



Cultural heritage, tourism and regional competitiveness: The Motor Valley cluster

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ABSTRACT

Tourism, one of the most relevant industries worldwide, plays a key role in the development and competitiveness of many regions. Despite the increasing debate in literature on cultural heritage- and tourism-based clusters for regional competitiveness, the relation between cultural heritage and competitiveness remains vastly unexplored, especially with respect to the mediating role played by tourism. The aim of the present paper is to explore the formation and development of clusters where tourism and cultural heritage engage in a virtuous circuit for regional competitiveness. To this purpose, the paper builds on the longitudinal case study of the Motor Valley cluster (around Modena, in Italy), illustrating and analysing its formation and development from 1999 to 2011. In the selected case, the regional identity and heritage on the motor sport industry since 1800 allowed the creation of a new form of cluster, where major firms in the motor industry, artisans, tourism organisations, sport facilities, institutions and tangible and intangible cultural heritage (corporate and industry museums, private collections, archives, expertise and practices) are beneficially tied together in a self reinforcing mechanism of competitiveness, nurtured by tourism flows. The findings of our work will help city leaders and regional policy-makers understand the formation and development of clusters where tourism is synergic with cultural heritage for regional competitiveness.

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Introduction

Policy makers are relentlessly seeking forms and arrangements for increasing the social and economic prosperity of their cities and regions. International studies suggest that the prosperity of a place is directly related to its competitiveness (Porter, 2008). Along this line, there is a growing awareness that regions may build their competitiveness leveraging their cultural heritage (Sasaki, 2004). Likewise there is large consensus that tourism plays a key role in the development and competitiveness of some regions (Lazzeretti & Petrillo, 2006), especially in relation to the tourism enhancement of cultural heritage in cluster arrangements (Cooke & Lazzeretti, 2008; Lazzeretti, Boix, & Capone, 2008). Clusters are believed to increase regional competitiveness, given that they contribute positively to innovative processes, facilitating relations with other institutions, better enabling the consumer needs, canalising

knowledge and information needed for development (Malmberg & Maskell, 2002; Porter, 2000, 2008, Ketels, 2011; Porter & Ketels, 2009). The result is an increasing debate in literature on tourism clusters (sometimes overlapped with cultural clusters) and destination management as a means to reach regional competitiveness.

Prior research shows that cultural heritage has gained an increasing importance at different levels of the economy (Florida, 2002; Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Scott, 2002) and that regions may build their competitiveness leveraging their cultural heritage (Bandarin, Hosagrahar, & Albernaz, 2011; Boix, Lazzeretti, Capone, De Propriis, & Sánchez, 2012; Cooke & Lazzeretti, 2008; Pereira Roders & Von Oers, 2011). Cluster arrangements can nurture competitiveness and regional development (Ketels, 2011; Porter, 2008), even opening up spaces for rejuvenating historical industrial contexts (Bailey, Bellandi, Caloffi, & De Propriis, 2010; Kim, 2011; Santagata, 2002; Sasaki, 2004; Sasaki, 2010). As a consequence, several regions and cities have undertaken culture-based policies for diffused and micro entrepreneurial initiatives able to set up cluster arrangements around a multitude of cultural assets (Mizzau & Montanari, 2008; Mommaas, 2004; Power & Scott, 2004;

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Sacco & Segre, 2006; Stern & Seifert, 2010). This approach interprets cultural heritage not as a mere resource endowment to be purely safeguarded or exploited, but as a driver for the formation and development of new cluster forms able to sustain regional competitiveness (Zan, Bonini Baraldi, & Gordon, 2007). Tourism is central to this respect, since cultural assets can attract tourism to a specific destination, and tourism can bring new and fresh resources to the cultural sector and the entire region, setting up clusters and, thus, nurturing competitiveness (Ferreira & Estevo, 2009; Jackson & Murphy, 2002; Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006). Some authors have suggested conceptualisations either on tourism cluster competitiveness (e.g., Capone & Boix, 2007; Cunha & Cunha, 2005; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Fernando & Long, 2012; Flowers & Easterling, 2006; Hawkins, 2004; Iordache, Ciochina, & Asandei, 2010) or cultural cluster competitiveness (e.g., Capone, 2008; Cinti, 2008; De Propriis & Cooke, 2011; Lazzarotti et al., 2008; Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008).

However, despite the increasing debate in literature on cultural heritage and tourism-based clusters for regional competitiveness, the discussion is still in its embryonic stage (Ferreira & Estevo, 2009) and the relation between cultural heritage and competitiveness remains vastly unexplored, especially in relation with the mediating role played by tourism. Likewise, empirical evidence on this topic is still anecdotic and descriptive and cases are still embryonic.

The present paper aims at contributing to this debate, offering an explorative look at the formation and development of clusters where tourism and cultural heritage engage in a virtuous circuit for regional competitiveness. Since this topic has been widely overlooked in literature, it demands further empirical evidence and conceptual insights. Further, the present paper takes a proactive perspective in the above-mentioned debate, discussing the economic enhancement of intangible cultural heritage as a path of rejuvenation of mature productive sectors.

The discussion builds on the analysis of the Motor Valley cluster (around Modena, in Italy), internationally recognised as an outstanding case for investigating the above-mentioned research question (Porter, 2010). The paper reports a longitudinal case study from 1999 to 2011, which studies the formation and development of the cluster, according to the following research question: how can tourism be synergic with cultural heritage in setting up a competitive cluster?

In the selected case, the regional identity and heritage on the motor sport industry since 1800 allowed the creation of a new form of cluster, where major firms in the motor industry, artisans, tourism organisations, sport facilities, institutions and tangible and intangible cultural heritage (corporate and industry museums, private collections, archives, expertise and practices) are beneficially tied together in a self reinforcing mechanism of competitiveness, nurtured by tourism flows. The focus of the study is on how tourism and cultural heritage may engage in a virtuous circuit within cluster arrangements for regional competitiveness and thus prosperity.

Empirical results of this study suggest that tourism and cultural heritage may engage in virtuous circuits in a cluster form, fostering regional competitiveness.

The findings are then abstracted to a model for the understanding and explanation of the formation and development of clusters where tourism is synergic with cultural heritage for regional competitiveness.

The paper concludes with contributions and suggestions for further research and policy challenges. Results of this case study will help city leaders and regional policy-makers understand how to leverage idiosyncratic industrial cultural heritage for regional competitiveness, where tourism plays a key role in setting up a cluster among pre-existing firms, facilities and institutions.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The first section of this article will briefly review literature concerning cultural heritage, tourism and regional competitiveness, with the conceptual lenses of Porter's cluster theory. The second section of this article will discuss the research methods used (research design, data collection and data analysis). The third section will present the analyses conducted on the case study of Motor Valley, where theoretical insights are derived from data and discussed. The paper concludes by discussing the contributions and future developments of the present study, together with directions for further research.

Theory

After many decades of relative neglect, cultural heritage has recently gained an increasing importance at different levels of the economy (Florida, 2002; Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Scott, 2002). As Lazzarotti, Capone, and Cinti (2011) suggest, the relationship between culture and economy has undergone an important shift in the focus, from the mere conservation of culture to its economic enhancement, which reveals the links among culture, society, and economic development (Cooke & Lazzarotti, 2008; Power & Scott, 2004). More specifically, there is a growing awareness that regions may build their competitiveness leveraging their cultural heritage (Bandarin et al., 2011; Boix et al., 2012; Pereira Roders & Von Oers, 2011; Storper & Scott, 2009). Further, the erroneous idea that the economic enhancement of cultural heritage may hamper its safeguard and vice versa is gradually and globally evaporating (Zan et al., 2007). We are referring to the compatibility and interdependency between the conservation of cultural heritage and its economic enhancement (Bandarin et al., 2011), according to which cultural heritage is both a productive resource and something that forms the basis of people's identity as well as providing a source of inspiration for their entrepreneurial initiatives (Stern & Seifert, 2010). Accordingly, cultural heritage fits very well into the current 'knowledge economy' paradigm as cultural skills support creativity, whilst, on the other side, the societal function of cultural goods can be significantly affected by economic growth and development (Florida, 2002; Hesmondhalgh, 2002). Hence, such interdependency adds a dimension of complexity to the debate, both in research and policy concerns. Such a global shift in public policies leverages cultural assets and organisations to promote new forms of entrepreneurship and regional competitiveness, to attract tourists and strengthen destinations and to favour the centrality of knowledge workers and

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