The organisation of a districtual museum: the Textile Museum of Prato, preserving an industrial heritage and developing a sustainable system

Sarti Daria; Varra Lucia
University of Florence, Department of Management and Economics, Florence, Italy

1. Introduction
The last twenty years have generated many changes in the field of cultural organisation that are intended to respond to the logic of efficiency and effectiveness in an even more pressing way. It is difficult to fully understand the impact of many reforms that have taken place in the sector on cultural management. These reforms have certainly expanded the range of management strategies used at the level of a single organisation [Lindqvist, 2012], and they have given rise to new organisational forms that are increasingly modular and transparent, not only by listening to the client’s needs and the activities of growing and articulated auditing [Gstraunthaler and Piber, 2012] but also by becoming more “permeable” to the system of governance. Even Italy, for a few decades, has seen a wider involvement of external parties [public and private] in the management of cultural heritage. In this phenomenon, as well as the progressive reduction of state funding, the cultural approach to sustainability in local policies makes a large contribution; in fact, sustainability offers the protection of cultural and environmental heritage, the defence of local identity and better quality of life but also requires responsibility and social participation by all of the stakeholders in the choices of the local government [Ritchie and Crouch, 2000].

The experience of district museums traces back to the same purposes of preservation and the development of a manufacturing identity by all stakeholders who are committed to enhancing the local intellectual capital; the district museums are, in fact, seen as local productive realities that do not testify to a single business experience but rather to the identity and the know-how that is common to all district organisations.

The aim of this paper is to present the case of the Textile Museum of Prato as an example of an organisation that preserves and enhances the history and know-how of a textile district.

The museum of Prato represents a good practice of management and of knowledge production on the territory, as well as an example of a governance network, meant as a solid pool of interdependent actors but operationally autonomous from the state, market and civil society, which interact within an institutionalized framework of rules, norms and shared knowledge for the creation of a “public value”.

The Museum of Prato presents good management practices for knowledge production of the territory; it is also an example of a governance network that is meant to be a solid pool of interdependent actors that are operationally autonomous from the state, market and civil society, and which interact within an institutionalised framework of rules, norms and shared knowledge for the
creation of a “public value” [Sørensen and Torfing, 2009]. The museum is an example of an effective combination of tradition and innovation, the past and the future and the public and the private. For the purposes of this paper, a case analysis methodology will be adopted. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews will be conducted with the representatives of public and private institutions supporting the Museum. Additionally, data and information from existing secondary sources will be collected.

2. Industrial districts and knowledge
The Italian production system is composed of a larger number of small-sized firms. In many cases, these small enterprises are clustered in local systems (LSs) or industrial districts (IDs) that are characterised by a high manufacturing specialisation and by an extensive horizontal and vertical division of labour [Becattini, 1989]. Many contributions to the literature on IDs have highlighted their innovative potential and cognitive dynamics. Authors refer to them by different terms, including regional systems of innovation [Cooke et al., 1998], knowledge systems [Rullani, 2004] and learning labs [Grandinetti and Tabacco, 1993].

There is ample agreement about the key role of knowledge and learning in IDs, and several learning paths are highlighted. In such manufacturing contexts, the high level of vertical and horizontal specialisation of work favours the creation of tacit knowledge. On the one hand, a reduced specialisation within each of the ID’s firms favours broad individual experiences and increases the opportunity for learning by doing and learning on the job. On the other hand, the permeability of the IDs’ boundaries favours an opening to external sources of knowledge, resulting in cooperative and imitative learning processes that affect the knowledge of the system as a whole. Additionally, labour mobility at the inter- and intra-districtual levels, often involving highly skilled technicians, contributes to sharing and generating new knowledge within the IDs and between external firms. Additionally, employing professionalism and business in similar working activities generates mutual learning experiences and economies of learning.

According to most authors, IDs are characterised by two different types of knowledge: instrumental knowledge, i.e., technical, practical and relational knowledge; the tacit knowledge – or “sticky” knowledge [von Hippel 1994] – that is rooted in the local know-how; and “semantic” knowledge, which is represented by shared meanings about the way to behave, produce and live [Rullani, 2004, 129] and comes from a collective identity; in other words, it is related to the “secrets of the industry” that, according to Marshall [1961], “are in the air”.

Cooke et al. [1998] emphasise the mainly informal institutional context [i.e., norms, trust and routines] in which such interactive learning takes place. In fact, the dynamic and complex interactions among actors that characterise such meta-contexts (i.e., IDs) favours learning processes. This concept has some similarity with the concept of ‘Ba’ [Nonaka and Konno, 1998], which is defined as a shared space that serves as the foundation for knowledge creation.
In IDs, there are two main categories of actors who are continuously engaged in interactive learning [Cooke et al., 1998]. These are (1) The regional production structure or knowledge exploitation subsystem which consists mainly of firms, often displaying clustering tendencies. (2) The regional supportive infrastructure or knowledge generation subsystem which consists of public and private research laboratories, universities and colleges, technology transfer agencies, vocational training organisations, etc." [Asheim and Coenen, 2005, 1177].

For regional supportive infrastructure, the museum represents a place of preservation and dissemination of knowledge and cultural heritage that is linked to the disseminated of productive skills. It represents an ideal space where it is possible to help to activate the processes of knowledge creation that characterise an industrial area and also to strengthen the local identity. In fact, the museum in a districtual context can favour inter and intra-districtual knowledge exchange processes and the production and re-production of new knowledge and identities. In other words, the museum could represent a vehicle that is able to grant a double loop learning process for the ID. In this sense, in the continuous transition between tacit and explicit knowledge and between individual and collective knowledge, all four of the knowledge creation processes – internalisation, socialisation, externalisation and combination – may be preserved by the museum.

3. Network governance and ID museums
The manner in which a museum preserves and creates knowledge is linked to its managerial capabilities and to its system of governance. It is generally recognised that networks may represent the answer to overcoming the dichotomies of state and market, public and private, local and national, etc. The N-form may, in fact, provide a viable method of horizontal co-ordination to face the growing complexity and the need for [public and private] resources in the public sector, which had experienced in recent decades a fragmentation that was due mainly to reforming laws.

A tentative effort to assess and to improve the impact and performance of governance networks can provide a series of normative criteria in terms of equity, democracy, meta-achievement, productivity, stability, conflict resolution, learning ability, and so on. The question of how to choose an appropriate criterion for evaluating the performance of a network has been addressed previously [Provan and Kenis, 2008] and has identified quite a few advantages in network governance, including better learning, a more efficient use of resources, a greater ability to plan and to tackle complex problems, greater competitiveness and better services for clients and customers [Chaskin, 2001; Brass et al., 2004].

According to Provan and Kenis [2008], there may be three different forms of network governance that are based on the following two dimensions: the centralisation of decision processes and whether the network is governed by participants or external forces [see figure 1]. According to these two dimensions, the forms of network governance may be defined as follows: participant-governed networks, lead organisation-governed networks and network
Administrative organisations. In particular, participant-governed networks are governed by the network members, with no separate governance entity. This type of network is especially common in building the “community capacity” [Chaskin, 2001]. Lead organisation-governed networks may involve network members who are characterised by a centralised governance. A network administration organisation [NAO] is a centralised model where a separate administrative entity is set up with the aim to govern the network and coordinate its activities [Provan and Kenis, 2007]. Network governance may be a feasible response to the issue of sustainability, which involves all stakeholders in a territory to take an active part in decisions regarding a community asset.

4. The Textile Museum of Prato
The Textile Museum of Prato (TMoP) represents a model of conservation and the development of knowledge and know-how of the industrial district of Prato, not only in its traditional characteristics and transformation processes but also in its response to increasingly important sustainability issues. Simultaneously, it represents an effective network governance model, a democratic model and a coordinated model that is stable, flexible and able to guarantee to all the main actors of the territory, both public and private, participation in decision making.

4.1. The Textile Museum as a container of memory and laboratory of knowledge of the textile sector
The TMoP represents the most important testimony to the manufacturing culture of the district of Prato. The textile industry of Prato dates back to the 12th century. The production system of Prato, well-known all over the world, was born from the capacity to ennoble rags [carded wool] [www.ui.prato.it]. In the 1970s, it was transformed from a textile woollen district into a fashion district with the development of micro-chains (jersey, combed print yarns, etc.). In the 1980s, it reacted to the sharp decline in carded wool production with a repositioning towards the production of items with a higher added value and with differentiation (synthetic fleece, chenille, etc.). In the 1990s, it moved towards connected strategies of diversification (services, textiles machinery, etc.). Today, the district is in a phase of deep rethinking and is moving in the direction of “dematerialised” production, including educational services; sup-

Fig. 1 – Modes of Network Governance [source: Provan and Kenis, 2007]
Thus, the history of the district is the history of a community of actors and practices, of flexibility and of cultural integration, together with tradition and innovation. Heterogeneous partners and owners of knowledge and specialised skills have implemented processes of collective learning with an effective combination of appropriation and accessibility to knowledge. The TMoP collects the cultural heritage, knowledge and know-how that have accumulated in the district.

The Museum was founded in 1975 thanks to the donation by the entrepreneur Loriano Bertini of an important set of ancient fabrics that dates back to the period between the 14th and the 18th century. He acquired them from a Florentine antique dealer, Giuseppe Salvadori. This collection was given to the “Technical Industrial Institute Buzzi”, a historical “forge” of the creation of textile technicians and entrepreneurs since the end of the 19th century. Since the mid-20th century, with the initiative of a group of teachers, this school has been involved in collecting historical testimonies about the local textile production – an activity that, over the years, sees in the foreground the commitment of the former students of the school, who help to build collections [Boccherini, 1999]. Therefore, the birth of the museum was due to a fruitful collaboration between an enlightened private party and a public school with excellence in the field of training. Since the early years of the museum, there has been a strong interest in its ancient collections, which has led to numerous purchases and donations. Over the years, the interest in strengthening the museum has made the main local institutions very active. The museum was built as the historical memory of the district, collecting not only collections of value but also some fabrics that do not have a great artistic value but do recall the past history of manufacturing by preserving what remained after the bombings of World War II, which had destroyed models, samples and machines. The museum’s exposition (which, as of September 2013, has been completely renewed) narrates the path of adaptation, insightful technical innovations and products that the district has faced, but the synthesis of ancient and modern, of tradition and innovation and of technique and creativity is told by the same building that houses it. The museum, after having temporarily occupied (since 1997) a part of the seat of the Municipality of Prato, has been housed since 2003 in the former Campolmi pruning, the most important factory of the 19th century, which was carefully restored according to the most innovative green and sustainable building techniques. With the renovation of the Campolmi, a new face has been given to an identity [De Mattei, 2010], that involves the manufacturing processes and the product as well as the idea, service, beauty, sociability and sustainability. All of these aspects may be found immediately at the entrances of the building. The first entrance allows a view of the medie-
val walls from every angle, and the second entrance, from the Piazza della Cultura, allows a view of the smokestacks of the past and the access to the Lazzerini library, which is now considered a privileged place of the accumulation and exchange of knowledge among the students and the people of Prato. As it represents a vessel of knowledge, we remember the enormous wealth of cultural resources that is preserved within the Museum: the tangible cultural resources consist of approximately 6,000 artefacts of international importance, and this heritage was developed as the result of over thirty years of donations by associations, private and public entities, as well as many private citizens. These donations include a) textile articles, such as archaeological fabrics coming from excavations or graves, belonging to the Coptic culture (3rd-10th century A.C.) and pre-Columbian culture; sacred textiles and vestments; embroidered fabrics and textiles (15th-20th century); ethnic fabrics and clothes from India, China, Japan, Indonesia, Yemen, etc. and contemporary fabrics, selected on the basis of their highly innovative content and of the aesthetic tastes of the district; b) prototypes, such as samples from Prato, from the last quarter of the 19th century through the contemporary period; sketches and artists’ fabrics: exemplars made by artists of the first half of the 18th century and contemporary artists and fashion plates (male and female) collected by the main French and Italian magazines published in the 19th century; and c) machineries, such as handlooms, fullers, spinners, plotters, etc.

The intangible resources consist of cognitive knowledge, linked to conscious mental processes and the “I think” aspect [e.g., techniques and productive processes]; emotional knowledge, i.e., the knowledge connected to the “I feel” aspect of the individuals and the territory (e.g., values, intuition, creativity, experience and the subjects’ capability of vision) and spiritual knowledge, i.e., the knowledge connected to the individual and local “I am” aspect (identity of Prato; the operating spirit belonging to the district).

The Textile Museum organises the heritage of resources (both tangible and intangible) and creates value for both the museum and the territory. It converts the potential intellectual capital into operational intellectual capital through some integrators that include the governance system, the technology, the

Fig.2 - Resources, integrators and activities in the Textile Museum
processes, the management and the leadership [Bratianu and Orzea, 2013]. The effective integration of resources gives rise to many activities, services and projects that increase and distribute the value of the present knowledge to the territory and abroad. The museum presents an articulate exhibition system that starts, for example, with a visit to an ancient steam boiler (to witness the complexity of the distribution of the energy systems found within factories during the industrialisation period); a historical section, which offers a broad overview of the present contents (including embroideries, author’s fabrics of the 20th century, ethnic materials, vestiges, etc.) exposed with a periodic rotation in highly innovative showcases and also illustrated through videos; an area of familiarisation with materials and processes that, through touch and a series of explanatory panels, introduce non-expert visitors to the materials and main phases of textile production; and a contemporary section, the only one in current European museums that, thanks to the consortium Pratotrade and its 150 selected companies, allows one to preview presentations with respect to the commercial distribution of the most innovative fabrics produced by the companies in the district [http://www.museodeltessuto.it/exhibition].

Consistent with the purposes of the statute, the museum carries out its educational mission, which is aimed at schools, families and adults, through a rich program of initiatives (i.e., lessons, laboratories, trips, etc.) proposed or designed for this purpose. The Museum offers the opportunity for young people to undertake practical internships or educational experiences at the museum. The development of knowledge and know-how is especially aimed at the operators of the textile industry, who are supported by the museum in their path of adaptation of the knowledge and of the innovation necessary to compete. The support takes place through both projects and services, such as the possibility to consult the heritage not exhibited to the public, the conservation and restoration of fabrics through an appropriate internal laboratory and the rent of spaces for events consistent with the purposes of the foundation or with the interests of the territory.

The international role of the driving force of local knowledge on a national and international scale emerges from numerous European and non-European projects. Among these projects, the TMoP is involved in initiatives that are concerned with the protection and enhancement of the heritage of knowledge and textile identity in the territories, the creation of integrated digital catalogues and the use of archive integration to map the productive background and help young designers. For those projects, the Museum cooperates with other textile museums and international institutions (e.g., textile associations, professional institutes of fashion and design and documentation centres). Additionally, the projects with which the TMoP is involved have a strong orientation towards the principles of sustainability, for example, through the creation of “routes” that allow tourists, operators and researchers to understand the main European textile realities. Another example is through sustainable innovation that is based on respect for the environment and for the community, i.e., a competition for young designers, “Cardato regenerated C02 neutral”, was promoted to create low-impact fabrics with the recognition of ecological credits [http://www.museodeltessuto.it/activities].
The activities and the projects originate from a willingness to create a “field of interaction” between the museum and students/families and between trainees and external experts/internal staff. These projects also originate from forms of dialogue and collective reflection that allow for the externalisation of individual tacit knowledge, from processes of systematisation of codified knowledge belonging to several operators, organisations and local systems and from processes of individual learning through the acquisition of the systemic knowledge. All of this is added to strong internal operating interactions and to the intense “connection” of the museum with the social networks: collaboration, the exchange of information and knowledge that characterises the well-integrated team of the seven internal operators within the museum, all graduates. This team is one of the strengths of the structure, as the direct interviews demonstrate. The museum has also a Facebook profile, which is very successful on both the local and international levels. Thus, the museum represents Nonaka’s “ba” [Nonaka and Konno, 1998], in which all of the processes of the conversion and creation of knowledge are generated, at the level of the museum, the district of Prato and the national and international environments. Figure 4 shows the different areas and processes of knowledge creation in the museum, according to the model of Nonaka.

4.2. The governance of the Museum

According to current literature, there exist integrators, such as the governance system, technology, processes, managerial systems and leadership, that are able to transform knowledge from potential capital to operational capital [Bratianu and Orzea, 2013]. In particular, in this work, the aspect of governance is analysed. The museum is an example of governance network, in which all of the institutional and social components of the local community are represented.

The Museum was founded in 1975 after a remarkable donation of fabrics made by an entrepreneur to the local technical high school Buzzi, in which the collection was hosted until 1997. Between 1997 and 2003, the Museum was managed by an association and occupied a part of the seat of the Municipality of Prato. Starting in 2003, the TMoP was moved to the old factory of Campol-
mi and managed by the Foundation of the Museo del Tessuto.

As an expression of the local community at both the institutional and productive levels, the President of the Foundation is appointed by the management board based on the recommendation of the Mayor of Prato, while the vice president is also appointed by the management board but on the recommendation of Buzzi’s alumni association.

According to the first version of the statute (2003), the foundation has two types of members. One type is its founding members, which corresponded to the previous small promoting group who first promoted the association, including the Municipality of Prato, the Province of Prato, the Chamber of Commerce of Prato and the Industrial Union. The other type of member included in the first statute was its meritorious members, who are considered to be public or private bodies or private individuals who, through donations of remarkable consistency either at one time or repeated over time, demonstrated, according to the sole discretion of the management committee, a special commitment to the foundation. The meritorious members of the foundation are the local bank foundation, the local bank, the association of the alumni of Buzzi, a consortia of textile producers (called the Pratotrade) and the association “Friends of the Textile Museum”.

The foundation functions through the action of a council of address, which fulfils the address function. It is composed of the President (who is responsible for half of the points in the votes given to the municipality), the Vice-President (whose vote is entitled to half of the points assigned to the alumni association of Buzzi), a representative of each of the founding members and a representative of the meritorious members elected by the meritorious board. The management board has executive tasks, and it is composed of one re-
representative for each of the founding members, one representative from each assimilated member and a representative of the meritorious members. In the most recent version of the statute (2013), another member category, the supporting members, was included. These members may be private bodies and institutions sharing the aim of the foundation who occasionally contribute through a donation in the manner and to the extent determined from time to time, including for specific projects of the Foundation. They will participate in the management board for issues concerning the object of their contribution.

5. Conclusions
The districtual museum captures and describes the evolution of the historical and productive link between the company and the territory, the birth and the transformation of the ID, the processes of creation of collective knowledge that it (ID) facilitates because the production of knowledge is an interactive process involving a plurality of heterogeneous actors who are connected by relationships of trust. The opening of the organisations to the art consequently leads to the search for adequate partnerships and synergies between the public and private sectors.
The Textile Museum of Prato is an example of success for this type of synergy. The system of governance represented by the foundation appears to be a mature system that is able to sustain itself through the processes of democratic representation, the active and conscious participation of all members and the balancing of the needs of the different stakeholders.
The evolution of the system of governance of the Textile Museum has led, on the one hand, to a progressive tinge of inside/outside boundaries with a greater and more flexible system permeability of local actors and, on the other hand, to a re-establishment of internal bonds that have become increasingly solid through the mechanisms of trust and the satisfaction of reciprocal expectations. This has facilitated the exchange of experiences and different views, the sharing of strategic objectives and the implementation of operational programs within the network. The network governance of the Museum is the first environment in which tacit and explicit knowledge is produced and from which begins the system of knowledge management that makes the TMoP an example of international excellence.

References
http://www.ui.prato.it/unionedigitale/v2/areastudi/Presentazione-distretto.pdf
http://www.museodeltessuto.it/