City of Art as a High Culture Local System and Cultural Districtualization Processes: The Cluster of Art Restoration in Florence*

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The city of art as an autonomous unit of analysis: an overview

The study of cities of art and their government is not only an issue of relevant scientific interest (Becattini, 1986; Scott, 1997), but also an extremely current topic in economics and politics. The European Union set up a challenge at the core of its policies to improve quality of life in European cities and urban regions (V Programma Quadro, 1998–2002), while assuring at the same time competitiveness and sustainable development (European Union, 1999). Moreover, in recognition of the diversity of European traditions, it assigned to ‘culture’ autonomy of programmes with regard to cultural policy and cohesion (European Union, 1998). The role of ‘cultural heritage’ as an economic factor of production is of crucial significance because it allows the evolution from a concept of safeguard to one of enhancement, with respect to the principle of economic and social cohesion (European Union, 1994).

The concerns of cultural economics (Farchy and Sagot-Duvaux, 1994; Baumol and Bowen, 1966), managerial economics for the arts (Owen and Hendon, 1985) and urban economics (Jacobs, 1970; Kerns and Philo, 1995; Zukin, 1995) are integral to the challenge, opening up interesting economic perspectives for the study of the actors and the networks (economic, non-economic and institutional) of actors in countries which hold a significant quota of cultural resources. In recent years, the first reports on Italian cultural economics have been produced (Brosio and Santagata, 1992; FORMEZ, 1993a; Bodo, 1994; Cicerchia, 1997) and many Italian economists, specialized in micro- and macro-economics have reported interesting scientific findings (Trimarchi, 1993; Santagata, 1998a; 1998b; Spranzi, 1998). Scientific debate is underway but the fields of research are manifold and they all need to be defined, because the exploitation of the productive factor CANH (Cultural, Artistic and Natural Heritage) offers many opportunities, not only to Italian entrepreneurship, but also to the country as a whole. The first studies to consider cities of art as autonomous analytic units can be found in the cultural economics literature (Mossetto, 1992). They deserve credit for identifying, as a qualifying factor, the set of material and non-material resources related to CANH.

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This variable, even if defined at a normative level, remains primitive under scientific profiling and is worth deeper investigation. Other scholars devoted to topics related to the city belong to specialist disciplines which stress the spatial (economic geographers), sociological (sociological economists) and technical (town-planners) dimensions of development processes. More recently, interesting research perspectives have shifted the focus of analysis from the city’s geographical dimension to the districts of art, or the cities of art, seen as enterprises — namely industrial economists, in particular those referring to the wide research area of local production, and business economists, especially those engaged with the problems of government with regard to territorial meta-management at an aggregate level.

Industrial economists have worked extensively with industrial districts as their unit of analysis, advancing our understanding of economic poles and technological poles (Bellandi et al., 2001: 52). These studies, however, never managed to take into account cities of art. According to Italian and European scholars living in countries with a ‘high cultural and artistic density’, the transition from studies of the company town, typical of the Fordist era, to the technopolis (Castells, 1994) — seen as an incubator for economic growth and regional innovation — opens an interesting research perspective aimed at the comprehension of the (social and economic) processes of development that characterize the city of art. In particular, three topics of major interest for researchers are evident:

1 Evaluation of the impact of change on cognitive processes characterizing the city of art. The central element of analysis here is the set of cognitive processes that are at the basis of the development path for the city of art, seen as a kind of ars polis and conceived as a creative city (Landry and Bianchini, 1995). The relevance of tertiary activities in post-industrial economies has been identified at a city level by scholars like Jacobs (1970), together with the prospects of the new information and multimedia technologies. This makes the city a potential entity of analytic study as a possible ‘flywheel’ of economic development associated with the category of immaterial assets, which presents unique characteristics, but which is also characterized by a variety of modes of consumption, for instance those of artistic assets and those pertaining to the image of the city of art (Crane, 1992).

2 Evaluation of the impact of post-industrial society and globalization processes emerging in the city of art. In an era moving towards a progressive de-industrialization of the developed countries in favour of the economic tertiary sector, epoch-making changes do not only concern the decline and regeneration of some factors, or the advent of new ones, but also the units of economic analysis themselves, which more and more frequently have a concurrent dimension at a local and at a global level. For example, even districts characterized by local systems of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operate on the international scene, side by side with multinational corporations. Cities of art can be considered districts by the same standard. They must be seen as local systems capable of producing a global product. A city’s artistic heritage is not only composed of a collection of material assets located in a distinct geographical place (Governa, 1998) and managed by an institutional community (municipality) that exhausts its authority at a local level, but it also represents a wealth that can activate a ‘replacement system’ for consumption in the city of art (Becattini, 1986: 90), usable outside of its territory as well. It would be restrictive to identify the whole range of economic activities tied to the artistic heritage and the image of a city solely with the tourism industry. Cultural economics contents (Baumol and Bowen, 1966; Heilburn and Gray, 1993) integrate with those of urban economics (Camagni, 1993) and find their synthesis in the city of art as a unit of analysis (Mossetto, 1992).

3 Evaluation of the value-creation mechanism at a city of art level, not only from the economic point of view but also from a socio-cultural one. In particular, value-creation is closely tied to the existence on the territory of specific resources able to activate social and individual processes for the creation of an identity (symbolic capital) (Peacock, 1992; Santagata, 1998a; 1998b).
As far as business economists are concerned, three interesting research perspectives are opened up that concern: (1) the most suitable organizational structures supporting the development of the city of art; (2) feasible formulas of government for the city of art, both as sources and local competencies in the management mechanisms (city management) and as territorial promotion instruments (place marketing); and (3) the likely birth of new economic leading actors in the city of art, coming from both the manufacturing side (new forms of artistic craft) and the advanced tertiary sector.

1 Previous contributions from complex economics and studies of the inter-organizational networks are relevant to the unit of analysis ‘city’, because its variety of organizational forms can constitute a valid example of complexity. The city is a network or, more specifically, a ‘system of networks or a network of systems’ (Chloay, 1991: 152). Furthermore, the city is the metaphor for the network of the information city (Castells, 1989), and so on.

2 A successive path involves the micro-economic sphere of the city leading to a macro-network organization, characterized by a network of actors to which the analytic categories of strategic management can be applied. Thus, it is possible to introduce the concept of ‘city government’, which implies the creation of a city management able to govern complexity in new macro-enterprises. City scientists are not only concerned with economic issues, but are also tackling the theme of ‘city crisis’, starting with the phenomenon of metropolis degeneration (Martinotti, 1993) due to environmental problems and congestion (overcrowding). The centre of gravity for city studies is moving towards a sort of city ‘ethics’ exploring the idea of a ‘perfect’, sustainable city (Vallega, 1996). A point of topical interest is to turn back to the theoretical configurations that either deal with the study of cities’ evolution and sustainable development through eco-biological models, or refer to those appraisals which, even from the perspective of strategic management, suggest the application of the concept of product lifecycle to the city. These come, in particular, from the work of Kotler and co-workers about ‘place marketing’ (Kotler et al., 1993), which concentrate on crisis areas, striving to apply a series of marketing instruments with the aim of revitalizing declining cities, and attempting, at the same time, to determine the possible causes (Colbert, 1994; Gold and Ward, 1994; Asworth and Voogd, 1995). We do not believe that the activation of city marketing initiatives alone is sufficient to improve a city’s attraction, or to turn it into an engine of development. Above all, it is necessary to agree on a much wider set of interventions for designing the future, to the extent that an intervention perspective must accord with a multi-generational logic, which in our opinion is the only one that can guarantee the survival of the enterprise-cities beyond the present generation of decision-makers.

3 Finally, we must outline the research perspectives on new entrepreneurship applied to the city of art. We want to examine the potential rise of new leading actors in the economic city that belong both to the traditional manufacturing side (such as the new art crafts in the sector of restoration) and to the advanced tertiary industry (such as multimedia enterprises and electronic publishing) (Scott, 1996; 2000).

The city of art as a High Culture local system

Until recently, studies of the city of art were almost exclusively concerned with analysis of tourist circulation. In other words, economic analysis was restricted to the study of the sector, or the firms belonging to that sector, and left the territory out, so that the city was regarded only as a framework. In this context, by contrast, we wish to look at the entity ‘city territory’ as central to the economic analysis. Thus, the city of art will be seen as an incubator for new entrepreneurship, as the connection point between
economic and social communities, and as the connector between different cultures. Therefore, the city of art will be treated as a workable form of socio-economic-productive organization, within which different productive sectors, characterized by spatial and cultural contiguity in the organization of work, are located. In previous studies, as a first approximation, we defined the city of art as an ‘autonomous local system that can be depicted as a reticular macro-organization identified by a network of (public and private) actors (firms and institutions) to be managed following a firm logic’ (Lazzeretti, 1997: 672). The city of art, like any other city, was conceived as a complex of different kinds of networks (Gottman, 1991: 7), that is, technical, professional, religious, social, individual and collective networks with an internal or external nature. Here, however, our interest is focused on the city as a possible flywheel of culture-driven economic development and on the complex of economic-productive and socio-cultural networks centred on the productive factor CANH. The challenge that the system of involved actors is facing is that of managing such a heritage in the best possible way, while confronting the antithetical alternatives of conservation and economic enhancement. From this standpoint, we can define the city of art as a ‘High Cultural local system’, characterized by the presence, in its territory, both of a large endowment of a set of artistic, natural and cultural resources which identify it as a High Cultural Place (HCPlace), and of a network of economic, non economic and institutional actors who carry out activities in respect of the conservation, enhancement and economic management of these resources and which represent in their totality the High Cultural Cluster (HCCluster) of the city.

A more detailed analysis might identify some High Cultural Sub-clusters (HCSub-clusters) in the city of art, which should refer either to the different components of CANH, or to the various identifiable typologies of the actors. At this point, we should be able to build a taxonomy with a comprehensive codification of ideal-types for cities and places with a high cultural density. It would be particularly important to study a specific sub-cluster of actors — that composed of firms and relationships among firms whose economic activity is mainly based on culture. The set of these firms can, in fact, be treated as a local industrial community typical of industrial districts. Therefore, by focusing on the aspects that are connected on one hand to the progressive division/specialization of work, and on the other to the sociological ties with the city community, we will be able to study the cities of art as communities of organizational populations with a district-evolutionary theoretical outlook (Lazzeretti and Storai, 2001; 2003).

As a result, we can summarize by saying that the city of art is first and foremost a place characterized by the presence of a large endowment of cultural resources (CANH) — this is a first ‘ideal-type’ in the hypothetical taxonomy of HCPlaces; and, secondly, a unit of analysis for complex relationships of a socio-economic and productive nature, composed of a network of (economic, non-economic and institutional) actors and of a system of relationships among those actors (HCCluster of the city), centred on the management of the CANH factor and confronting the alternatives of conservation and economic enhancement.

A further step would involve questioning whether this system can produce employment and wealth following a culture-driven model of local development. Among the practicable theoretical approaches (the milieu, the industrial pole, the dynamic city, etc.) a possible answer seems to come from industrial district theories with a dynamic foundation — i.e. centred on the dynamic conformation of the process of districtualization, rather than on the structural elements of the industrial district (Becattini, 2000a: 197) — given that two basic conditions are satisfied: (1) the presence in the city of a considerable group of economic activities based on the economic exploitation of the CANH productive factor, that must be interpreted in terms of SME local systems; and (2) the existence of socio-economic relationships among town and industrial local communities, in terms of a sense of belonging to the city itself. When these conditions are verified, we will be able to go ‘hunting for cultural districts’ in the ‘game reserves’ of the cities of art, with the following conceptual armoury: (1) the
notion of CANH in its three components, and in terms of the relations among its components; (2) the notion of an ‘image’ of the city, perceived as symbolic capital, and designated by a synthesis of the more representative elements of CANH; (3) the concept of an HCCluster of the city, represented by the economic, non-economic and institutional actors, and by their mutual relationships; (4) the concept of the most relevant HCSUB-clusters identifiable in the city, in particular firm clusters; and (5) analysis of the process of cultural districtualization (Lazzeretti, 2001).

The city of art as an HCPlace: CANH and the image of the city

Cultural and environmental heritage must be thought of as the discriminating factor for marking the city of art out from the ‘non-artistic’ one, and the one that, at the same time, distinguishes it from other similar cities, as far as both the quantitative concentration of the endowment of resources and the qualitative differentiation of resources are concerned. CANH should signify a set of material and immaterial resources that can be traced back to its three main components — artistic, cultural and environmental (Lazzeretti, 1997: 669), i.e. the distinctive traits of an HCPlace. Among the first, we can obviously number the set of artistic assets and art structures (e.g. art works, monuments, architectural complexes, archaeological sites); the second designates the set of activities, behaviours, habits and customs that makes a specific place different from any other (e.g. universities and pre-eminent centres, typical arts and crafts, contextual knowledge, events and festivities, or the neighbourhoods’ ‘atmosphere’); the third component comprises specific elements of urban, naturalistic and environmental landscapes (e.g. urban morphology, gardens and squares, flora and fauna, etc.). A taxonomy of the ‘forms and species’ of HCPPlaces can be derived from the analysis and evaluation of the three components, which may converge with the canonical one (e.g. it embraces big cities of art, minor towns, art regions, natural parks, etc.), or it may not. We will then be able to map a national territory according to the recorded resources and, for example, separate places with artistic, naturalistic and cultural vocation from wide-ranging places, or places whose economic enhancement is already manifest from those that still need improvement.

This ‘objective’ notion of CANH can certainly measure the ‘real artistic potential of a place’, but it cannot determine in an exhaustive manner its overall value. A second element, a subjective one, should be taken into account; that is, the worth of CANH as ‘symbolic capital’, i.e. the value of the city perceived in the collective imaginary of its various audiences. This constitutes a sort of legitimation for the artistic value of a city, which transforms a deposit of resources into a deposit of symbols. Such value can be summarized by the notion of the ‘image of the city of art’, which does not include all of the CANH resources, but only those that are recognized as ‘symbols’. From this viewpoint, CANH seems to perform two fundamental functions: (1) it can identify the artistic ‘potential’ of the place, thus permitting a distinction between places that are HCPPlaces and those that are not; (2) it can identify the symbolic ‘capital’ (high cultural density) of the city of art.

The city of art as an HCCluster: actors networks and economic enhancement

Under different conditions, in order to verify whether the city of art can be a flywheel for economic development we must first predict if culture can really be a productive factor, and produce employment and wealth. To do this, we will focus on the option of economic enhancement of CANH rather than that of conservation, although these two sorts of policies are just the reverse sides of the same coin. The policy of safeguarding CANH is directed to the protection ‘in negative’ of an asset through the imposition of a bond and other restrictions on its owner: thus, it is essentially done in terms of actions of defence of the asset from human intervention (by means of the bond) and from time (by means of restoration). Enhancement, instead, aims at making the asset usable, facilitating public enjoyment of it, and turning it into ‘a producer of culture, of tastes, of
civic growth’ (Piselli, 1994: 170), so that it basically tends to develop the asset ‘in positive’. Three fundamental aspects connected to ‘enhancement’ should be noted: the first concerns the so-called ‘cultural aims’, the second the role it plays in the ‘usability’ of artistic assets, and the third its ability to activate economic and productive resources. In this context, our main concern is with the last aspect. In fact, in order to fully understand the concept of enhancement and, more importantly, to place cultural assets at the centre of a feasible model for economic development, we must emphasize the passage from ‘revenue’ to ‘resource’ in the concept of cultural assets. In other words, it is necessary that the potentiality of cultural assets emerge in the activation of ‘productive connections’ able to create new activities and resources. Consequently, there is a passage from the vision of the cultural asset as a means of revenue — hence directed to the phases of ‘consumption’ — to that of a resource — mainly directed to the phase of ‘production’. In this way, safeguard-centred policy will change into enhancement-centred policy.

We must now determine which economic sectors can be activated by the factor of culture production. Elsewhere, we have pointed out that culture can be considered in every respect one of those sectors with ‘a technological convergence that intersects telecommunication, multimedia, and fashion’ (Lazzeretti, 1997: 673), so that cultural tourism cannot be thought of as the prevailing sector in cities of art. Publishing, advertising and multimedia companies, and the construction industry are the most immediate examples, where others are the restoration sector, or the phenomenon of banks’ cultural sponsorship. As we can see, the notion of a city of art cluster embracing all actors and all relationships among actors seems quite elaborate. We can take some cues from the studies that discuss local systems as multilevel neural networks (Pilotti, 1997), which focus on the diverse roles played by stakeholders in the governance of the territory; or the studies of the Porterian school on comparative localized competitive advantages (Porter, 1998a). Porter sees clusters as geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular line of work, like the California wine cluster (Porter, 1998b: 78). However, in the special case of cities of art as HClusters, we believe that any kind of generalization is still premature. A good measure of empirical research will be needed in order to sketch an initial taxonomy of ideal-types for the city of art, a necessary step for the attainment of a satisfactory generalization at the level of an HCLocal system. At this point, we are just identifying a new role for firms that were traditionally taken into account only by geographically restricted sector analyses.

Italian industrial district model and the ‘cultural districtualization process’

Starting from the studies conducted by Giacomo Becattini (1979) and his co-workers, a theoretical current of thought developed in Italy known as Industrial District Theory. According to these authors, the industrial district is a local system characterized by the active co-participation of a community of people, and small firms specialized in different parts of the production process. Although this theory aims at studying the critical conditions for the development of a local vertically integrated network of firms operating in manufacturing markets, there are ample reasons for building a constructive parallel between this original analytic context and the reality of a local economy based on cultural and artistic assets. What we want to explore is whether, and to what extent, one can identify local development processes that give rise to structured cultural districts based on networks of small, localized firms operating in complementary aspects of cultural and artistic markets, and to what extent such networks contribute to the exploration of new models of economic enhancement for local cultural and artistic assets that imply low environmental impact, high added value, and strong potential for human development for their customers. We can therefore consider different levels of
aggregation of culture-driven local development processes involving cities of art and regions with a high endowment of cultural, artistic and environmental heritage.

A noteworthy predecessor for our attempt can be found making reference directly to Becattini himself (1994: 275), when he examines the concept of ‘Economic Nation’, and writes how:

the enhancement of resources is embodied in the interdependencies among firms, families and institutions that can be defined as local systems. Consequently, the performance of firms can be traced back not only to the natural economic context but also to the cultural and institutional heritage associated with a given territory.

This passage is very much in keeping with the concept of HCLocal system that we are developing here. Nevertheless, analysis of the so-called cultural districts is not a novelty, as attempts have been made on this path both in Italy (Preite, 1998; Santagata, 2000) and abroad (e.g. the film industry district of Los Angeles) (Garreau, 1992; Frost Kumpf, 1998). For our part, our attempt should be qualified by two distinctions: (1) being a district analysis set up to determine the ‘replicability’ of district logical categories in the service industry and handicrafts sectors; and (2) being a dynamic district analysis focused not on the cultural district as such, but on the forms of cultural districtualization, by means of a process analysis. Starting from suggestions made for the agrarian district (Becattini, 2000b), and from more general theorizations made by the same author (Becattini, 2000a: 197), we proceed with a physiological analysis of the district with the support of an ex-post study carried out in a mature, complete and, strictly speaking, Marshallian district. By linking these logical categories to the case in point, represented by the city of art as an HCSystem, we will try to find in it, as in any other ideal-type of HCPlace, different degrees of cultural districtualization with the aim of conjugating different ideal-types of HCLocal systems with different forms of cultural districtualization that are more or less well-developed compared to the mature, achieved form of the ‘Marshallian cultural district’. In short, the principal concepts we are referring to are: (1) the idea of a theoretical ‘Marshallian cultural district’ centred on the cultural factor of CANH production, and characterized by two intimately-connected knots of relations, on the one hand economic and productive relations, and on the other socio-cultural ones, between local town community and industrial town community; and (2) analysis of the physiology of cultural districts carried out through examination of a set of districtualization processes. These constitute, we conclude, the implements with which we declare open the hunting season in the cities’ ‘game reserves’.

Cultural districtualization in cities of art:
Florence and the handicrafts art cluster

Research design

In order to determine whether it will be possible to find significant signs of cultural processes of districtualization in the art city of Florence, we first have to test the following three conditions: (1) whether there is a consistent number of firms exploiting the CANH factor and, in the specific case, in the field of art restoration; (2) whether such firms constitute an SME system and are localized in the city of art; and (3) whether a network of productive and social-economic relations are linked to the city community and to the local industry community. First of all, we underlined the concept of ‘city of art’ as an HCPlace. We then proceeded to examine the main CANH resources in Florence. After a brief summary of the complex set of resources available in Florence, we restricted our analysis to the most representative components of the city. We focused on its artistic component, deeply rooted in the image of the city. In this context, we concentrated on the material artistic assets
present in the city area and decided to take into consideration the ‘art restoration’ sub-cluster. From this standpoint, we identified the network of actors involved in economic enhancement of the CANH factor, developing a rough general pattern of the art restoration HCluster. We then proceeded to examine the restoration enterprises’ sub-cluster in the city. The study sample comprises 145 enterprises whose premises are located within the city of Florence territory, mostly artisan firms, classified with respect to the material under restoration. A case study and interviews were undertaken with other objectives by the regional research society ARTEX (‘Progetto Europa Restauro’), the Federazione Regionale Toscana, and Confatartigianato Toscana. We proceeded to analyse all the data and then integrated them with municipal and national sources of information. The reference period covered three years from 1996 to 1998.

Data collection
The selection of sample firms was carried out through the examination of 430 questionnaires from the ones completed by the 5,550 restoration firms contacted in the whole Tuscany area. We had to take into account, on the one hand the firms’ territory of origin, which was easily inferable by the address, and on the other hand the need to find an ‘index’ that might help us to identify such a category. At this point, it is worth pointing out that we were interested in art restorers as actors exploiting Florence’s cultural and artistic heritage, so that the fundamental discriminate of our study had to be the object of restoration. We considered the question of the kind of asset under restoration, which provided three options: (1) unprotected assets; (2) unprotected assets bearing an antique quality; and (3) protected assets.

Those who declared that their activity was concerned with protected assets certainly had to be classed as art restorers, on a par with those who appeared in the lists of the Monument and Fine Arts Office or in the categories of the Ministry of Public Works. Thus, we excluded the firms that restore unprotected assets. As for the firms that restore unprotected assets bearing an antique quality, we carried out a cross-selection based on the type of clients, excluding restorers that declared more than 70% of their business was on behalf of private clients. At the end of the selection process the sample we took into consideration was composed of 145 firms, exclusively located within the Florence town territory.

The city of art, Florence, as an HCPlace: first elements of discussion
Focus on the artistic component
In our study we tried to restrict the degree of complexity of a dynamic, multi-sectoral city such as Florence (Bellandi, 2000), by focusing on its natural artistic bent within the city boundaries, also because the main object of our study, i.e. the city’s art and architectural heritage, is localized in the historical centre of the city. Nowadays, due to the complexity of the issue, it is impossible to evaluate the cultural and environmental heritage of Florence. Cataloguing of the Tuscan heritage in general, and of the Florentine one in particular, started a long time ago. Finally, in 1988 a first report was published that included a rough analysis of the historical and artistic heritage owned by every municipality in Italy: Tuscany retains 17% of the national total, while Florence reaches 38% of the regional totals and 6.5% of the national one (see Papaldo and Zuretti Angle, 1988). In order to classify the kinds of assets, we simplified the concept by dividing the CANH of Florence into its three components: artistic (monumental and architectural structures, works of art, museums and art galleries); environmental-natural (natural landscape, town landscape, streets, squares, neighbourhoods, and gardens); and cultural (arts and crafts, universities, cultural institutions, fairs). Some of these elements have a symbolic value for the city of Florence (such as the Uffizi Gallery, the Florentine fleur-de-lis, the Accademia della Crusca, the Pitti Uomo, the jewels of Ponte Vecchio, the Florentine beef-steak, etc.). These elements of the CANH concept have different
symbolic values depending on the public we refer to: most of them have international recognition, while others only national or municipal esteem. In this analysis we concentrate on the ‘artistic image’ of Florence, linked to its artistic and architectural heritage. Among the clusters we might evaluate, we decided to begin with the art restoration cluster, as it is the one most directly connected to the economic enhancement of the CANH factor, whose activity’s inner nature is to link a spirit of conservation with economic enhancement. Nevertheless, many other clusters are also constitutive of the HCCluster of Florence — e.g. the clusters of museums, performing arts, cultural tourism, handicraft activities and contextual knowledge, landscape, natural products, fashion, and so on. While it is clear there is much work to do, our aim was only to find a starting point for analysis.

**Focus on the art restoration sub-cluster**

A cluster is defined as a system of actors who between them have developed a network relationship within a particular territory. Economic enhancement of ‘artistic assets’ is the main objective of art restoration, the sub-cluster of our analysis. First of all, we must answer two questions: firstly, what is art restoration, and secondly, what do we mean by economic enhancement. Following from this, we will outline the concept of the art restoration HCSSub-cluster, and directly shift to the analysis of the art restoration firms’ sub-cluster.

The art restoration area is not confined to one specific commodity sector, but it can be aggregated because of the presence of different commodity sectors for ‘protected

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**Table 1** Distribution of firms in Florence neighbourhoods according to the kind of material/objects under restoration (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials/Objects</th>
<th>Percentage of firms per neighbourhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frescos, wall paintings</td>
<td>51.9 14.8 14.8 11.1 7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapestries, draperies, carpets, fabrics</td>
<td>12.5 12.5 - 12.5 62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory, mother-of-pearl and the like</td>
<td>87.5 - - 12.5 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper, prints, books</td>
<td>66.6 33.4 - -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paintings on wood</td>
<td>71.1 15.6 2.2 8.9 2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canvas</td>
<td>68.2 15.9 2.3 11.3 2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carved and/or polychrome wood</td>
<td>77.8 11.1 2.8 5.5 2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majolicaware, chinaware, glassware</td>
<td>50.0 16.6 - 16.7 16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone materials</td>
<td>35.5 25.8 12.9 12.9 12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metals</td>
<td>62.5 - - 12.5 25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precious metals</td>
<td>100.0 - - -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture</td>
<td>76.0 4.0 - 20.0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosaics, hard stones</td>
<td>40.0 20.0 10.0 30.0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masonry and structural works</td>
<td>17.6 35.3 11.8 11.8 23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floorings</td>
<td>25.0 12.5 12.5 12.5 37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archaeological finds</td>
<td>50.0 16.6 16.7 16.7 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuccos, plasters, pargets, paintwork, patinations</td>
<td>31.8 22.7 13.6 13.6 18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stained glass</td>
<td>50.0 50.0 - -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>52.4 33.3 - 4.8 9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56.6 17.7 5.6 11.2 8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
artistic assets'. In this context, by art restoration we mean a cluster of firms whose activity is represented by restoration and conservation of protected and unprotected cultural assets bearing a high artistic value or antique quality. A recent law of the Region of Tuscany (regional law 2/11/1998 no. 58) includes in the category of art handicraft workmanship ‘restoration activities whose intervention is aimed at the conservation, consolidation and restoration of interesting artistic assets or assets that belong to the architectural, archaeological, ethnographic, and bibliographical heritage, even if already protected by laws in force’ (article 2a), while traditional handicrafts include all ‘activities of restoration and reparation of objects of use’ (article 2b). This differentiation is important as it allows us, although only on a theoretical level (as on a practical one there are too many difficulties), to set apart restoration concerned with assets that are included in the concept of CANH. The art restoration sector seems to be a good starting point for testing our original hypotheses. We have to consider, in fact, the implications of this activity in terms of employment, the activated resources, the opportunity to make cultural heritage usable (consequently, of having a strong influence over tourism flows), and also its unquestionable relation with the image of Florence itself and, accordingly, its importance in the promotion of the city.

The sub-cluster of art restoration firms

Our aim here is to analyse the double role the art restorer plays with respect to the concept of CANH. In fact, the restorer represents one of the actors who directly exploits the productive factor CANH, and in particular its artistic component (material assets), while at the same time contributing to engendering a sense of belonging to the environment in which the activity is set, and to creating the ‘atmosphere’ one can breathe in the most characteristic city neighbourhoods (cultural component).

With respect to the artistic component, we will try to provide a general framework for the sector of art restoration in the Florence municipality, while sketching a typical character for the Florentine restorer. As regards the cultural component, we intend to set the restorers examined in our analysis in the neighbourhoods where their activity is carried out (for our convenience, we make reference to the firm’s premises, although sometimes the work is actually done in other places), so that we identify the areas that generate the above mentioned ‘atmosphere’.

In short, the keys to art restorers are the following (see Figure 1):

![Figure 1](https://example.com/figure1.png)

**Figure 1** The components of CANH requiring in-depth investigation (source: Lazzeretti and Cinti, 2001: 75)

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1 The actors of art restoration are: Monument and Fine Arts Office; Region; Municipality; Museums, galleries, libraries, archives; Societies, foundations and cultural institutions; Universities, specialized schools, training organizations and institutions; Opificio delle Pietre Dure; Centres for research, enhancement and cataloguing; Sponsors; Antique dealers; Private owners of assets; Art historians, architects, engineers, chemists, geologists; Diagnostic centres and photographic studios; Survey centres; Disinfection, disinestation, sterilization; Security; Publishing and communications; Specialists in restorable materials; Manufacturing firms of materials and machines for restoration; Building firms; Restoration firms.

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The main features of the firms

The most important features resulting from the analysis and elaboration of the questionnaires involving the 145 firms we examined can be summarized as follows (see Lazzeretti and Cinti, 2001 for a more detailed analysis of these data).

Art restoration firms constitute a group of small and micro artisan firms, or workshops, of which 61% are represented by individual firms, and only 15% by capital companies (while joint-stock companies only amount to 2%). Most of the enterprises are micro-firms. In 46% of the cases their annual turnover is less than 50 thousand million lire, while if we consider firms whose turnover is below 100 thousand million lire the percentage rises to 63%. There is a large amount of small entrepreneurs, often very young and highly-educated. Almost 35% of the owners and shareholders are less than 40 years old, and more than half of them are under 50 years of age. Their level of education is pretty high, if we consider that 43.3% of these persons have a high-school diploma, and over 17% of them have a university degree. The group is composed of firms that are highly specialized in the restoration of protected or artistic assets; 77% of them declare that they operate almost solely in the restoration field — i.e. restoration represents more than 75% of the specific activity of the firm. The specialization of the firm is not only devoted to restoration, but is also addressed to a 'product specialization'; in fact, the major discriminant reported is a 'specialization as to the object under restoration'. Thus, we found 21 different categories of commodity for the firms as regards the object under restoration — e.g. paintings, frescoes, and wall paintings; metals, wood and furniture; majolicaware, glassware, and jewellery; marbles, mosaics, and semi-precious stones. In addition to the marked specialization of firms, we also recorded a high degree of cooperation among firms: in fact, 71% declared that they had established work relationships with other firms. In the restoration of metals we recorded the highest degree of cooperation (87.5%). The least collaborative are represented by restorers of furniture (about 50%). The main customers are the general public, although almost all the categories of firms also work for private owners, antique dealers and clerical institutions. We did not record any specialization as to the kind of customers, but it is worth noting that customers of the Florentine firms are predominantly national (42%), regional (38%) and provincial (12%), with foreign clients comprising only 6%. Finally, as regards professional training, the greater value is ascribed to family education (about 26%), a figure that, when added to that of apprenticeship (20%), shows us that almost half of the subjects learn the art of restoration in the workshop. Nevertheless, another important feature is the relatively high proportion of people trained at the ‘Opificio delle Pietre Dure’ or at the ‘Istituto Centrale del Restauro’ (Central Institute of Restoration) — compared to an absolutely minor weight held by private institutions and schools. Institutional training is particularly important in the field of precious metals (67%) and metals (53%), while family training predominates in the restoration of wall paintings (46%) and furniture (40%), and workshop training in the case of tapestries, drapery and carpets.

Enterprise localization

In order to understand the importance of the ‘localization factor’, we have to determine the thickening of enterprises in the territory. First, we re-aggregated the data according to specific neighbourhoods, using the address variable as proxy, and then localized them in the town area. At this point we developed some maps of the city of Florence showing the main thickening of enterprises (see Figure 2).

Florence is divided into five districts. Over half the firms are concentrated in the historical centre (neighbourhood 1), especially close to Santo Spirito, San Frediano, Stazione, Santa Croce and San Marco, the most characteristic neighbourhoods of the city where the largest part of the artistic heritage is localized. This element confirms the double role of artistic restorers: in terms of the artistic component of CANH, they provide...
economic enhancement of artistic productive resources due to their restoration activities (they are actors); from another point of view, they are a resource of the cultural component of CANH. In fact, artisan shops are a rooted part of the cultural atmosphere in the most characteristic quarters of the historical centre of Florence. There are two different macro groups of restorers: one more localized and the other more spread out. The first group is localized in the historical centre or close to it, and is composed of restorers specialized in precious metals, ivory, mother-of-pearl, paper, paintings on wood or canvas, and books; the second group belongs to the category of restorers of building materials such as stucco and plaster work, flooring, memorial tablets, etc.

Conclusions

Concluding our research, we can say that the analysis of the sub-cluster of art restoration shows, in fact, many signs of the presence of a certain degree of cultural districtualization in the art city of Florence. The three fundamental conditions for the existence of a district seem satisfied. In particular, we verified that:

- There are a substantial number of firms which economically exploit the CANH factor of production in its artistic component, represented by the firms in the cluster ‘private art restoration’. This figure proves the ability of the economic factor ‘culture’ to produce employment and wealth, following a logic of economic enhancement of art.

- This set of firms might be organized as a system (although this trait needs to be proved), as we not only recorded a high degree of productive specialization, but also a strong tendency for cooperation. This figure can be read in terms of a specialization/division of the localized typical labour in the districts, which can stand for the existence of teams of firms organized by the customers, by leading firms, or by other flexible integrators (this aspect alone deserves a thorough enquiry). The very high degree of cooperation might imply a low index of straight rivalry among firms, thus representing a strong advantage for the HCLocal system.
Finally, there might be a knot of economic-productive and economic-social relationships between the local community of firms and the local community of people. In fact, our figures indicate that, firstly, restorers share a similar training, and, secondly, the vicinity of firms favours not only the constitution of a sense of belonging, but also their mutual relationships.

Other encouraging signals for the analysis of cultural districtualization come from the outposts of contextual knowledge and external recognizability of productive skills in the area. The high level of education of Florentine restorers, joined with the demand from external customers, can be interpreted not only as the elements for the identification in the place, but also as the special qualities of the firms. There are further elements that we might focus on, but they would not be sufficient to measure a hypothetical degree of cultural districtualization in Florence. In order to claim a scientific value for our findings, we need more purposeful and in-depth analyses. However, our hunt for a cultural district has just commenced. Up to now, we have only demonstrated that cities of art can be very interesting game reserves.

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