

Chapter 9

Innovation in Cultural Districts: The Cases of Naples and Washington

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Abstract During the years, academics and practitioners have given great attention to the role played by cultural heritage and arts in revitalizing and regenerating central and peripheral areas of contemporary cities.

In the era of global markets and knowledge sharing, the production of culture represents an increasingly complex activity: on the one hand, culture should adapt to goods and services that are different for content and technology; on the other hand, it should try to satisfy a very heterogeneous demand. With these premises in mind, it seems to be clear that culture represents an essential resource to several geographical areas in order to re-launch themselves and to be competitive in the global arena.

The aim of the paper is to analyse evolved cultural districts in order to understand what is the role innovation plays both at the systemic and firm level; also, this research aims at capturing the way innovation can support cultural districts in their promotional activities, both at the organic phase and during the service provision.

In order to proceed with this analysis, the paper discusses the theme of innovation in cultural districts from a theoretical perspective to then present an empirical study that take into account two cultural districts, D. T. B.E.N.C. and the District of Washington, which successfully implemented innovation in their activities.

Keywords Cultural districts • Innovation • Collaboration

9.1 Introduction

The aim of the paper is to analyse evolved cultural districts in order to understand the role of innovation at different levels (systemic level and firm level) and phases (both organic – the phase of service provision and induced – the phase of promotion).

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Nowadays, evolved cultural districts are forced to face with the creation, development, diffusion of innovation, the management of relationships between different stakeholders that have to generate/implement innovation as well as the valorization and promotion of the cultural district.

This complex perspective leads to a precise structure of the paper that develops the analysis in some main points. The first one regards the study of innovation in evolved cultural districts in order to understand its real meaning and how it is created and spread throughout the district. The second point deals with the investigation of interactions among stakeholders involved into an evolved cultural district, that can be defined as a “well-recognized, labeled, mixed-use area of a city in which a high concentration of cultural facilities serves as the anchor of attraction” (Frost-Kumpf 1998). It is a context in which it is possible to develop creative ideas, also through the support of high technology (van der Duim 2007). The third point refers to the analysis of districts’ valorization and promotion according to an innovative lens. Hence, the bidding agent of the previous points is the study of innovation and its role as both keystone and transversal component in this precise configuration of district.

The current research deepens the literature on cultural districts related to innovation theories and the dynamic capabilities and relational view.

Given the above-mentioned reflections, the paper examines, through a comparative case study analysis, two districts: D. .T. .B.E.N.C. in Naples, Italy and the District of Washington, US in order to understand how these districts innovate.

9.2 Theoretical Framework

Districts are expression of specific local vocation (Testa 2013) where it is possible to find a high territorial specialization either products or services, the so-called “flexible specialization” (Piore and Sabel 1984), depending on their relative nature. district is a specific structure where “community and firms tend to merge” (Becattini 1990, p. 39). This definition supports the concept of “social embeddedness” that leads to the development of this issue according to different perspectives, either economic (Marshall 1925; Brusco 1982) or social (Bellandi and Sforzi 2001). The interplay between both economic and social mechanisms requires a solid entrepreneurial component from the start-up phase.

Before proceeding with the theoretical analysis, a clarification about the terms “district” and “cluster” is necessary.

ctually, some researchers (Sydow et al. 2011) use the terms “cluster” and “district” as synonymous even if many scholars (Bijaoui et al. 2011; Sciarelli 2007) agree that these concepts and the relative research streams are different.

ccording to Porter (1998), a cluster is a “geographic concentration of industries and specialized suppliers, complementary, independent, yet interdependent, that jointly carry out their activities and/or share research, human capital, technologies and infrastructures. They are both competitors and capable of a collaboration that

increases productivity and competitiveness”. Marshall (1919) sees a district as “a socio-economic entity formed by a set of companies, usually being part of the same productive sector, located in a circumscribed area, among which there is co-operation, but also competition”. This belongs to what shapes the “economies of agglomeration” (Marshall 1919).

In spite of these definitions, the current paper is based on a concept of district as strategic network (Gulati et al. 2000; Jarillo 1988; Borch and Arthur 1995) of firms located in a specific geographic area. According to Gulati et al. (2000), strategic networks “encompass a firm’s set of relationships, both horizontal and vertical, with other organizations” and “are composed of inter-organizational ties that are enduring, are of strategic significance for the firms entering them”.

Some scholars analyzed districts’ structural features (Rabellotti and Schmitz 1999), while others have discussed different themes such as the role of co-operation, the districts’ competitiveness (Meneghetti and Chinese 2002), the importance of local culture, the role of institutional actors (Provasi 2002; Di Giacinto and Nuzzo 2006), etc.

The classic literature on districts (Piore and Sable 1984; Easton and Axelsson 1992; Hakansson and Johanson 1993) stresses the importance on the fact that “network supplies or can supply the firm with resources, which otherwise would not have been available to the firm, and the network offers flexibility when organizing production” (Havnese and Senneseth 2001).

Within this complexity, some firms consider the benefits of taking part to a network (i.e., access to resources or reduce risk costs (Kogut 2000), trying to overcome the classic resistances to cooperation.

The firms that activate or take part to the process of a district creation express their willingness to realize new ideas, to spread innovation or to create new job opportunities (Idrich 1999), as districts act as incubators for canalizing already available resources and competences and create new sources of value.

The recall to entrepreneurship within district literature can be connected with the Schumpeterian view (1934) that conceives the entrepreneur as an innovator with the interpretation of new venture creation and able to generate opportunities in their broader meaning. In this direction, according to some scholars (Ivarez and Barney 2001), the creation/discovery of opportunities is related to entrepreneurial capabilities.

Trust, shared values and mutuality become evident only when collaboration is effectively spread among the members of the district. As regards co-operation within a district, some scholars argue that there is the necessity to balance co-operation and competition (You and Wilkinson 1994).

Such process seems to drive a co-competition context (Nalebuff et al. 1996; Dagnino and Padula 2002; Della Corte and Pavia 2016) that can reveal itself to be very profitable since competition favours innovation and through collaboration it is possible to start strategic initiatives that increase the market power of the whole network.

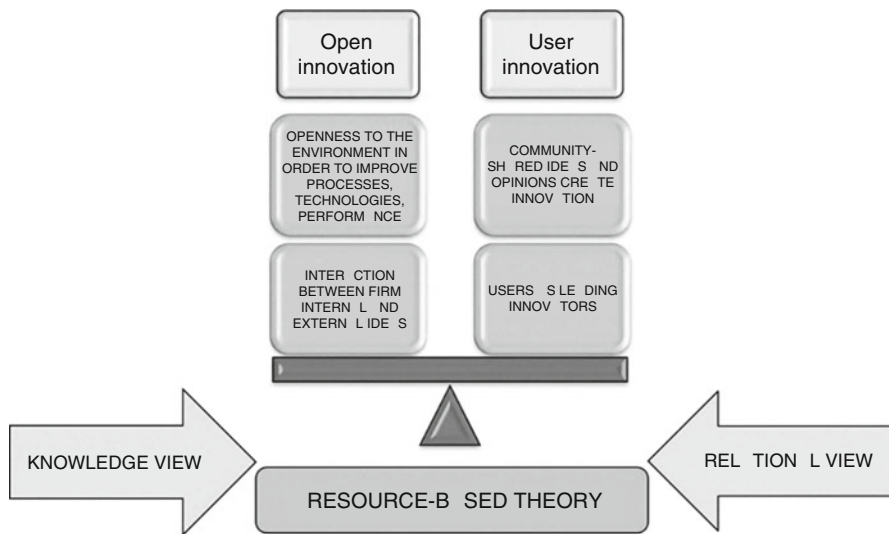


Fig. 9.1 The theoretical framework (Source: Our elaboration)

Starting from the analysis of the peculiar aspects that characterize the innovation in cultural districts, we have gone to research the links among the following frameworks:

- the Resource-Based Theory (RBT – Grant 1991; Barney 1996; Barney and Clark 2007);
- its most recent approaches, in terms of relational view (Hunt and Derozier 2004) and knowledge view (Grant 1991, 1996; Cabrera-Suárez et al. 2001);
- the theories that are at the basis of the innovation concept.

This connection allows us to define the assumptions of open and user innovation that are useful to the achievement of our research goal, which is the analysis of high technology cultural districts in order to understand the role of innovation at both systemic and firm level at the organic and induced levels.

As shown in Fig. 9.1, linking open and user innovation to RBT, it is possible to understand, with reference to the innovation dimension, what are the factors that can be considered sources of firm competitive advantage and to describe the different forms of involvement and interaction with the customer.

Taking into account the RBT foundations, the literature review confirms that one of the rarest and most inimitable resources is knowledge (Du Plessis 2007). This perspective suggests that the innovation dimension develops within the firm boundaries. On the other hand, the studies on Open Innovation state that most innovative firms are those able to combine new internal resources with the external ones in order to create innovation.

Moreover, studies on competitive advantage (Grant 1991; Barney 1996; Barney and Clark 2007; du Plessis 2007) consider the role of inter-firm relationships between the firm and its partners/stakeholders as strategic for the achievement of positive performance in the market. Hence, the major is the customer involvement in the firm's activities, the minor will be the effort that the firm itself has to bear in order to meet customer needs.

Users create innovation when they produce creative ideas that can be translated into radical or incremental products, processes or services improvements. These innovations create value for the consumers and for the entire firm. These concepts, linked to the innovation implemented within an evolved cultural district, stand out the necessity to create new products and services, starting from the ideas suggested from the external environment and implementing information that are potentially accessible for all.

The major is the users' engagement, the major is the possibility that consumers collaborate in order to swap and share information.

The competitive scenario imposes tourism and cultural firms, and more importantly districts, to search for new ideas that can come from the outside environment and assume new internal processes and technologies to improve their competitive position.

In line with these assumptions, the district logic underlines the presence of important social relationships with competitors in order to compete successfully.

Martín-de-Castro et al. (2011) argue that innovation process consists of a mix between current (recalling the definition of social capital these are "resources embedded within" and "available through") and new knowledge ("derived from" looking at social capital definition) implemented for commercial objectives.

This would explain the reason why in the current context – characterized by economic recession, uncertainty and dynamism – the district finds its *raison d'être*. The belonging to the district represents the main source able to adapt to market changes (Stieglitz and Heine 2007).

set of privileged relationships can generate the creation/strengthening of innovation and improve the time-to-market (Rindfleisch and Moorman 2001). In sum, the willingness to commercialize their own products/services is what drives members to build relationships and to cooperate.

The presence of a wide number of firms and the mixture between public and private bodies can stiffen the process of innovation and slow down changes.

actually, the concept of innovation perfectly joins the growth aspirations of entrepreneurs who decide to undertake the decision about the new venture within a district. Besides, although districts can favour innovation, the related process may be gradual rather than fast.

The locus of innovation may reside in networks but, sometimes, there could be limits to innovation due to insufficient internal capabilities (firm level) in supporting this process (Cohen and Levinthal 1990) or to the lack of knowledge transfer at network level.

9.3 n Outline of the Evolved Cultural District Model

Over the time great attention has been given to the role of cultural heritage and arts in revitalizing and regenerating central and peripheral areas of contemporary cities (Brooks and Kushner 2001; Ponzini 2009; Santagata 2002; Lorenzini 2011).

In the era of global markets and knowledge sharing, the production of culture represents an increasingly complex activity because, on the one hand, culture should adapt to goods and services that are different for content and technology; on the other hand, it should try to satisfy a very heterogeneous demand. With these premises, it seems to be clear that culture is a resource on which different areas should count on in order to re-launch themselves and to be competitive in the global arena. Since culture is becoming more and more a constitutive mechanism of the value creation process, the theories on industrial districts (Marshall 1919; Richardson 1972) pave the way to the study of the economic value of cultural districts.

cultural district is defined as a *territorially delimited system of relationships that integrates the valorisation process of both tangible and intangible cultural facilities with infrastructure and other productive sectors that are related to that process. The creation of a cultural district aims at making more efficient and effective the production process of “culture” and, optimizing, on local scale, its economic and social impacts* (Valentino 2001).

From this definition emerges that the cultural district is characterized by the presence of local firms, which show their willingness to valorise their resources and to take advantage of the products resulting from the enhancement and development of an area. In addition, the quality of these resources affects the quality of other factors such as infrastructure, or, more in general, the territory of reference.

There are four essential elements that characterize a district; it should be: complex (involving a large number of actors), relational (based, therefore, on a system of relationships), participated (able to engage and interconnect different actors) and planned (in the sense that comes from a top-down strategy and not from the historical and environmental characteristics of the area).

s emerges from Fig. 9.2, according to Valentino, the cultural district assumes a reticular form that is expressed in a system of relationships, which in turn can be divided into four homogeneous sub-systems (Valentino 2003):

- sub-system of territorial resources, for the valorisation of historical, cultural and environmental resources in the area;
- sub-system of human and social resources, in which there are elements such as ‘human capital’ (i.e. the workforce) and ‘social capital’ (i.e. education and institutions);
- sub-system of accessibility services, such as the transport service;
- sub-system of hospitality services, related to accommodation and entertainment;
- sub-system of enterprises belonging to different sectors, such as crafts, communication, restoration.

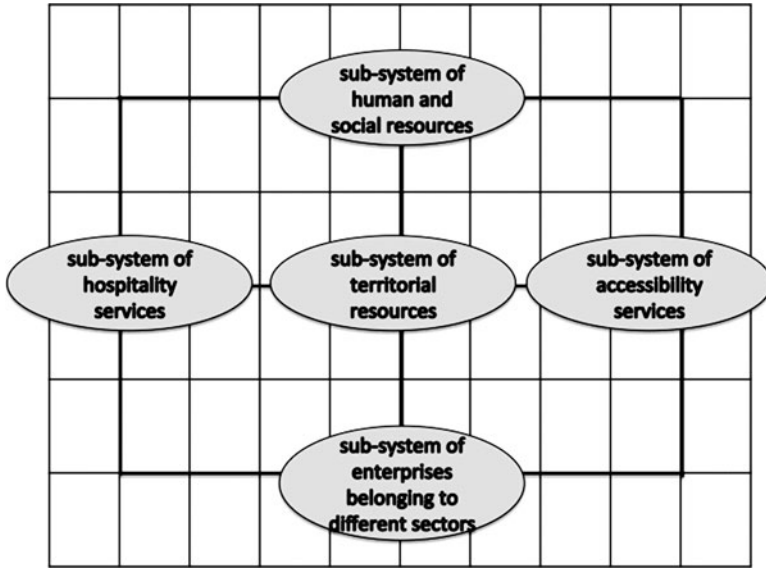


Fig. 9.2 Sub-systems of a cultural district (Source: our elaboration from Valentino 2003)

This classification highlights the idea of an “integrated valorisation process” theorized by Valentino, according to which the cultural district develops around the most valuable cultural assets of a territorial area, so that both the cultural sector, and the entire territory can generate a competitive advantage. This latter can be achieved only if there is a system of relationships, which aims at connecting the cultural and environmental, tangible and intangible resources towards a unique strategy shared by all actors there operating.

In order to promote cultural factors in a defined area, a central role is played by the systemic logics of the “evolved cultural district” (Sacco and Blessi 2006; Sacco 2010). Innovation, economy and culture are the pillars upon which this systemic district is based. The evolved cultural district is a “system of systems” made up of enterprises and cultural institutions that are homogeneous for specialization and belong to the same territory. These actors are able to establish vertical, horizontal and transversal relationships looking for internal and external integration (Usai 2016).

This systemic organization derives from a complex integration of a large number of actors, such as public administration, local entrepreneurs, universities, cultural operators and local communities.

Il stakeholders aim at developing an area and a key role is played by local communities, which take actively part to the value generation process for the local system (Sacco 2006; Mizzau and Montanari 2008).

In this optic, there seems to be evident that the district is characterized by an eclectic combination of top-down and bottom-up elements; in other words, it is a

kind of a *self-organization process*, where culture assumes the role of a “synergistic agent” for the development of the territorial factors.

In the evolved cultural district, the economic activities related to cultural heritage produce positive effects on other sectors, such as tourism and contribute to generate innovation, creativity and knowledge sharing for local production systems. In this conception, production and cultural fruition rather than to be intended as profit centers or direct factors of economic development, are conceived as elements able to generate and disseminate creative ideas. This is what local entrepreneurs need in order to pursue patterns of specialization and competitive advantage (Moon 2001).

9.4 Method of the Research

The empirical analysis is carried out in two districts. The first one is the District of High Technology for Cultural Heritage (D T BENC), an evolved cultural district, which was created in order to bridge the existing gaps in Campania Region’s strategic management approach of both cultural and environmental heritage in its interconnections with tourism industry. Federico II University is the governing-promoting actor of this district, shaped by more than 60 members.

The second one is the District of Washington, in the United States of America. This district is analysed in the light of its tourism implications. The tourist soul of the district is expressed through the destination management organization that includes both private and public organizations.

The research methodology adopts a comparative case study analysis and analyzes the relative qualitative results. Furthermore, the case study methodology is in line with the exploratory nature of this paper since it is able to capture contextual richness and complexity of research issues (Yin 2003) and to understand the social structures (Riege 2003). According to Erikka-Stenroos and Sandberg (2012, p. 201) two case studies “allow rich description and comparison” as well as to proceed with a cross-case comparisons (Eisenhardt 1989).

First, from the literature review, there is the necessity to study the role of the interactions among the members. Second, the literature review has emphasized key issues and, hence, the empirical part explores if the relations established within the district can be effectively considered as strategic.

In order to capture these reflections, in-depth interviews with the promoter actors and the other members were conducted following a predesigned protocol (Yin 2003). Indeed, the interviews used a snowball method that allows to catch information from both central actors and peripheral ones in order to obtain a more holistic view.

These interviews were semi-structured. Furthermore, the research group is still taking part to workshops and round tables as non-participant observer, studying the interactions among the internal members and between the latter and the entire referring ecosystem.

Data were collected from different sources such as semi-structured interviews, annual report, feasibility studies, other secondary sources and direct observations. Respondents were identified through the study of district composition.

9.5 Discussion

The District of high technology for Cultural Heritage (D T BENC) originates from the willingness of Federico II University of Naples. This governing actor, indeed, can be defined as accelerator in creating an advanced cultural district in order to bridge the existing gaps in Campania Region' strategic management approach of both cultural and environmental heritage in its interconnections with tourism industry.

This district is born within the National Operative Program (PON 2007–2013) called “Research and Competitivity” referring to the line of intervention n.2 “Districts of high technology and related networks” to whom the feasibility study of D T BENC is linked.

s regards the field of interest of this district, the entrepreneurial subject identified four thematic areas within archaeological areas, documentation and archiving and Smart historic centre (Fig. 9.2):

1. **Knowledge:** under this voice, it is included the knowledge about the cultural products within Databenc district in terms of their history, contents and technical characteristics such us used materials and techniques of construction.
2. **Preservation:** this mostly refers to the logic of preventive preservation rather than curative one. In this sense, the district activities contemplate a planned maintenance that is less invasive of the restoration. Both preservation and restoration are linked to the transversal activity of constant monitoring.
3. **Security and safety:** these concern the identification and realization of measures towards possible risks that cultural heritage could be subjected to. While the security refers to intentional causes, the safety concerns motivations that are not directly intentional (i.e., environmental risks, transportation of cultural products for exhibitions out of the museum, etc.).
4. **Valorisation, fruition and promotion:** these two terms, in entrepreneurial terms, are conceived as unique expression since the valorisation of cultural resources allows to give a unique fruition both for tourists and local community where the use of specific technologies helps intensifying the degree of involvement, offering a unique experience during the fruition phase.

The current configuration of this District of high technology for Cultural Heritage is the result of a collaborative process generating a network structure and shaping an integrated cultural heritage system. D T BENC is in fact a local operator of differentiated cultural offers, playing a pivotal role in the process of building brand identity.

The other opportunity can be referred to the fact that heritage and culture are still conceived and managed in a traditional, out of date approach, mainly focused on preservation rather than on valorization, promotion and fruition.

Furthermore, the district, as socio-territorial identity, characterized by an active pull of actors and firms needs capabilities able to form alliances even for its creation.

As regards the District of Washington, one of its main strength is the presence of Smithsonian. This latter is constituted by 19 Institutions (galleries, museums, National Zoological Park, etc.).

According to the managers of the district the current innovation activity is devoted to:

- Identify the type of leisure needs, linked to leisure, that the cultural district intends to cater for visitors/tourists with particular reference to the unmet needs;
- Identify the cultural experiences that can be targeted to the needs of specific tourists/visitors;
- Identify the additional experiences that are compatible with the mission and the cultural district's resources;
- Identify the ways through which potential users can be informed and attracted to the district experiences;
- Ensure that visitors tourists, both new repeaters, are completely satisfied with the experiences lived within the district and services and it connected;
- These described-above assets align perfectly with the strategic objective called "audience" which aims to "attract a wider audience and engage him in deeper relationships and long-term."

An example is offered, for the innovation in this field, by the activation of summer camps for families with children by offering specific activities (meeting with experts of the artistic and cultural field, seminars and courses in the form of edutainment on specific themes, musical program strongly customized, journey through history through imagination, etc.).

The collaboration with George Mason University is an example that allows understanding how a cultural district wants to attract the audience of university students. Students of the course "decorative arts" have, in fact, access to the museum spaces and private collections to be able to study on field the cultural, historical and artistic elements.

9.6 Main Implications and Findings

This paper outlines both theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical point of view, the paper stresses the attention on the role of cultural districts as expression of specific local vocation (Testa 2013) and strategic relationships among members. Secondly, the district configuration presumes the existence of relationships among competitors and, hence, the development of both competitive

and cooperative attitudes (Nalebuff et al. 1996), that this paper deepens. Actors operating in cultural districts possess a high territorial either productive or service specialization.

From a managerial point of view, the paper shows the stakeholders involved into a cultural district and, particularly, the collaborative and competitive processes among actors, generating knowledge transfer and sharing, in a value co-creation perspective. Moreover, another managerial implication is connected with the opportunity of implementing efficient interactions within districts because the set of privileged relationships can generate the creation/strengthening of innovation and improve time-to-market (Rindfleisch and Moorman 2001; Rinaldi and Spiller 2011). Although districts can favour innovation, this paper also explores if the related process may be gradual rather than fast.

Findings show that innovation plays a key role in high technology cultural districts innovation. The implementation of innovation process, consisting of a mix between current and new knowledge, is strategic for commercial objectives. The relationships among the stakeholders of the districts increase when members recognize the value of digital platforms in classifying and disseminating cultural heritage and its main peculiarities.

The districts' external scenario is increasingly dynamic and the interactions among the internal members are becoming complex to manage and may involve a large number of stakeholders. Therefore, firms have to implement creative strategies and innovative business models in order to increase fluidity related to the dynamic nature of the collaboration.

Theoretical findings show that, despite substantial research in this field, there remain gaps in the analysis of the stakeholder collaborations in developing creative and high technology tourism/cultural districts.

9.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the previous considerations lead us to point out that the implementation of innovative policies in the cultural field allows contemporary cities to be proactive, offering exciting and qualifying opportunities for citizens.

Cultural development is a concept that links the past with the future: if on the one hand it is intended as an intelligent conservation of the existing heritage, on the other, it needs to innovate in order to generate social and economic benefits. This justifies the existence of the concept of evolved cultural district that is distinguished from earlier notions of cultural district and industrial district for its innovative component that allows to strategically define its resources and capabilities.

Evolved cultural districts can be compared to "learning" regions, which are places where the cognitive processes play a crucial role, combining know-how, interpretations, information with intellectual artefacts, allowing the exchange of experiences and cooperation.

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