

How to Change Vision From Manufacturing to Tourism?: The Role of University in the Marche Region (Italy)

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Abstract | In regions of the so-called Third Italy, economy was long based on industrial manufacturing, spread in countless small and medium sized units (SMEs), within industrial districts scattered in rural areas. The Marche region pertains to this area and culture of both entrepreneurs and laborers maintains distinctive know-how, skills and craft abilities, coming from a farming culture fit for the production of consumption goods, such as shoes, cloths, furniture, household appliances. Incumbent competitors, due to the effect of globalization, jeopardize many SMEs, stressing on new market strategies both for single companies and territories. National and local policymakers envisage tourism as a leverage to create effectual alternatives to redirect the economy. In such a context, university is called to provide education and governance. The paper reports the authors' experience in teaching and researching on tourism for ten years in a medium sized University located in the Marche, in Central Italy. The work explores how research and education on sustainable tourism may empower local communities and economies not to lose their identity, fostering traditional know-how, intercepting possible international opportunities. Results show how the University can effectively participate in the governance process designed by national and local public agencies—the National Ministry of Research and the Regional Government—by helping territories to customize new visions for local development. Feedbacks are forecast in the medium-long period, given the sticky adaptation of entrepreneurial culture to interact with tourism sector. University students coming from other regions will be able to disseminate benefits also out of the Marche region.

Keywords | Research and education, third Italy, manufacturing, tourism, university

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1. Introduction and Problem Statement

University is traditionally committed to technological, institutional and cultural innovation even though more recently it had to face some changes on how to perform its functions. There is a substantial scholar and political accord in stressing, besides its traditional functions of teaching and research, the university role of being a driver of regional development. In a bottom-up approach to regional development, university can fuel the process of planning the regional growth based on the economy of knowledge. It is considered the proper institution capable of stimulating and orienting education and research towards the new needs of regional economies (De Rubertis, Pollice, Ciavolino & Ricciardelli, 2011).

EU policies have promoted two broad strategic initiatives. First, the Lisbon strategy furnished more investment to scientific research, also fostering cooperation between university and enterprises, then, the Bologna process has proposed the implementation of a European higher education scheme based upon continuous learning and on the capability of meeting the needs of the territory (De Rubertis et al., 2011).

The University of Macerata accepted this political stimulus in upgrading relationship with the territory even giving the students more possibilities to encounter real labour markets and making effective experience in companies, through routine initiatives such as stages and educational training in companies and extracurricular teaching activities.

It was founded in 1290 in the Italian region Marche and it is one of the oldest universities in Europe. It is a small / medium sized University located in a rural-industrial region of Central Italy. Its main activities are focused on the humanities and social sciences. Research and teaching are on cultural heritage, economics, philosophy, law, arts and humanities, languages, linguistic mediation, communication, education, political science and

tourism. Its motto is 'Innovation through Humanism' and the subsequent vision is to educate and research for creating a society based on knowledge.

The Marche region has a long socioeconomic history as a territory hosting manufacturing industries, specialized in producing consumption goods, such as shoes, cloths, furniture, home appliances, mainly commercialized abroad. The still ongoing industrial fabric is primarily based on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) geographically clustered. Incumbent competitors and globalization jeopardize many of these companies, stressing on new market strategies both for single firms and territories. After the 2008 world economic crisis many industries faced harsh reduction of turnover, revenues and employment (Cutrini, Micucci & Montarano 2013; Goffi, 2013).

In this challenging environment, national and local policymakers envisaged tourism as a leverage to create effectual alternatives to redirect economies of many regions (Presidenza Del Consiglio Dei Ministri, 2013; Regione Marche, 2015; 2016). In such a context, the Italian university is committed to provide a diffusion of knowledge and governance, and since 2013 singular Universities started to be evaluated also for their 'Third Mission', after research and teaching. This mission consists in the diffusion of knowledge to the society, matching the necessity of productive industries (Cognetti, 2013; Fantoni, 2015).

This idea is illustrated by the theoretical concept of the Triple Helix of university-industry-government relationships proposed in the 1990s by Etzkowitz (1993) and Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1995). The metaphor of the helix, borrowed by the helix stairs, aims at illustrating also the risk of never matching paths, those separately traced in the same direction by the Government, Industry and University. Recently Ranga and Etzkowitz (2013) introduced this concept into an 'innovation system' format, defined accordingly to the systems theory as a set of components, relationships and functions.

Wilson (2012) inserted a forth 'pole' into the model, calling it the 'quad' of interrelated sectors: public, private, civil, and academic. This perspective provides an explicit reference to the civil community considering that the circulation of knowledge and resources within the spaces is fuelled by the capabilities of the residents. The coherent combination of the spaces and the non-linear interaction between them can produce new knowledge, new interactive relations, new ideas, and thus innovation both in theory making and practice. This could be particularly effective at the regional level, because both place and institutions matter in doing business (Anderson, Domosh, Pile & Thrift, 2003; Hodgson, 2009; North, 1994).

The paper reports the authors' experience in studying how local communities can rethink their production features and how they can adapt strategic vision from producing material goods into offering services related to hospitality and tourism. The paper treats how research and education on sustainable tourism can empower local communities not to lose their identity while evolving to a service-based economy.

For this purpose, the rest of text is structured as follows. Section 2 gives the regional background about capabilities in industrial manufacturing. Section 3 describes objectives and procedures. Section 4 is divided into three paragraphs illustrating main findings of preceding case studies. The first one tells about the perception of local actors about the 'spirit of the place' of the region, the second one about the online reputation of hotels in the city of Macerata, the third one about perception of sustainable tourism in the Adriatic Ionian macro-region as retrievable by online conversation analysis. Section 5 describes lessons eventually learnt and gives some suggestions for further steps.

2. Background: the Marchigian Capabilities in Manufacturing

The Italian region of the Marche is located in the center of Italy and was discussed as a component of the geographical area called by sociologist of economy Arnaldo Bagnasco (1977) the 'Third Italy', or the 'North-East-Center' (NEC). This area is positioned between the old industrialized North Western regions and the underdeveloped South (Dunford & Greco, 2005; Piore & Sabel, 1984).

The Marche region shows an advanced economic development due to the presence of several industrial districts (Becattini, 1987; 1990) spread in the territory and base of local knowledge and productive attitudes (Fuà & Zacchia, 1983; Fuà, 1988). A strong persistency of rural settlements is still ongoing and the local culture clearly stems from the countryside way of life. Many elements of a long lasting 'rural social culture' (Anselmi, 1990) still remain, figuring a definitively original socio-economic model, capable of merging high levels of material wealth with immaterial wellbeing (Censis, 2002).

After the WWII, a progressive concentration of residents and activities along the land near the Adriatic Sea took place, provoking a certain division between the crowded coast and the much less densely populated inner areas (Fuschi, Massimi & Landini, 2011). In recent times, farm and rural tourism were the sole type of hospitality capable of increasing the bed supply, in a framework of territorial integration between farming and non-agricultural industries, both in the pretty rural areas and in urbanized or industrialized zones and their neighbourhoods (Corinto, 2014; Salizzoni, 2012).

Since decades, economist Giacomo Becattini (1987; 1990) denominated *light industrialization* the key-character of the central Italy development, fostered by the robust proliferation of SMEs, spread in the geographical space and often clus-

tered within 'industrial districts' specialized in one output (Fondazione Censis, 2002). Specialized researchers have long and strongly emphasized that origins of Italian industrial districts did descend from a mix of factors, pertaining both to urban and rural values (Becattini, 1987; Becattini, Belandi, Dei Ottati, & Sforzi, 2001; Fuà 1988). In the Marche region, family-businesses frequently run small-scale manufacturing enterprise jointly with farming, and rural and urban residents have close relations and common entrepreneurial attitudes (Dunford & Greco, 2005). In the whole population (rural and urban), proportion of self-employed workers is high.

In the whole region, 'the economic role of the family is often not confined to consumption, but covers production too [...] Relationships within the family and with neighbours are supportive and there is a marked community participation and social integration [...] In this world of family businesses and self-employed workers, there is some management experience, some spirit of initiative, some sense of responsibility, and all these gifts, even in small doses, are widespread among population.' (Fuà 1988, pp. 262-263).

In the Marche, only the municipality of Ancona has slightly more than 100,000 inhabitants. The occurring small average size of urban centres is the historical legacy of a society in which, for centuries, residents in urban areas based their way of life on contacts with the surrounding countryside (Conti, 1996). Local culture of both entrepreneurs and workers still maintains distinctive know-how, skills and craft abilities, fit for the production of consumption goods, such as shoes, furniture, household appliances. These socio-economic and demographic special characteristics have been strengthened by the other big driver of the regional development, i. e. the tourism activities concentrated along the coast of the Adriatic Sea (Corinto, 2014; Salizzoni, 2012). The region has a coastline of 180 kilometres, along which the dissemination of tourism activities was seemingly equal to the light

industrialization in the inner areas.

3. Objectives and Procedures

The aim of this work is to demonstrate how the university can deal with its Third Mission, in spreading knowledge within the local socio-economic environment. The paper reports the authors' personal experience and lessons learnt about relations between place and university, while teaching and researching at the Tourism Degree of the University of Macerata during the past 10-year period. In particular, the paper explores how research and education on tourism (and sustainable tourism) can empower local communities not to loose identity in adapting their pattern of making business, fostering traditional know-how for exploiting opportunities originating from the global boost of the tourism market.

The experiences narrated in this paper are specifically related to the three following topics, which are within the main field of the authors' research activity:

- (i) Perception of local actors about the 'spirit of the place' of the Marche region;
- (ii) Online reputation of hotels in the city of Macerata;
- (iii) Twittering on sustainable tourism in the Adriatic Ionian macro-region.

The researches under (i) and (ii) have been conducted by a field team composed by the authors and some students, both during monographic courses of lessons, case-study work groups, and making of theses; for the (iii) research the team was made by the authors, who have many times given lessons and seminars on this topic.

4. Results of Three Studies Placed in the Marche

4.1. Perception of local actors about the 'spirit of the place' of the Marche region

Results exposed in this paragraph come from a specific survey conducted involving the students of the Degree of Tourism from 2011 to 2013. They have recorded twenty direct interviews to key-informants aiming at enucleating main features of the local socioeconomic fabric and spirit of the place, as perceived by local actors (Corinto, 2016). The perceived spirit of the place can be resumed as key-figures of being a resident, living and working in the Marche, as follows:

- (i) People show a certain degree of closure to all exterior things or appearing as novelty;
- (ii) Residents have a strong proudness of belonging to their own old, beloved and safe place;
- (iii) Both a profound sense of labour ethic and strong entrepreneurial aptitude are spread all over the regional territory;
- (iv) Workers and entrepreneurs over-exploit themselves in producing consumption goods, especially for very high quality markets, implementing profound handicraft skills.

The research showed clearly a strong individual passion for working and sparing earned money, to be reinvested in family-run industries. These figures are largely considered as the specific 'Marchigian' assets, capable of being the actual motor of local development, and perfectly in line with the farming model inherited from the past generations. Marchigians consider themselves strong workers and brave entrepreneurs, capable of selling goods abroad.

Capabilities to vision new industrial products

and new markets are strong, as well as aptitudes to face risky enterprises. This innovating orientation is easily implemented in the traditional manufacturing industries, while it becomes a 'scarce resource' in the tourism industry. In other words, the transfer of entrepreneurial capabilities from manufacturing industries to services is sticky.

Although it is increasing, the average willingness to hospitality is not a regular asset of the local human capabilities, traditionally educated in handicraft and industrial production. Tourists may easily perceive the individual 'shy behavior' and reserved temper as hostility rather than authenticity and a genuine habit. A focal point is the low propensity for cooperation and a sort of continuing distance between private initiatives and public intervention, especially in the tourism industry. In the sector, it is not so difficult to inventory and depict singular successful companies, whilst it is quite impossible to find stories of good private-public relations. On this, it is important to record a fundamental statement issued by a tourism entrepreneur:

"I would like to be able to working not only with other entrepreneurs, but even with institutions, universities, with cultural institutions, politicians, hoping we can see a starting point for future collaborative initiatives". (Interview on April 11th, 2011 reported by Corinto (2016)).

The research allows to vision the economic potentiality of tourism, even subjected to the strict necessity of training people, both workers and entrepreneurs, in cooperative collaboration and supporting public/private dialog.

4.2. Online Reputation of Hotels in the City of Macerata

Results exposed in this paragraph come from a research aimed at assessing behavior of hotel managers in using social media as a leverage of company marketing and a tool for establishing relations

with clients. The survey was performed during the year 2015, analyzing the texts of reviews made by tourists on the web aggregator TripAdvisor and answers managers gave to them (Corinto & Curzi, 2016).

The hotels located in the city that received online reviews in the period were 10, and they represent nearly the whole hotel accommodation capacity of the city. They include two 4 star and three 3 star accommodations. Until April 15th, 2015, 1.836 reviews have been collected and analysed. They come mainly from Italian tourists, who are near exclusively the total arrivals to Macerata. Texts have been analysed in order to underline the sentiment expressed by clients and how managers reacted or answered (Pang & Lee, 2008).

In this paper, for the sake of brevity, only the comparison between the two 4 star hotel located in the municipal area of Macerata is presented. The two hotels rank the same level of stars, but have received very different reviews by clients on their satisfaction. Tourists declared main interest for venue accessibility and location, room comfort, quality of breakfast, and kindness of welcome.

The worst reviews have been expressed for the hotel located in the very old centre of the city, but reputed very scarce for room quality, care of client's necessities, and level of breakfast. The hotel located in the countryside gains in reputation for showing high care for clients, superior quality of warm hospitality and very good breakfast. The commitment to clients is confirmed also because the hotel manager does use to properly respond to any of the negative online reviews issued and thank for positive ones.

This research shows diffused attitude of under-rating social media in hotel marketing, and a general misuse of knowledge retrievable from reviews

issued by hotel clients. The opportunity to use this kind of information for managing is completely missed.

4.3. Twittering on Sustainable Tourism in the Adriatic Ionian Macro-region

The third case presented refers to the opportunity/necessity to integrate the tourism offer of the Marche region in a broader geographical area, as stated by the Marche Region that envisaged the Adriatic Ionian macro-region as an effective area for designing a model of sustainable tourism (Regione Marche, 2016). The survey aimed at understanding the 'perceived meaning' of 'sustainable tourism', analyzing texts issued online by Twitter users during the last summer season (Corinto & Curzi, in press). The intention was to answer to two questions: do policymakers and tourists have the same mind about the meaning of 'sustainable tourism'? Can policymakers adapt their programs and communications in order to match the tourist's preferences in the Adriatic Ionian macro-region?

Data collected refer to four tourist destinations, located in the Eastern and Western coasts of the Adriatic Sea: namely Cosenatico and San Benedetto del Tronto in Italy, and Markaska and Split in Croatia. The destinations have been chosen for their established notoriety, and can be considered as emblematic. The online searching was oriented to trace conversations (texts) containing words more or less related to the concept of sustainable tourism. As a benchmark of sustainability the Blue Flag Programme criteria have been used. Those words/criteria are exposed in table 1.

Table 1 | Words/criteria used by the Blue Flag Programme

Accessible	Freshwater
Algae Vegetation	Habitats
Bathing water	Health
Beach Management Committee	Information
Beach Operators	Lifesaving
Beach user	Local authorities
Bicycling	Local Eco-system
Blue Flag	Map
Blue Flag season	Marine areas
Camping	Oil
Clean	Physically disabled
Code of conduct	Pollution
Dogs	Recyclable
Driving	Safety
Dumping	Sea
Eco-label	Sensitive area
Eco-system	Sewage
Education	Sustainable development
Enterococci	Toilet
Environment	Waste bins
Environmental management	Waste containers
Escherichia Coli	Waste-water
Facilities	Water
First Aid	Water quality
Flag	

Source: Foundation for Environmental Education, (n.d.)

A mass of nearly 35 thousands tweets has been collected and analyzed, following the sentiment analysis method suggested by Pang and Lee (2008).

Results can be schematized as follows:

(i) The most searched words are the 'name' of the destination, and then 'sea' and 'beach';

(ii) The Italian destinations are cited more than the Croatian ones; Makarska is the less

treated;

(iii) Within the Blue Flag criteria, used as keywords, the terms 'sea' and 'beach' are the most used ones in all the considered languages. When linked to singular destinations they produce the same ranking of the two Italian destinations before the Croatian ones.

(iv) All the environmentally sensitive hashtags, referring to the Blue Flag criteria of sustainable tourism, are the very residual part of the total mass of texts 'talking' about the four destinations; there are no substantial differences between the two coasts, even due to their minimal amount;

(v) Hastags referring directly to the eco-label Blue Flag are literally very few.

The research shows clearly that the analysed online conversations (texts) regarding the selected destinations utterly treat their leisure features rather than any kind of environmental topic.

5. Lessons from Research and Teaching Experiences

From the above exposed different experiences in research and teaching it is possible to gain lessons regarding both the general mission of the University and the authors' scale of interest.

The Third Mission University received from the Ministry can be beneficial for academicians because it actually helps them in focalizing theory and practice efforts toward real life and necessity of communities where Universities are immersed. University can effectively participate in the governance process designed by national and local public agencies—the National Ministry of Research and the Regional Government—by helping territories to customize new visions for local development.

However, the divide between efforts and results may be large. Moreover any survey oriented to practice helps teachers in the students' commitment.

Especially the research regarding the 'spirit of the place' put in light the absolute importance of local capabilities in exploiting resources for economic purposes and the fundamental role of private/public relations. Both entrepreneurs and common people share a precise perception about relations between their lives and the place where they are settled. All the actors living in this area have manifested a clear sense of place and social identity that is a sound description of the 'spirit of the place', keen on supporting manufacturing and much less hospitality.

The perceived atmosphere by local interviewed actors can be simplified in such a sentence as 'we are missing a great opportunity'. Namely, the entire Marchigian society perceives the necessity of adapting the general scheme of economy, and in the same time 'suffers' the absence of capabilities of collaboration in designing and implementing a service economy. The main perceived lacking asset is the insurmountable distance between private and public objectives. It is possible to assess a great deal of human capital and a sort of very minor social capital. Singular initiatives are flourishing while cooperation is not. A lesson for teaching must be learnt.

Because training of students is a good leverage for disseminating knowledge in the society and space, with the aim at improving collaborative skills, the teaching method of the authors has been implemented by adopting small and medium group works, practice exercises, performing of case-study related to the territory, use of web tools and blogs, and seminars with tourism entrepreneurs. Students of the Department rated this specific activity higher than that of any other Department of the University of Macerata (Università di Macerata, 2016).

More specific items in tourism training can be

explained for assessing future steps. The university should support the tourism sector by training students at interpreting and managing the changing environment of web tools. Relations between business and consumer are rapidly changing due to the large diffusion of the Internet related technologies. The management of online reputation, supply channels, and promotion of tourist companies and destinations became a daily continuous commitment of managers. The incumbent 'platform economy', as well as the relationship and storytelling marketing, is even more intertwined in product differentiation and client commitment. All the events happening online are determinants for the firm organization and management, and main part of consumers' behaviors can be detected and managed by using web tools. A new online pact between companies and consumers is necessary as well as a credible storytelling of both production and consumption. All these facts request a strong capability of rapid adaptation to the present and future environment change, improving the ability of merging very diverse skills and competencies.

The two case studies related to the web use in tourism showed the necessity and opportunity to utilize this new source of knowledge in organizing and managing business. The university can be a bridge between the public and private companies in assessing strengths and weaknesses of destinations by suggesting methods and practices for giving sense to sustainable tourism, and first of all by training students in flexibility, cooperation and problem solving. The University of Macerata can help a broader geographical area than that of the Marche region, because students involved in the action-research-teaching scheme will be able to disseminate benefits also in their regions of origin.

Even though past experience can be assessed as positive, any feedback should be forecast in the medium-long period, given the slow adaptation of local entrepreneurial culture in interacting with the tourism sector. Results exposed help to

understand the circularity of university/place relations and its sound importance in choosing local features of decisions. The university vision of its three goals, research, teaching and knowledge implementation in the real economy, is surely conditioned by its emplacement and must be flexible.

6. Further Steps

The vision of the University of Macerata, stressed by the motto 'Innovation through Humanism', is surely that of sustaining the local society by an increasing diffusion of knowledge. The Tourism degree faces the fatiguing job of introducing not yet acquired competencies, skills and knowledge in a territory traditionally keen to manufacture and handicraft productions.

Results exposed suggest forwarding to:

- (i) Continue to make research involving the students, because it help them to face real companies and researchers to propose effective methods and practice topics;
- (ii) Improve the involvement of students in active forms of teaching, and learning by doing;
- (iii) Improve the international experience of both researchers and students, in the EU and extra European Countries, in order to show different paths of local development;
- (iv) Stimulate the local community of tourism entrepreneurs in participating the research and teaching reality of singular scholars and the university as a whole;
- (v) Increase the periodical survey of stakeholders and sustain their participation is producing effective vision and strategic thinking.

The path of university/place relations is paved of difficulties especially in the case exposed, as tourism is not listed as a traditional asset of the local entrepreneurial culture. Anyway, a cumulative effect is expected, due to the 10-year satisfactory experience made till up today. It will be necessary to keep allocation policy of human and financial means at least at the past same level.

It seems credible that the involvement of universities in processes of local development will be effective only if the degree of trust between different territorial institutions will increase, so that the collaboration will be not ever sporadic but planned and credibly organized in practice.

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