicating the hierarchy of elements and dimensions of coopetition in the context of social ties in the Paraibano context, as shown in Table 2.

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Table 2.
Validation of research prepositions.

| N. | Propositions | Validation |
|----|---|---------------------|
| 1 | The categories of coopetition indicated by the business literature, namely, Mutual Trust, Social Bonds and Social Cohesion, Shared Values, Interpersonal Commitment, Mutual Dependence, Previous Experience, Partner Reputation and Awareness of Risks and Advantages, also reproduce as the main dimensions of coopetition in Coopetition networks for Regional Development. | Partially validated |
| 2 | Social ties and mutual trust have a higher hierarchy than the other elements in the Coopetition networks for Regional Development. | Not validated |
| 3 | The existence of social ties drives the coopetition networks to offer tourist circuits. | Validated |
| 4 | The shared vision of regional tourism development provides for associationism and, consequently, coopetition networks. | Validated |
| 5 | Community empowerment is perceived as one of the products of the coopetition network aimed at tourism development. | Validated |
| 6 | The sense of belonging to a tourist destination tends to produce the community's acceptance and involvement in the tourist activity. Therefore, it compels the formation of the coopetition network aimed at tourist development. | Validated |

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Conclusions

This study aimed to extract the elements that form the dimensions of coopetition in the context of social ties and a sense of belonging from the discourse of managers of a tourist cooperative network. A thriving tourist coopetition network was analyzed formed by nine cities in Paraíba that make up the Caminhos do Frio Circuit. This network's choice was based on a coopetition strategy, and its success is driving the formation of a shared tourist destination: Destino Brejo. Data collection took place through semi-structured interviews based on dimensions highlighted in the literature, focused on studies of mutual trust in coopetition networks; therefore, the analysis categories were pre-established. The research subjects were the primary managers of the circuit in each city. The data were subjected to a lexical analysis for subsequent descending hierarchical analysis (CHD) and similarity analysis (ADS).

Based on the analyzed evidence, four proposals were fully validated, one partially validated, and one was not validated. The analyzed context presents what Granovetter's Theory (1994) calls weak ties that are drivers of information, innovation, and resources, therefore acting on a coopetition network's results. At the same time, they represent the structural dimension of the social capital of the coopetition

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network as defined by Tsai (2002), as well as a result in the relational dimension of social capital that materializes in mutual trust, interaction and shared vision or strategic adjustment (Baruch & Lin, 2012).

The results indicated that the coopetition strategy is a network process formed by the Caminhos do Frio tourist circuit. A product that generates collective and individual value generation and both go through empowerment through social inclusion in the tourist chain, appreciation of local culture and recognition and citizen participation in decision-making through the circuit organizing associations.

When managed in a participatory way in coopetition networks, these findings demonstrate that regional circuit tourism can produce an effect similar to community-based tourism, which is recognized for its cohesion, social ties, and collective sense of life in society (Irving, 2009). Thus, it is concluded that the Coopetition networks for regional tourism development formed by the nine cities in Paraíba that make up the Caminhos do Frio Circuit contribute to promoting quality of life, the sense of inclusion, the appreciation of local culture and the feeling of belonging, through the dimensions that drive the network, namely: Belonging, Social Ties, Associations, Reputation, Legitimacy and Intentionality, which produce from cooperation, social cohesion, empowerment, co-production and strategic adjustment between the partners of the cooperative network Caminhos do Frio.

Contributions and Implications of the Study

In summary, the findings corroborated with previous studies that define mutual trust as a mediating variable of coopetition and highlight the categories of prior experience, reputation and competence of partners, awareness of the advantages derived from coopetition, dependence and commitment. However, this study brings a theoretical contribution to the area by adding that, in tourist networks, social ties are the building blocks of trust between participants. The experience can be acquired jointly by the group when there is social cohesion. It also indicates that the advantages stem from the collective goals and the sharing of the sense of belonging and the empowerment of the tourist activity's subjects. In practice, this study's results imply the confirmation of a retro-feeding cycle of the two phases of the coopetition network, formation and consolidation, where social ties, belonging, and

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associationism are the formative dimensions of the coopetition network. Intentionality, legitimation and reputation of the partner make up the dimensions of consolidation of coopetition.

Also, among the practical implications, it is identified that empirical elements of the tourism network in the analyzed circuit made it possible to reach aspects of the actors' empowerment and joint actions regarding the strengthening of the coopetition networks. This finding will contribute to the more effective management of the Caminhos do Frio circuit coopetition network, and it could extrapolate to other similar contexts.

Research Limitations and Indication for Future Studies

A limitation of this research was the number of interviews, although minimized by the degree of saturation verified in the interviewees' discourse. More studies are recommended using different research subjects to cover managers and members of the community. Future studies using confirmatory multivariate statistics are also advised to complement these findings. Finally, this study is of interest to academics in administration and tourism, in addition to managers involved in circuit tourism activities.

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