

## INTANGIBLE ASSETS IN THE COMPETITIVE PROCESSES OF THE CULTURAL TOURISTIC DESTINATIONS. AN EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM TARANTO'S DESTINATION

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### **Abstract:**

The research objective is to analyze the “widespread museum” of the city of Taranto, the systemic set of widespread cultural heritage in the city and in the surrounding area, and to consider it in view of a cultural touristic destination. In particular, the research aims to verify if and how the “widespread museum” may help to achieve social and economic positive externalities, so substantial benefits for stakeholders involved in the local community as the residents, public institutions, enterprises, due to the culture, aptitude to relation, cognitive abilities, knowledge, traditions, customs ingrained in a specific cultural area. Therefore, the role of intangible assets in the development of destination, as perceived by residents, has been defined through some synthesis indicators obtained by factor analysis – which point out the different perception in the areas of residence.

*Keywords: destination management, cultural touristic destination competitiveness, intangible assets, destination sustainability, quality of life, society, “widespread museum”*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The research objective is to analyze the “widespread museum” of the city of Taranto, the systemic set of widespread cultural heritage in the city and in the surrounding area, and to consider it in view of a cultural touristic destination.

According to the managerial literature dealing with *Destination Management* we can state that in order to have a competitive destination we need the activation of a specific system of tangible assets, like the tangible cultural heritage, which can make it attractive, together with what is considered intangible, i.e. a set of organizational and management skills and abilities (Aaker, 1989; Brondoni, Gatti & Corniani, 2003) allowing both the design and the allocation of an integrated offer that can intercept the different exigencies of its own potential reference market (Cantone, Risitano & Testa, 2007). Therefore, the destination competitiveness is the interaction result of different factors which need to be managed together.

For this reason we can state that in order to have a competitive destination we need the activation of a tangible and intangible assets system which takes account of a *resource-based view* (Grant, 1991) and with reference to the numerous theoretical works that have contributed to codify the role of the enterprise assets as an analysis unit in the creation dynamics of the competitive advantage.

While creating the theoretical framework, particular care has been given to national and international management literature which suggested different models that identify and analyse the destination competitiveness drivers and the role that can be played by a destination’s intangible assets when they support its competitive processes (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000; Ritchie, Crouch & Hudson, 2001; Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Enright & Newton, 2004; Dwyer, Mellor, Livaic, Edwards & Kim, 2004; Iazzi, Rosato, Gravili & Iaia, 2012). On this matter we can notice that if the macro categories of Ritchie and Crouch’s model were read from a tangible/intangible assets viewpoint, we could get that a considerable and particularly remarkable part of the destination competitiveness determinants can be considered as intangible assets.

Moreover, at the basis of the above mentioned Ritchie and Crouch’s model lies the firm belief that the sustainability of a destination is a requirement to get the competitiveness of that destination. For this reason it greatly acknowledges the inherent tie between the destination competitiveness and sustainability. Consequently, scholars state that the most competitive destination is the one that improves the quality of life of its residents to the largest extent (Ritchie et al., 2001).

We therefore need to accept the idea that the sustainability model of the local development is a value in itself, able to have an effect on the destination competitiveness, as it is an element that prevents the landscape deterioration on the one hand, on the other hand it strengthens the inner social cohesion and consequently the landscape ability to suggest a touristic offer with a strong identity connotation. For this reason, the research aims at analysing, as far as attractiveness and competitiveness are concerned, the contribution of a cultural touristic destination’s intangible assets, taking the inner stakeholders’ perspective into consideration and above all the residents’ one.

More specifically, the research aims to verify if and how the “widespread museum” of the city of Taranto may help to achieve social and economic positive externalities, so substantial benefits for stakeholders involved in the local community as the residents, public institutions, enterprises, due to the culture, aptitude to relation, cognitive abilities, knowledge, traditions, and to the customs ingrained in a specific cultural area. All that means wondering whether residents benefit from the culture of the area, the specific competences, and from the cultural touristic destination’s relational abilities through which the quality of life needs to be improved.

We tried to define the role of intangible assets in the development of the Ionian cultural touristic destination, as it is perceived by its residents – considering that, at the present time, the city of Taranto has not achieved yet the “destination” status, except from the modest inner regional flow of tourists, even if it has got a high potential in this sector. To this end we carried out a sample survey by administering an ad hoc questionnaire. We need to stress the importance of a survey addressed to the resident community because, as they have a wider view of the environmental context – both for their acquired knowledge and for their own relational heritage (as shown in the questionnaire) – they can play the role of promoters of a territory development (Golinelli, 2002, p.178). Moreover this research

aims at highlighting how cultural tourism can be an opportunity for the city and its sustainable development, thus becoming a proposal which is somewhat shared by the resident community and that should be put forward to policy makers by a logic of “participative strategic planning” (Napolitano, 2000, p.283; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Ansell & Gash, 2007).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

We did a desk analysis about the theoretical contributions to the development strategies of the local interest cultural heritage in view of the sustainable development (Montella 2012; Golinelli, 2008) and to the studies about *Destination Management* (Pechlaner & Weiermair, 2000; Franch, 2010; Pencarelli, 2009) and about *Resource-based theory* (Barney, 1991; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Grant, 1991; Boschetti & Lipparini, 1998). Particular care has been given to the national and international studies about the destination competitiveness and the role that intangible assets can have in supporting its competitive processes. Moreover, we decided to share the qualification proposal of a touristic destination’s intangible assets which were identified in the culture of the territory, the specific competences, the relational abilities and in the destination brand equity (Iazzi et al., 2012).

We did an on-the-spot analysis by means of a quality-quantity method questionnaire. The tool used for the research is composed of five sections: the first one deals with the social-demographic characteristics of the interviewed residents sample (section A); the other sections, composed of 33 items, investigate the interviewees’ opinions on the territory culture (section B), the specific competences (section C), the relational abilities (section D) and the cultural touristic destination brand (section E). As for the questions where the interviewees’ assessment was required, we used a five-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = nothing at all to 5 = very much.

The questionnaire was administered by direct interview to a sample of 30 residents in each of the 10 neighbourhoods composing the city of Taranto (Borgo; Città vecchia; Italia Montegranaro; Lido Azzurro; Paolo VI; Salinella; Solito Corvisea; Tamburi; Tre Carrare Battisti; San Vito Lama Talsano). Therefore, a total of 300 residents were interviewed out of a population of about 200.000 inhabitants. Moreover, the 10 neighbourhoods were later grouped into 4 areas, considering how close the residents of the neighbourhoods were to the different elements characterizing the city, which identifies the area 1, as the oldest and richest in cultural heritage: area 1 (Città vecchia, Borgo); area 2 (Italia Montegranaro, Tre Carrare Battisti, San Vito Lama Talsano); area 3 (Salinella, Solito Corvisea); area 4 (Tamburi, Lido Azzurro, Paolo VI).

The statistical methodology we used aimed first at making a summary, by means of factor analysis, of the huge amount of information which was in the items administered to the interviewees (Bartholomew, Steele, Galbraith & Moustaki, 2008). We made then a comparison between the average extracted factors in the various residence areas, in order to verify the hypothesis of a different perception of the phenomenon between the different areas of the city.

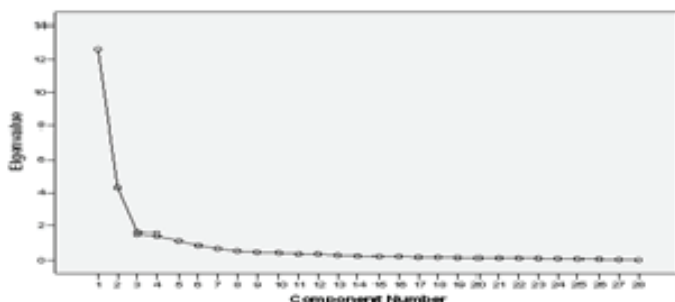
## 3. RESULTS

In order to summarize the information taken from 33 items of the questionnaire, a Factor Analysis (FA) has been carried out by using the Principal Components Analysis (PCA) as factor extraction method (Bartholomew et al., 2008). We have noticed that 5 of the analyzed items are not very correlated with the overall system of relations as they have very low communalities and for this reason they have been removed from the analysis. While a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index equal to 0.915 confirms the usefulness of an FA, the PCA have suggested using 5 components which summarize most of the information taken from the 28 selected items. We have actually decided to use the components that have an at least unitary explained variance (this variance is calculated by means of the eigenvalue of the single component) and on the whole the result has been that 5 components explain almost the 76% of the cumulative variance. Figure 1 shows how every component explains decreasing portions of the cumulative variance and therefore the first five of them have been considered as good enough to explain the different aspects of the analyzed complex phenomenon.

**Table 1:** Explained variance by the first five components extracted

| Component | Explained variance | Explained variance (%) | Cumulative explained variance (%) |
|-----------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1         | 12.63              | 45.11                  | 45.11                             |
| 2         | 4.32               | 15.43                  | 60.54                             |
| 3         | 1.61               | 5.74                   | 66.28                             |
| 4         | 1.51               | 5.4                    | 71.68                             |
| 5         | 1.2                | 4.28                   | 75.96                             |

**Figure 1:** Scree plot of eigenvalues



In order to identify and name the different factors to use as perception indicators of the phenomenon, a PROMAX oblique rotation has been used by fixing the parameter K at 2.7 (Hendrickson & White, 1964). This rotation allows every factor to be very correlated with some items, the ones which identify it, and not very correlated with the others. Therefore, every factor can be considered as a summary of the items it is correlated with. Table 2 shows the components matrix, which indicates the correlation between each item and the 5 factors considered after carrying out the rotation. The communality shows the variance proportion of each item reproduced by the five factors.

**Table 2:** Components matrix after PROMAX rotation (In bold the best correlation for each item)

| item  | Factor 1     | Factor 2    | Factor 3 | Factor 4 | Factor 5 | communality | item   | Factor 1      | Factor 2    | Factor 3    | Factor 4    | Factor 5    | communality |
|-------|--------------|-------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------|--------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| B.5.1 | <b>0.89</b>  | 0.08        | 0.06     | -0.14    | -0.01    | 0.82        | D.1.4  | -0.52         | <b>0.64</b> | 0.17        | -0.18       | -0.20       | 0.77        |
| B.5.2 | <b>0.68</b>  | 0.01        | -0.11    | -0.05    | -0.12    | 0.62        | B.3.2  | -0.09         | 0.04        | <b>0.81</b> | 0.07        | 0.05        | 0.83        |
| B.5.3 | <b>0.77</b>  | 0.14        | 0.00     | 0.20     | -0.48    | 0.83        | B.3.3  | 0.10          | 0.05        | <b>0.97</b> | -0.01       | 0.08        | 0.94        |
| B.5.4 | <b>0.72</b>  | 0.03        | 0.16     | 0.09     | -0.43    | 0.67        | B.3.7  | 0.04          | 0.17        | <b>0.76</b> | 0.12        | 0.04        | 0.81        |
| B.5.5 | <b>0.80</b>  | 0.04        | -0.01    | -0.18    | -0.06    | 0.77        | B.6.5  | 0.07          | 0.01        | <b>0.92</b> | 0.06        | 0.07        | 0.90        |
| B.5.6 | <b>0.81</b>  | 0.14        | -0.09    | -0.21    | 0.13     | 0.80        | B.3.1  | -0.19         | 0.18        | 0.11        | <b>0.67</b> | -0.02       | 0.75        |
| B.5.7 | <b>0.80</b>  | 0.03        | 0.12     | -0.22    | -0.03    | 0.70        | B.3.8  | 0.01          | 0.47        | -0.25       | <b>0.64</b> | 0.04        | 0.67        |
| B.2   | <b>-0.63</b> | 0.29        | -0.14    | 0.13     | 0.19     | 0.60        | B.6.1  | -0.21         | 0.03        | 0.23        | <b>0.64</b> | 0.04        | 0.79        |
| D.2   | <b>-0.74</b> | 0.40        | 0.11     | -0.18    | -0.14    | 0.75        | B.6.2* | <b>-0.46*</b> | -0.11       | 0.29        | <b>0.49</b> | -0.01       | 0.83        |
| B.1   | 0.30         | <b>0.65</b> | 0.01     | 0.26     | 0.33     | 0.85        | B.6.3  | -0.14         | -0.04       | 0.14        | <b>0.76</b> | -0.10       | 0.68        |
| B.3.6 | 0.14         | <b>0.62</b> | -0.03    | 0.24     | 0.17     | 0.61        | B.7    | -0.10         | 0.31        | 0.24        | <b>0.44</b> | 0.12        | 0.75        |
| C.3   | 0.06         | <b>0.79</b> | 0.08     | 0.08     | 0.16     | 0.84        | B.3.4  | -0.29         | 0.02        | 0.20        | -0.10       | <b>0.75</b> | 0.82        |
| D.1.2 | -0.02        | <b>0.80</b> | 0.05     | 0.02     | -0.01    | 0.69        | B.3.5  | -0.06         | 0.26        | -0.02       | 0.09        | <b>0.71</b> | 0.75        |
| D.1.3 | -0.07        | <b>0.75</b> | 0.12     | -0.03    | -0.06    | 0.63        | B.6.4  | -0.25         | -0.01       | 0.26        | 0.06        | <b>0.62</b> | 0.79        |

\* The item B.6.2 is almost equally correlated with factors 1 and 5, but it has been included in the first one because it is more similar to the other items correlated with it.

Considering the weight carried by the examined items, the five factors therefore stress the fundamental dimensions according to which we can classify the interviewees' assessments. Each factor is an indicator of a single dimension of the considered complex phenomenon. The identified five factors can be summarized as follows:

- *Factor 1*, which has been named "*importance of the territory culture and relational abilities*", is mainly correlated with 9 items, and on the whole it shows how important are, in the interviewees' opinion, the cultural aspects and the relational abilities of the territory for the city growth.

- *Factor 2*, named “*perception of the territory culture, of the relational abilities and of the competences*”, is correlated with 6 of the items and shows how the territory culture, relational abilities and the competences in human resources are actually perceived by residents.
- *Factor 3*, named “*perception of the environmental protection*”, is correlated with 4 items, and shows how the resident interviewees perceive the presence of care with environmental matters.
- *Factor 4*, named “*perception of the cultural heritage*”, is correlated with 6 items, and shows what and how the interviewees perceive about the residents’ sensibility concerning the city cultural and artistic heritage.
- *Factor 5*, named “*perception of the territory economy*”, is mainly correlated with 3 items and on the whole it shows the residents’ perception about the care found on the territory concerning the economic aspects of the city as touristic destination.

For each factor and interviewee we have calculated a factorial score that provides the measure of a dimension of the considered complex phenomenon. Every factorial score has a standardized normal distribution. Positive values show a positive assessment of the interviewee about the dimension associated with the factor, and vice versa as for the negative values. Values close to zero can be considered average. For each factor we have calculated the mean score and standard deviation in the different areas (table 3). Obviously, the average and the standard deviation of the factors in the total sample are equal respectively to 0 and 1, because each factor is standardized for construction. For the comparison of the average value between areas we have used the Kruskal-Wallis test, of which, in the table 3, is shown the p-value for each factor. The Factor 1 does not show significant differences between areas, as regards the Factor 3 the situation is on the limit, because the mean value differences of the Factor 3 between areas are not significant at the 5%. The mean scores of the Factors 2, 4 and 5 are significantly different in the various areas; in particular the Factor 2 shows a higher mean score in area 1 rather than in the area 3 and area 4; the Factor 4 has the highest average score in area 2, in comparison with the area 4 and then the Factor 5 presents the highest average score in area 1 than in the area 4. From table 3 we can see more details.

In general, the perception about the different aspects of the phenomenon is higher in area 1 and area 2, which have positive scores, while in area 3 and even more in area 4 the same perceptions are negative.

**Table 1:** Mean and standard deviation of the factor for each area

| FACTORS         | Area   |      |        |      |        |      |        |      | Total |      | p-value |
|-----------------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|-------|------|---------|
|                 | area 1 |      | area 2 |      | area 3 |      | Area 4 |      | Mean  | s.d. | sig.    |
|                 | Mean   | s.d. | Mean   | s.d. | Mean   | s.d. | Mean   | s.d. |       |      |         |
| <b>Factor 1</b> | 0.11   | 1.02 | -0.12  | 0.80 | -0.02  | 0.96 | 0.06   | 1.18 | 0.00  | 1.00 | 0.696   |
| <b>Factor 2</b> | 0.52   | 0.91 | 0.13   | 0.98 | -0.26  | 1.04 | -0.30  | 0.89 | 0.00  | 1.00 | 0.00    |
| <b>Factor 3</b> | 0.30   | 0.90 | 0.02   | 0.90 | -0.06  | 1.05 | -0.18  | 1.09 | 0.00  | 1.00 | 0.08    |
| <b>Factor 4</b> | 0.00   | 1.19 | 0.25   | 0.88 | -0.01  | 0.83 | -0.25  | 1.03 | 0.00  | 1.00 | 0.04    |
| <b>Factor 5</b> | 0.41   | 1.11 | 0.10   | 0.92 | 0.07   | 0.90 | -0.42  | 0.93 | 0.00  | 1.00 | 0.00    |

Therefore, the aspects concerning the territory culture and the examined relational abilities, with remarkable differences between areas, show a higher mean value in area 1, thus meaning that in it the residents have a higher perception of Taranto as a cultural touristic destination, due to the presence of a predominant territory culture in the residents of the two oldest neighbourhoods of the city and to the aptitude for collaboration they have, and as they have the cultural heritage next to them, they show a strong sense of belonging. Therefore, the perception of the residents in Città vecchia and Borgo is remarkably different from the perception of the residents in Paolo VI or Tamburi, the so-called neighbourhoods of the industrial outskirts, where what prevails is not the sight of the cultural heritage but the presence of the Ilva iron and steel industry and the environmental pollution it causes.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As it occurs in the enterprise competitiveness and according to the resource-based view, the growth and development of a touristic destination is more and more due to the tangible and intangible assets that characterize it, as well as to the local actors’ abilities to exploit them and to implement

development paths to follow even through the activation of relational mechanisms able to improve the quality and the offer differentiation within a systemic logic. The territory is considered as a social institution endowed with the same characteristics as an enterprise, thus interpreting the territory organization according to the “viable systems approach” theory (Golinelli, 2002).

As far as this research is concerned, we thought it was useful analyzing the role of the intangible assets in the development of the Ionian cultural touristic destination, as it is perceived by the resident community. Therefore, we need to make a point of the intangible asset concept, with reference to destinations.

As they are distinctive elements, such assets differentiate the territory, thus allowing the creation of a competitive advantage that is lasting and defensible. All that is possible because of the difficulty to exactly identify and repeat the path which allowed their origin. Actually, the *soft* components of a territory are not only difficult to create from the temporal and economic point of view, but, because of their specificity, are also seldom used in contexts different from the one in which they were created, and consequently they are difficult to be imitated and reproduced by the competing territories (Itami & Roehl, 1987; Vicari, 1991; Rullani, 1999).

By borrowing the enterprise culture concept, the first intangible asset we deal with is the “territory culture”. When we talk about the territory culture of the cultural touristic destination, we mean the learning and knowledge heritage characterizing the history and lifestyle in a specific area and influencing the behaviours and actions of its residents, local institutions, schools, universities and enterprises, i.e. the local actors who are committed to a destination. The presence of such an asset can be identified, as we have seen in the questionnaire, by observing the resident community’s sensibility degree towards the knowledge of the cultural and identity values of the local historical-artistic heritage.

Another asset can be identified in the “specific competences” of the destination which correspond to the local community stakeholders’ abilities (inner stakeholders) – and therefore the territory human resources’ ones – to develop and use the specific resources, which are intrinsic to the destination, in a sustainable way, thus preserving their integrity in order to improve above all the quality of life, protect the cultural heritage for the future generations, preserve and exploit landscape and environment, and achieve a lasting competitive advantage.

The “relational abilities” of the cultural touristic destination are the specific attitudes enabling the activation and governance of relational mechanism between the single actors of the destinations, but also with actors living outside the reference territory. As far as the local area is concerned, all that requires a collaborative logic between the actors involved in the offer and highlights the rather remarkable role of the public institution as it influences the coordination of the local actors. The need of offer coordination in the destination is in direct ratio to the variety of demand.

The measuring of such an asset can be done, as shown by the questionnaire items, by examining the presence of touristic-cultural routes, which have different actors involved, aimed at getting a shared growth of the territory use; all that through actions whose purpose is to create an integrated and systemic offer.

As everybody knows, the activation of relationships allows an increase of every actor’s competences – such as shareholders, stakeholders, residents, clients or government bodies – through the creation and diffusion of the knowledge concerning the territory processes, services and products with a dynamic view of the scene and of the competitive challenges. What is mainly needed is contributing to the growth of the context social capital, as stated by Costabile and Lanza (2000), where the above-mentioned capital correspond to the cluster of relationships that arises between the different individuals and is able to increase the conditions of the same membership context.

The multidimensional aspect of the territory structure is widely witnessed in literature, where territory is qualified as a system of tangible and intangible assets and of numerous forces (individuals, organizations) that interact with one another. For these reasons we can state that the territory is not only a cluster of infrastructures, services and natural resources, but it is above all the cluster of abilities, relationships and knowledge which depict a relational space unique and not easy to imitate.

This paper offers policy suggestions to public decision makers of the city with regard to the planning and development of a management model adequate for the systemic perspective and applied in a cultural touristic destination context like Taranto. This city, through the use of its culture, its knowledge deeply ingrained in the local territory and thanks to its relational abilities, should try to increase, from a systemic point of view, the intangible assets of those peripheral neighbourhoods, where they do not seem so developed in order to get a balanced and sustainable development of the city.

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