



COOPETITION IN SYNOPTIC AND INCREMENTAL APPROACHES. CONTEXT OF THE CULTURAL SECTOR

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Patrycja Juszczak
Dagmara Wójcik

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Introduction

Economic practice shows that organisations cooperate with competitors in order to achieve their goals more effectively and efficiently, to provide customers with high quality services and products, or to attain a higher level of effectiveness of the organisation's activities. Although cooperation and competition are usually considered as two separate – even confrontational – types of inter-organisational relations, and prior research has indicated the incongruence of these two attitudes (Anderson, Narus, 1990), contemporary research and examples from economic practice confirm that both types of relations are in fact close to each other. The point of contact for these two types of relationships is coopetition, which is clearly observable in the rapidly changing economic environment.

The phenomenon of coopetition enables organisations to achieve many benefits, but a certain number of risks or costs may also appear, such as the risk of a partner's opportunism. Among other benefits, coopetition enables an organisation to use fewer of its own resources, or to manage them more efficiently as a result of accessing and combining them with the resources of a partner (Hung, Chang, 2012), thus reducing risk and operating costs. Hence, organisations more and more often enter into cooperation with competitors, and coopetition brings the organisation a higher value than competition or cooperation taken separately (Klimas, Czakon, 2018). Therefore, coopetition would appear to be a phenomenon of significant importance in the activities of an organisation, facilitating its development, and often also ensuring its survival in a competitive and complex environment. Researchers use a variety of approaches and perspectives to analyse this phenomenon. This article focuses on two approaches and uses a synoptic and incremental perspective to discuss the way in which coopetition is established and developed between participants.

Moreover, it is noticeable that researchers focus particularly on coopetition in sectors that make intensive use of knowledge, new technologies or innovations (Klimas, Czakon, 2018). Meanwhile, it would seem that coopetition may also be important in sectors with completely different specificity, such as for example the cultural one. The cultural sector is represented by such cultural institutions as e.g.: theatres, philharmonics (including operas, operettas), film institutions, cinemas, museums, libraries, community

centres, art centres, art galleries and other hybrid organisations that are working both within commercial markets and thanks to state funding (Ekström, 2019). The cultural sector is an important area of socio-economic development. Culture is not only considered to be a basis for building an innovative and competitive knowledge-based economy, but also creates an ideal foundation for establishing cooperation. Cultural institutions – established to create and disseminate cultural heritage – very often cooperate, increasing both individual and common benefits. The cultural sector plays an important role in the broadly understood economic life, creating jobs and a source of income for artistic, substantive, administrative and technical employees. Cultural institutions generate income for the local economy by spending on cultural services (local consumers, visitors). Culture is also a source of revitalization and economic development. It is seen as a driving force for other related activities, such as tourism or gastronomy. In the social context, cultural institutions play an important role in building and strengthening social capital, taking part in the community of people, and meeting various social needs, promoting norms, attitudes and social values. Cultural institutions preserve also the heritage of the local community, i.e., the past, monuments, traditions, and local history. Cultural institutions are often places where artists from various fields look for inspiration, e.g., artists, writers, film and theatre directors, architects, designers, or artists from many other fields of applied arts. The cultural sector, although it is an important area of socio-economic development, is relatively poorly recognized in many approaches (Ingram, 2016.). One of them is coopetition.

Despite the objective market premises highlighted in the literature suggesting the existence of coopetition, little or even marginal research attention has been devoted to researching this phenomenon among cultural institutions so far (Köseoğlu et al., 2019). Meanwhile, as already mentioned, cultural institutions strive to create links within their sector due to the common goal of spreading and disseminating culture. Moreover, although cultural institutions in the past sought sources of competitive advantage in artistic and operational activities, as a result of struggling with problems with financing activities and limited resources, now they seek this advantage in cooperation with competitors.

However, it should be pointed out that the specificity of entities operating in the field of culture makes it impossible to transpose the results concerning the study of coopetition phenomenon in business organisations. Because “entities conducting cultural activity are organisations that cannot be treated only in a market way, they cannot strive only to maximize profit or be guided solely by the logic of hard business” (Kocój et al., 2019, p. 7). The activities of these entities are therefore revealed in different purposes, operating conditions, methods of financing activities, criteria for assessing effectiveness, structures or methods of operation (Ingram, 2016). Moreover, as the literature emphasizes, in recent years cultural institutions have undergone fundamental changes, also in terms of the way of management.

Based on research conducted in the commercial sector, it can be expected that coopetition will ensure success for organisations from the cultural sector, provided that it is properly prepared and implemented (Zineldin, 2004). On the other hand, coopetition also entails practical difficulties – it requires managers to deal with contradictions, and from organisations – flexibility and adopting a paradoxical model of functioning. Considering the above and the fact that cultural institutions, due to their specificity, structure, and activity profiles, seem to be a particularly interesting research subject from the perspective of strategic management, the aim of the article is to fill the indicated knowledge gap and present the specificity of coopetition in the cultural sector. The theoretical contribution is focused in particular on two analysis perspectives to coopetition, i.e., synoptic and incremental, that have not been widely analysed both – regarding this phenomenon and the cultural sector. The article presents the findings based on the literature review results¹.

Coopetition in the literature

Even though coopetition is not a new phenomenon in terms of literature analyses, researchers have not yet developed a consensus on a consistent definition. The term “coopetition” is most often explained using the definition by Nalebuff and Brandenburger (1996), understood as a simultaneous occurrence of competition and cooperation between competitors. Thus, the concept of coopetition refers to cooperation of an organisation with competitors, in which, apart from cooperation itself, competitive relations between the partners also exist.

Coopetition presupposes the effective coordination of its participants’ actions, leading to the implementation of two groups of goals, i.e., common and individual, and therefore, in a certain sense, it enables the parties involved to pursue “partially convergent goals” (Dagnino et al., 2008). These goals are achieved through cooperation within some activities and competition in others. At the same time, the intensity of cooperation and competition changes in the course of the coopetition relationship.

Cooperation between competing organisations takes place in order to build and/or strengthen the collective power to fight against competitors more effectively and can be treated as an entry barrier that supplements the

resource profiles of the cooperating organisations. In turn, the organisation achieves a competitive advantage over other, non-cooperating entities, thanks to the combined effect of the pressure on competitors and access to resources that are not owned independently.

Researchers emphasize beneficial implications of coopetition for the parties involved, for example, its positive significance for the achieved results of the organisation, measured e.g., by profitability, sales growth or market share. For example, studies of coopetition between French football clubs showed that although it did not contribute to the improvement of the clubs’ sporting performance, it significantly improved the economic performance of the parties involved. In turn, research conducted by Le Roy and Sanou (2014) confirmed that coopetition had a greater impact on achieving higher market results than purely competitive or cooperative relations. At the same time, the literature shows that thanks to coopetition, organisations are able not only to achieve a greater share in the current market, but also to create completely new, common markets (Nalebuff, Brandenburger, 1996). Cooperation with competitors helps organisations to find areas in which their strengths or resources are complementary, thus enabling the development of new products or services. In addition to the indicated benefits, the literature also includes a number of other positive sides to coopetition, including (Bigliardi et al., 2011): mutual learning and stimulating creativity and innovation, improving and creating new solutions and ideas, reducing operating or transaction costs, achieving specialization benefits (synergy), increasing value and strengthening the organisation’s position in relation to competitors not covered by the coopetition system, access to partners’ resources, fuller use of market opportunities, expansion of the scale and scope of operations, and access to new markets. The indicated benefits are also the basic motives for undertaking competitive activities. However, it is worth pointing out that simultaneous cooperation and competition may also generate certain threats and negative results. Among them, we may mention, for example (Gnyawali et al., 2016): the risk of knowledge and information leakage from the organisation, the opportunistic behaviour of co-coopetitors, conflict between co-coopetitors that limit cooperation, investment in specific resources, i.e. those that are not typical for the organisation and will only be used for this specific cooperation, loss of cooperation opportunities with others due to exclusivity clauses, low effectiveness of jointly implemented processes and goals, and weakening of the organisation’s market position and image.

Coopetition is characterised by complexity and comprehensiveness and often becomes a source of both internal and inter-organisational tensions (Gnyawali et al., 2016). The literature shows that only when coopetitors are able to balance the positive and negative results of their activities is it possible to achieve the intended goals, and thus draw on the benefits of coopetition (Zineldin, 2004). The parallelism of competition and cooperation, which is the essence and at the same time an immanent feature of coopetition, always implies certain tensions due to the



contradictory nature of the activities contained therein. In coopetition, it is therefore important that the expected benefits outweigh the potential threats, and the obtained effects contribute to the development of all competitors.

Coopetition in incremental and synoptic approaches

The literature on the subject presents various approaches and perspectives regarding the analysis of the phenomenon of coopetition (Köseoğlu et al., 2019). As already mentioned, this article focuses on a dichotomous approach to examining the phenomenon of coopetition, that is from a synoptic and incremental perspective. These perspectives relate to the way in which the coopetition is established and developed between its participants. Table 1 presents a short comparative analysis of the presented perspectives. The criteria presented therein, and broader analysis of the approaches are discussed in detail below.

The synoptic perspective refers to planning activities based on an analysis conducted on both the organisation itself and its environment. This means an overall and comprehensive review for the purpose of consistent implementation of the activities planned in advance in order to achieve the previously set goals. Hence, the synoptic perspective will refer to establishing coopetition in a fully conscious, purposeful, planned *ex ante* manner, resulting from a prior carefully conducted in-depth, holistic analysis. The synoptic perspective is based on the principles of rational decision-making, hence it is characterised by rationality, sequentiality and complexity (Toft, 2000) in the approach to actions and decisions undertaken.

The synoptic perspective assumes that organisations intentionally initiate competitive relations as they strive to maintain a certain repeatability (Zerbini, Castaldo, 2007), leading in the long run to an increase in the interdependence between competitors. It is worth noting that such an approach is close to being a strategic orientation towards

coopetition, i.e. perceiving it as a deliberately designed action strategy. In this approach, coopetition is to serve the implementation of involved entities' specific strategic goals within a specific – usually longer – time horizon (Zerbini, Castaldo, 2007), as well as achieving a higher level of efficiency with regard to actions taken, and a competitive advantage, all merely thanks to cooperation with competitors (Nalebuff, Brandenbuerger, 1996).

In turn, the incremental perspective assumes limited rationality (Simon, 1997), and refers to taking actions in response to changes in the external and internal situation of the organisation. Thus, in this approach – as opposed to the synoptic approach – there is no specific and precisely defined target at which the activities of the organisation are aimed. The goals, plans and activities of the organisation are not planned in advance, but emerge gradually from the daily interactions between the organisations. So, unlike the synoptic approach, they are unintentional. In the synoptic perspective, there is no place for randomness of actions and irrational actions, while the incremental perspective is characterised by a lack of a predetermined action plan, greater freedom, dynamics, flexibility, and voluntary behaviour.

It is worth noting that the incremental approach draws from the evolutionary school in strategic management (Krupski et al., 2007), revealing certain dynamics in shaping relationships over time. This means that according to the approach, cooperation with competitors will be established and developed in a gradual, emerging manner, and its nature may be short-term (temporary) or even one-time or occasional (incidental). The general goal of such cooperation with competitors may be, for example, better effectiveness of the organisation's activities, but the parties involved will not make greater efforts to specify the conditions and principles of the coopetition in detail, because the cooperation between competitors will emerge idiosyncratically from their frequent interactions, as a spontaneous, previously unplanned relation that the parties may not even be fully aware of (Lichtarski, 2014).

Table 1. Synoptic and incremental approaches – coopetition context

Criterion	Synoptic perspective	Incremental perspective
coopetition antecedents	comprehensive analysis of organisation and its environment (often strategic ones)	lack of strategic analysis (or lack of detailed analysis) of organisation and its environment
positioning of coopetition in the organisation's strategy	result of consistent implementation, planned in advance in order to achieve the previously in the organisation's strategy set goals	response to changes in the external and internal situation of the organisation, unplanned coopetition in the organisation's strategy
nature of coopetition	conscious, purposeful, planned, resulting from a prior carefully conducted in-depth, holistic analysis	not planned in advance, emerging gradually from the daily interactions between the organisations, often unintentional
approach to actions in coopetition	rationality, sequentiality and complexity in actions	freedom, dynamics, flexibility and voluntary in actions
duration of coopetition	rather long-term, usually of a strategic nature	rather short-term (temporary) and even one-time or occasional (incidental)
degree of formalization of coopetition	usually formalized	usually informal

Source: own elaboration based on the literature review

Despite the differences between the synoptic and incremental perspectives, both approaches to coopetition are based on the willingness to cooperate with competitors on the basis of mutual involvement, sharing knowledge and information as well as the risks and benefits of joint activities (Zineldin, 2004). In both perspectives, it can be assumed that the organisations involved in coopetition have a common goal, but it will be of a more long-term or even strategic nature in the case of the synoptic approach, but more short-term or operational in the case of the incremental approach.

Moreover, researchers indicate that coopetition can be built on both formal contracts as well as on a less formal or even informal basis (Hung, Chang, 2012). As shown by observations of economic practice, entities adopting the attitude of more strategic and thoughtful action, based on the rationality of decision-making, tend to formalize such relationships. In turn, entities adopting the attitude of bounded rationality are more inclined to undertake less formalized actions or arrangements based on oral agreements. Hence, it can be assumed that the contracts concluded between coopetitors will be more formalized and prepared in writing in the case of the synoptic approach, and less formalized or even oral in the case of the incremental approach. In other words, in the synoptic perspective, the creation of a coopetitive relation will be the result of a more formalized process and, as a rule, intentionally initiated. In turn, coopetition in the incremental perspective is self-created, as a result of a series of organisational decisions made in response to certain events that occur in the environment, and which affect the activity of the entity.

Coopetition in the cultural sector

Since Brandenburger and Nalebuff (Brandenburger, Nalebuff, 1996) initiated the first studies on coopetition, the phenomenon has become the subject of increasing interest to researchers around the world (Köseoğlu et al., 2019; Gernsheimer et al., 2021). Coopetition has been analysed not only from different cognitive perspectives, but also in different areas of activity and economic sectors. It is noticeable that the high technology sector is characterised by the greatest exploration. Indeed, as the literature has indicated, cooperation with competitors is characteristic for sectors that are highly networked and hyper-competitive, providing quick access to specialist knowledge that would be unavailable for an organisation operating alone. Thanks to cooperation, competitors can create a common knowledge base, using the experience and competences of both entities. Moreover, it allows both parties involved to gain mutual access to customer databases and benefit from sharing brand images and proven marketing activities. In addition to increased coopetition in the hi-tech sector, it would seem that coopetition can also be a source of success for organisations operating in the cultural sector. However, this phenomenon – although clearly observable among cultural institutions – still remains on the margin of research exploration and extended scientific considerations, thus revealing a cognitive gap that is worth filling.

Organisations, that is cultural institutions, which operate in the cultural sector struggle with both limited financial resources and limited intangible resources, which may stimulate competition and encourage these entities to enter into cooperation. The research results show that exemplary areas of establishing cooperation in the cultural sector are, among others: training and education (including raising the awareness of recipients), coordination of activities and preparation of complementary and non-duplicate offers, joint marketing and promotion, exchange of experiences and information, conducting research and development work (including the development and implementation of new materials and technologies), increasing the sales market (serving a larger number of recipients), and lobbying for legal regulations and state policy. At the same time, despite the creation of networks based on cooperation between entities from the cultural sector, they simultaneously compete in many areas. Cultural institutions compete one with another for the effective use of intangible resources through the distinctive competences of employees, but also due to budgetary reasons that force them to minimize costs, which in turn leads to competition for obtaining external funds or sponsors. Limited resources and/or the provision of similar products or services that meet the same social needs are mentioned as the main reasons for this situation (Dziurski, 2019). As Mariani pointed out, competition in the cultural sector exists in at least three main areas (Mariani, 2007): competition for recipients, for employees (professional staff), and for financial resources.

Coopetition that is aimed at popularizing culture and stimulating its development is beneficial for both the entities involved in cooperation and the society as a whole. On the other hand, different views about which social goals should be prioritized have made competition among non-commercial organisations – including cultural institutions² – go beyond fundraising or the struggle for customers. At the same time, the literature shows that organisations providing services in the field of culture are susceptible to forces that, on the one hand, encourage them to cooperate and be interdependent, and, on the other hand, push them towards competitive behaviour (Kylänen, Rusko, 2011). Coopetition seems to be particularly beneficial when the independent development of an organisation is too expensive for a single entity, as it provides an opportunity to share costs and risk through the existence of mutual interests in a given area. Additionally, coopetition also increases the possibility of gaining access to valuable and unique resources, including the skills and knowledge of partner institutions.

Moreover, as in other sectors, in the cultural sector, coopetition brings benefits in terms of reducing uncertainty and risk (e.g. related to the implementation of projects funded by the EU), but also relationship costs that are most typical for other sectors, such as limiting the innovation of activities, closing oneself to external ideas and partners, too strong involvement of partners resulting in limiting the rationality of actions – interdependence or



the risk of opportunism and the undesirable effect of ideas and knowledge spreading, which for cultural and artistic activities are the most valuable resources. It is worth pointing out that activities in culture are by definition proprietary, therefore knowledge in cultural institutions is intellectual property that is difficult to protect, and its unintentional spread or opportunistic use by a cooperation partner is the greatest risk of cooperation with a competitor.

Observations of activities in the cultural sector reveal that these organisations often function in an operational manner, i.e. on the principles of “here and now”, in a way devoid of a managerial view and long-term plans. Therefore, it seems that cooptation in the cultural sector appears in an incremental perspective, which allows for faster adaptation of activities and more flexible adaptation both to a partner and to the turbulent environment than the synoptic perspective. In non-commercial organisations, the process of formulating intended actions in a more strategic way is negligible. In this case, researchers claim that the process actually arises as a “need of the moment” (Golensky, Hager, 2020). It is indicated that non-commercial organisations are managed in the short term rather than in a strategic perspective (Golensky, Hager, 2020). In Hofer and Schendel’s opinion, some non-commercial organisations do not even have a strategy, and the direction of their activities is determined by personal goals of managers and employees as well as by budget cycles, with one of the most important factors influencing the activities undertaken being the source of financing (Lapuente, Van de Walle, 2020).

Thus, it seems that cooptation among organisations in the cultural sector is often unintentional or even unconscious on the part of the entities involved (Ritchie, Weinberg, 2000). The research shows that an initial cooperative relationship between entities evolves over time into cooptation, i.e. when the goal of cooperation has been achieved, the cultural institutions start a competitive struggle, while at the same time conducting joint activities (cooperating) in previously established areas (Kylänen, Rusko, 2011). Therefore, cooptation appears in an incremental perspective, being implemented as an effect of taking actions resulting from the reaction to changes in the external and internal situation. One example may be the change of priorities by local and state authorities (organisers) in terms of financing those institutions, regular election cycles, changing legal conditions or recent tendencies of the EU authorities to finance projects submitted jointly by two or more institutions. It is also worth noting that some organisations in the field of culture – despite the existence of objective market premises – do not treat other organisations as competitors. This means that establishing cooperation with competitors will not be deliberate, planned, and long-term oriented, but rather a result of taking advantage of opportunities and noticing the benefits of cooperation – even in the short term or as part of a single project – that appear on the way to implementation of an organisation’s own, relatively constant goals.

Conclusions

Cooptation in the cultural sector refers to the simultaneous competition and cooperation of cultural institutions. Cultural institutions initiate and develop cooptation with other institutions in order to achieve a competitive advantage by creating a complementary, attractive, and competitive offer that takes into account the diverse needs of increasingly demanding customers. However, it seems that the establishment of cooptation and its subsequent development is the result of reactions to changing realities, both internally and in the external environment of the cultural institution. Moreover, involvement in cooptation is often unintentional or even unconscious. This is evidenced by the voices of representatives from the field of culture, who firstly often point to the lack of competitors in their environment, and secondly also claim that analysing culture through the prism of competition “is neither appropriate nor useful” (Gander, 2017).

Moreover, the lack of intentional, long-term profit-oriented cooperation with competitors among cultural institutions is also evidenced by the fact that activities undertaken by these organisations are rarely the result of a deliberate, long-term plan (Golensky, Hager, 2020), and their direction may be determined by the changing goals of organisers that result from regular election cycles. What is more, research shows that in the case of non-commercial organisations, a critical factor in the process of long-term goal formulation is the source of funding (Lapuente, Van de Walle, 2020), that is budget cycles and the changing shape of the budget, as well as dependence on possible sponsors (in the case of non-profit organisations). Therefore, cooperation with a competitor is most often the result of a desire to achieve a specific goal – a joint initiative or venture in a specific budget cycle or with the support of sponsors. This goal results from the dynamics that characterise inter-organisational relationships among institutions and emerge from daily interactions between them.

A review of the literature shows that cooptation appears as a relationship that allows for the creation and distribution of a unique and outstanding cultural offer, thanks to which clients’ needs will be fully satisfied. In addition, it allows for satisfying the common need among cultural institutions, namely continuous learning, as well as stimulating development, and improving skills. The market practice of entities operating in the cultural sector shows that they often lack appropriate competences and knowledge, and therefore, thanks to cooptation, the integration of opportunities, abilities, skills, and knowledge resources contributes to achieving a synergy effect which makes the combined resources more valuable and more difficult for other competitors to match.

Some researchers pay attention to the fact that the phenomena rooted in research on business organisations are also more and more often found in non-commercial organisations, such as the cultural sector (Dziurski, 2019). Cooptation, although relatively often explored with regard to business organisations, has not to date received broad, in-depth research with respect to other organisations such as cultural

institutions. The cultural sector – as indicated in the article – is an important area of socio-economic development, therefore an interesting field of research exploration, and research on the phenomenon of co-competition is particularly lacking.

The analysis of the literature shows that co-competition in the cultural sector appears in an incremental perspective, however, only empirical research will allow for confirmation or rejection of these findings. Future empirical research could also consider whether different criteria for dividing cultural entities (e.g. private/public, type of institution, method of financing) are relevant to co-competition in this sector, and if so, in what way. Moreover, the way in which value is divided by entities involved in co-competition also seems to be cognitively interesting. Indeed, cultural institutions that are involved in co-competition admittedly create value together, but the division of this value does not have to be symmetrical. Probably the greater part of the jointly created value will be captured by those organisations that have the appropriate capabilities, for example, they will attract a larger number of recipients and encourage them to spend more time and more money taking advantage of the organisation's cultural offer (Dziurski, 2019).

Therefore, it seems that co-competition in the cultural sector is an attractive area for further research, and taking into account the specificity of cultural institutions, promises a better understanding of the phenomenon, contributing at the same time to a more complete explanation thereof. However, bearing in mind that co-competition among cultural institutions is an area poorly explored so far, it is suggested to conduct exploratory research explaining the importance of co-competition for cultural institutions in the context of achieved benefits and costs. Research should be also conducted on the specifics of co-competition undertaken by different cultural institutions, i.e. public, non-profit, and commercial ones in order to make a comparative analysis, especially on the subject of co-competition as an organisation's strategy. In the future, research should help to formulate some recommendations for managers of private, public, and non-profit cultural institutions. Future research should also point out the similarities and differences in the management of different cultural institutions, e.g. theatres, museums, etc. It should also concern the use of knowledge in the field of impact of established and maintained relationships with competitors to stimulate the development of these institutions or building a competitive strategy.

Patrycja Juszczak, Ph.D.
Faculty of Management
University of Economics in Katowice
ORCID: 0000-0003-2231-5719
e-mail: patrycja.juszczak@uekat.pl

Dagmara Wójcik, M.Sc.
Faculty of Management
University of Economics in Katowice
ORCID: 0000-0002-9082-8471
e-mail: dagmara.wojcik@uekat.pl

Endnotes

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- 2) It should be noted that entities operating in the field of culture in Poland, due to the provisions of the Act, are non-commercial organisations – not focused on profit, whose main purpose is to perform statutory tasks and provide public and social services. See: Act of the 25th October 1991 on the organisation and conducting of cultural activities, Dz.U. 2020, poz. 194: <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19911140493/U/D19910493Lj.pdf> (access date: 22.08.2021).

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Koopetycja w perspektywie synoptycznej i inkrementalnej. Kontekst sektora kultury

Streszczenie

W ostatnich dekadach znaczenie koopetycji stale rośnie. Pomimo że dostrzeżono, iż zjawisko koopetycji jest istotne w wielu różnych sektorach, to nie było szeroko analizowane w obszarze kultury. W szczególności, podejście synoptyczne i inkrementalne do koopetycji nie zostało szerzej rozpoznane. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie specyfiki koopetycji w sektorze kultury na gruncie dwóch wskazanych orientacji – synoptycznej i inkrementalnej – w oparciu o wyniki przeglądu literatury.

Słowa kluczowe

koopetycja, podejście inkrementalne, podejście synoptyczne, sektor kultury
