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Camilla Ferri

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Sites: A comparison between
Scuola Grande della
Misericordia in Venice and
Oude Kerk in Amsterdam**

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Competitiveness of Heritage Sites: a comparison between Scuola Grande della Misericordia in Venice and Oude Kerk in Amsterdam

Camilla Ferri

Dept. of Management
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

Abstract. The presence of outstanding cultural assets is not always a synonym of tourism and local development. This means that the competitiveness of a destination or a site is also related to other factors, which have been studied and gathered within respective theoretical frameworks by different researchers, focusing the urban destination (Van den Berg, Van der Borg, Van der Meer, 1995), the site level (Jansen-Verbeke, 2012), and the relationship between heritage conservation and tourist use (McKercher, Du Cros, 2002). In the present paper, these three different models have been applied to two cases: Scuola Grande della Misericordia in Venice and Oude Kerk in Amsterdam. Two flexible spaces, recently restored, they are both important on the community level for their past function and modern adaptive re-use. Results demonstrate the usefulness of the models in offering an operative tool to evaluate the site on its own, but also their limits in a network destination governance perspective: thus they open to models integrations and future research in this domain.

Keywords: Destination governance, heritage site, competitiveness, sustainability

JEL Classification Numbers: L11, L83

Correspondence to:

Camilla Ferri Department of Management, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia
San Giobbe, Cannaregio 873
E-mail: camferri92@gmail.com

Introduction

European cities pride themselves on a long history of tourism mostly thanks to the large number of cultural assets they own. However, their mere presence does not constitute an economic value and it is not sufficient to make tourism an agent of local development, as it is claimed to be by numerous municipalities in recent years. In order to fulfil this aim, existing resources have to be promoted in conjunction with other forms of tourist attractions, spanning from events to gastronomy, high quality infrastructure and whole regional networks, without losing from sight the necessity to bring about a diverse, original and attractive image (A. P. Russo & J. Van der Borg, 2002). This is particularly important in a time of public funding shortages, in which private entities risk to use cultural heritage for their personal interests, bringing to commodification, banalization and lose of culture value. To avoid such a situation, tourism should be seen as a system in which all the components are not only important in their relation to each other within the destination but also as key factors for its Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA).

Many cultural assets are essentially similar, in fact most temples, historic buildings, festivals and even indigenous performances tend to be monotonous after a while for most tourists, which hence becomes often reluctant in visiting this kind of attractions (McKercher & Ho, 2006).

How to distinguish the specific value of a heritage site, if existing? How to comprehend where to focus efforts and investments?

Some theoretical frameworks have been drawn up in order to assist *planners* in the difficult task to manage not only heritage quality and significance, but also all the parallel aspects (like communication, accessibility) often neglected in cultural and tourism planning.

However, despite their usefulness for economic assessment of heritage sites attractiveness, a more comprehensive approach to the study of heritage management in a destination governance perspective is still lacking. Therefore, this research aims to highlight the limits of these models and to uncover potential avenues for future research towards an integration of these two aspects in a management path for cultural heritage competitiveness in a destination governance perspective. This paper does so through an exploratory analysis of two case studies: the Scuola Grande della Misericordia in Venice and the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam. Two of the most visited cities in Europe, affected by tourist overcrowding and *tourismification* problems (Russo, 2002), and two flexible spaces, recently restored, emblematic for their modern adaptive re-use and their importance for the local community.

Considering heritage sites as nodes of a network composed by the whole destination's cultural heritage (Caroli, 2012), the application of the aforementioned models on these sites can be used as a first starting point for the evaluation of the performance of the whole network of cultural heritage and, thus, for supporting DMOs or municipalities in the outlining of a policy for the destination governance.

Literature Review

In recent years tourism has evolved according to some trends which highlight in particular its systemic nature: among them, spreading of new activities, organizations and actors, an increase of experiential products and the growing importance of territorial systems. Thus, the studies on the development and the competitiveness of tourism destinations have to take into consideration new forms of interdependencies among actors and their territorial integration (Tamma, 2012).

Ritchie and Crouch (2003) state that tourism competitiveness depends not only on economic strength, but also on its social, cultural, political, technological and environmental ones: "what makes a tourism destination truly competitive is its ability to increase tourism expenditure, to increasingly attract visitors while providing them with satisfying, memorable experiences, and to do so in a profitable way, while enhancing the well-being of destination residents and preserving the natural capital of the destination for future generations".

This definition is tied with the one of cultural heritage sustainable management, which implies that the economic value generation is a necessary condition for its preservation during the time, its public fruition and the increase of its stock and quality (Caroli, 2012).

The key processes to pursue in order to achieve competitiveness and sustainability in such an environment characterized by a structural interdependence of organizations are coordination and cooperation (Jamal & Getz, 1995). The tourism literature concerned with destinations' competitiveness argues that despite the difficulties characterizing the development of cooperation in such a fragmented sector, the successful destinations will be those able to manage effectively the development of cooperative relationships among destinations' stakeholders. Thus, studies on destination management and destination governance, two diverse approaches on the issues of whom to connect with and how to coordinate joint actions (Moretti, 2017), are necessary to reach this aim.

Destination management adopts an entrepreneurial view to destinations' development, focusing on their unique selling proposition, marketing and positioning within the

competitive arena (Harald Pechlaner et al., 2015; Harald Pechlaner et al., 2012). Destinations are considered as the basic competitive units that can be managed as strategic business units (Bieger, 1998). This approach is mainly market-oriented, and its focus is on establishing a consistent fit between products offered and market segments (Harald Pechlaner et al., 2015). Destination governance, instead, focuses on stakeholders: a wider range of organizations and actors, their interests and affiliations, the roles they play for destination development. As defined by Beritelli, Bieger and Laesser (2007), destination governance “consists of setting and developing rules and mechanisms for a policy, as well as business strategies, by involving all the institutions and individuals.” The concept is grounded not only on the supply side, but also on organizations and actors belonging to influential areas of activity (for example, cultural or environmental associations, customers’ groups, the local community, etc). The destination governance approach interprets destinations as systems of interdependent but autonomous actors belonging to a wide range of industries and sectors within the private and public spheres of activity: mediations between the private and public sectors are one of the key activities that needs to be developed.

Although every destination is defined by its territory, values, cultural specificities, resources, local actors (citizens, businesses, institutions), the literature has developed some theoretical frameworks to orient both researchers and practitioners to deal with such a complex issue as destination governance (Moretti, 2017).

Among the various organizational forms elaborated within the managerial literature, tourism studies have identified *networks* as the most useful theoretical approach to guide destination governance research (Dredge, 2006; Pavlovich, 2003; Pechlaner & Volgger, 2012; Scott et al., 2008).

Podolny and Page (1998) state that a *network* form of organization is any collection of two or more actors that pursue repeated, enduring exchange relations with one another and, at the same time, lack a legitimate organizational authority to arbitrate and resolve disputes that may arise during the exchange.

Scott, Baggio, & Cooper (2008) recognize *networks* as the organizing principle of tourism destinations, in which successful inter-organizational relationships are at the basis of destinations’ competitiveness (Cooper, Scott, & Baggio, 2009; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

Furthermore, according to the *community model* of Flagestad and Hope (2001), the destination can be seen as a system of numerous actors that operates independently and autonomously, in a symmetric distribution of power and decision-making rights. Coordination is left in the hands of local governments or of destination management organizations, which

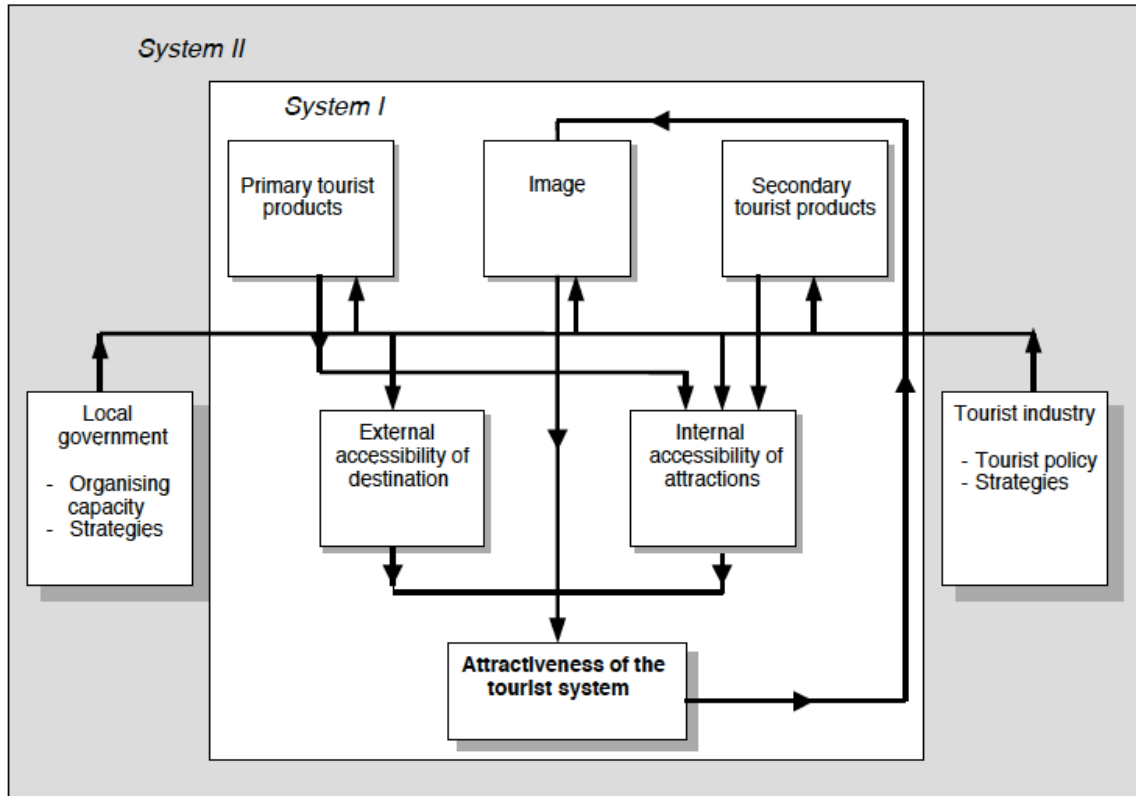
will take care of involving all stakeholders in the destination's development planning and management.

However, this task is not an easy one, especially in a situation composed by different resources, public shortage and a multiplicity of stakeholders. For this reason, as aforementioned, some researchers with different backgrounds (economics, geography, sites conservation) elaborated some operative tools to assist planners, from municipalities to DMOs, to evaluate the economic competitiveness of destinations and sites. Among them, this research chose to analyse and use three models with different focuses: the whole destination and its attractiveness factors (Van den Berg, Van der Borg, Van der Meer, 1995), the site as a complex of physical, experiential and management features (Jansen-Verbeke, 2012), the relationship between heritage conservation and tourist use (McKercher, Du Cros, 2002) at the site level. They are explained in details in the following sections.

The Urban Tourism Product Model

At a destination level, Van den Berg, van der Borg and van der Meer (1995) elaborated the so called the *Urban Tourism Product Model* with the aim of evaluating the overall attractiveness of an urban tourism system. The relations which characterize it have been gathered into two main groups: System I and System II. The former shows the factors that determine the competitiveness of a tourist destination, the latter indicates how the public and private sectors can influence the development of that urban tourism product.

Figure 1 - Van den Berg, van der Borg, van der Meer Urban Tourism Product Model



Source: Van den Berg et al.; 1995

The attractiveness of an urban destination depends most of all on the quality of the “primary product” which corresponds to the main reason for visiting the place: natural and cultural landscape, historical features, events and attractions (such as theme parks) created for specific tourist purposes. Also the quality of “secondary products” is fundamental in drawing visitor to a city, even if it always needs to be supported by the primary ones. For this reason, hotels, restaurants, conference centres, exhibition halls are also called complementary products.

The attractiveness of a tourist city is further determined by the “image” it has in the perception of potential tourists, as well as by the accessibility of the place itself. This factor can be better described into two categories: “external and internal accessibility”. The former can be defined as the effort required to reach the destination and thus corresponds to distance and the quality of transport connection from the demand basin to the destination. The latter regards the ease of wandering around the locality and reaching the various attraction points during the stay.

These five factors can be implemented by government and industry through deliberate actions, however it has been noticed that the majority of tourism strategies focus on single attractions and external accessibility (van den Berg, van der Borg and van der Meer, 1995).

This is why the aforementioned analysis of the tourism product (*System I*) should help policy makers to address the available funds to what needs more attention to promote the attractiveness of the city. In order to reach this purpose, integrating the urban tourism product in *System II* is indispensable. As the framework shows, the main responsible actors in the tourism strategy are the municipality (public actor) and the tourism industry (private actor). Organizing capacities of the local government and cooperation through public-public and private-public partnerships are essential in this process. Nevertheless, also the tourism sector has its own responsibility in enhancing through its strategy all the elements of the tourism system.

Some years later, this theoretical framework was further implemented by Russo and Van der Borg (2002) with the concept of *visitor-friendliness*. They believe the challenge for the competitiveness of a cultural tourist destination consists nowadays in finding a point of balance between the distinctiveness of its cultural assets and their communication to the public and the standardization and predictability that the tourism industry infrastructures needs to reach to be included in the global tourism market. Besides, the success of a cultural system is determined by a consumer-oriented management strategy capable to identify a niche position responding to a super-segmentation of the market.

The Hardware, Software & Orgware Model

Moving the focus on the site level, the geographer Jansen-Verbeke based her studies on the so-called “territoriality paradigm”, according to which cultural resources cannot be distinguished from the context in which they are embedded.

Despite the specific peculiarities of every cultural site, a number of common issues have been identified and ordered in a framework according to three different, yet connected cultural dimensions of heritage sites: *Hardware, Software and Orgware*.

Figure 2 – Jansen-Verbeke Model

HARDWARE of Heritage Site & Territory		SOFTWARE of Cultural Tourism Product		ORGWARE Agents and Organization	
IN HERITAGE SITE SITE MANAGEMENT local	IN TOURIST DESTINATION DESTINATION MANAGEMENT regional	PRESENTATION & INTERPRETATION	TOURIST APPEAL & EXPERIENCES	PUBLIC & PRIVATE AGENTS POWER & INVOLVEMENT	STAKEHOLDERS LOCAL & GLOBAL INVOLVEMENT & INTERESTS
Monitoring Physical impact Robustness - Fragility	Sustainable Development of Infrastructures	Valorising tangible and intangible Heritage	Uses and affinity with the site	Awareness of sustainable tourism potentials	Inclusion & exclusion in decision making
Carrying Capacity	Tourist Space-use Patterns	Visitor Centre – facilities	Visitor Management	Business opportunities of TOS	Connections and disconnections Global - Local
				Ownership & Competition	Ownership & Stewardship
Selection & Planning of Cultural Resources	Zoning & Clustering of TOS	Innovation & financial resources	Creativity & Marketing	Motivation & incentives	Partnership

Source: Jansen-Verbeke; 2012

On a local perspective, the concept of Hardware regards the location aspects of a heritage site (its integration with the landscape and the destination, its proximity with other remarkable sites, its accessibility and connection with main tourism gateways), its spatial characteristics (its size and scale, its internal spatial structure, its carrying capacity) and some aspects related to its robustness (fragility of tangible asset, risks connected with tourism pressure and ability to manage these impacts). On the other side, on a regional perspective, it analyses the position of the site inside the destination, therefore the focus turns from a *heritagescape* into a broader *tourismscape*.

Software coincides with the site skill to attract visitors delivering a positive tourist experience. Differently from the *Hardware*, this dimension changes over time according to fashion trends and innovations. Presentation and interpretation of the heritage site are the first fundamental variables to take into account since they create a connection between the place and the visitor. They are assessed analysing the quality of the visitor center services (if there is one), the way in which the message is communicated through the heritage presentation (for example, by a tour guide), the presence of a link between tangible and intangible assets (traditions, music, food, handicrafts, etc). Tourist appeal of the site is evaluated through its reputation in potential visitors' mind and the analysis of target groups within the brand strategy.

Software dimension aims at understanding how *tourismscape* turns into an *experiencescape* through the idea of the place conveyed to tourists. The way in which this process is done can constitute a competitive advantage in case of similar heritage sites.

Orgware represents the organizational capacity of a destination, which results from the types, the powers and the cross-sectoral networks of both private and public organizations and their management structures. In order to understand perspectives and constraints of the *Orgware*, three main levels of analysis have to be explained: stakeholders, management and policy.

The first regards the power balance among the actors involved in the ownership and stewardships of the site, the presence of partnerships, the involvement of local communities and their influence in decision making processes. The second aims at examining the idea behind the management of a site through the analysis of its management plan and its level of commodification. The policy aspect highlights the dynamics related to the pursuit of economic advantages through *tourismification* and the framework given by government and conservation legislation.

Robusticity-Market Appeal Model

Besides Jansen-Verbeke's, another important contribution for the assessment of tourism potential of cultural heritage attractions has been provided by Hilary Du Cros and Bob McKercher (2002), who focused their studies on the relationship between conservation and tourism. In order to provide effective and case-specific management actions, they translated these two dimensions into two variables, *Robusticity* and *Market Appeal*: sustainable tourism development is reachable when the latter is correlated with the ability of the asset to cope with increased visitation or to be modified for use in a manner that does not compromise its values. In particular, their model consists in a 3x3 matrix in which these two dimensions are classified according to a quantitative evaluation which can assume the categories "high" (3), "moderate" (2), "low"(1). The score is assigned taking into account a series of indicators deriving from a previous phase of context and issues investigation. The sum of the scores of the variables is then plotted to position the asset into the following matrix (figure 3).

Figure 3 - McKercher-DuCros Market Appeal-Robusticity Matrix, first version

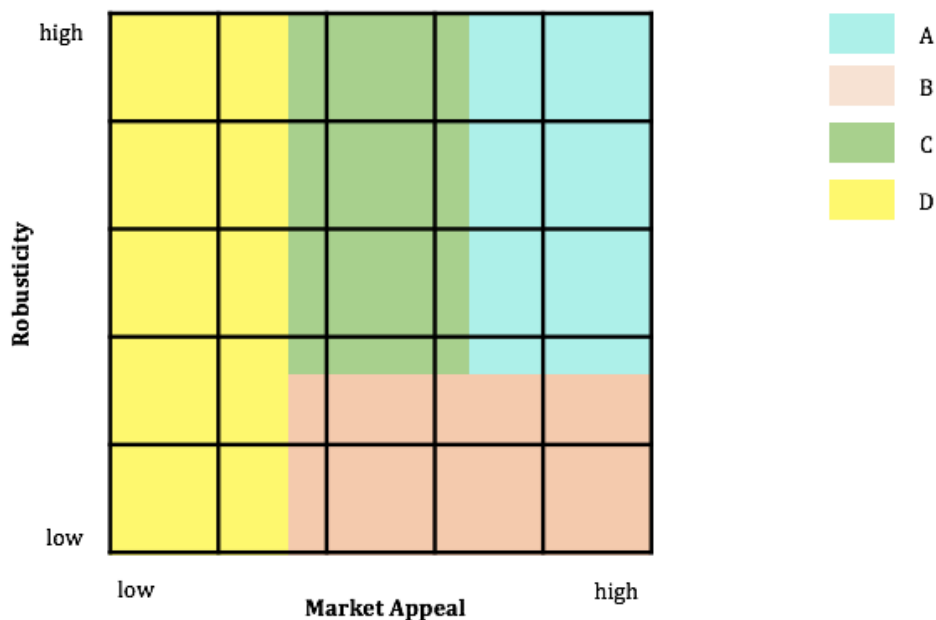
	HIGH			
		D1	C1	A1
Robusticity		D2	C2	A2
	LOW	D3	B2	B1
		LOW		HIGH
		Market Appeal		

Source: B. McKercher & P.S.Y. Ho, 2006

The status the asset occupies indicates the actions to be taken in the perspective of a cultural tourism planning for that site. 'A' grade assets have moderate to high *Market Appeal* and moderate to high *Robusticity*. These assets are ideally suited for significant tourism activity, no strong interventions are needed to protect the cultural values from the impact of heavy tourist flows, neither to enhance visitors appeal. 'B' grade assets have strong to moderate *Market Appeal* but a low *Robusticity*. The reason can rely in a physical fragility of the structure or in a situation in which cultural values are mined by mass visitation. Strict conservation and visitor management measures are required to avoid the achievement of a point of no return in which the site and its cultural significance are definitely damaged by an unsustainable tourist use. On the contrary, 'C' grade assets have a high or moderate *Robusticity* but a limited *Market Appeal*. In this case, the adoption of a marketing plan capable to exploit the potential given by the site robustness is a desirable option, however managers can also decide to maintain this status quo and accept the presence of limited tourist flows. 'D' grade assets represent a borderline case in which both *Market Appeal* and *Robusticity* are at a low level. Therefore, they should be preserved for reasons other than tourism and, even if not easy, managers should be convinced towards this decision.

Various empirical tests (Du Cros, 2000; Li & Lo, 2004) proved not only the framework's efficacy as a preliminary assessment tool, but also its ability to provide insights into future management strategies, descending mainly from the identification of four key dimensions. Nevertheless, the model also has some shortcomings that relate principally to the subjective nature of its indicators (B. McKercher and P.S.Y. Ho, 2006). Furthermore, Li and Lo (2004) show a tendency in obtaining results in the central positions of the matrix, thus even if the auditor sees a fatal flaw, he cannot give it the importance it deserves in the final assessment (B. McKercher and P.S.Y. Ho, 2006). In order to remedy to these limits, Bob McKercher and Pamela S.Y. Ho (2006) provided an alternative assessment protocol as an implementation of the Du Cros Model (2001). The main innovation consists in the disaggregation of the Du Cros model into four constituent dimensions: cultural, physical, product and experiential values. Their assessment is done following a series of sub-indicators, which are sort of guidelines questions whose answers have to be given on an ordinal scale based on five categories of 'Low', 'Low/Moderate', 'Moderate', 'Moderate/High', and 'High'. Thus, the previous model matrix 3x3 turns into 5x5, as showed by figure 4.

Figure 4 - The updated version of McKercher-DuCros Robusticity-Market Appeal Matrix



Source: Personal elaboration based on B. McKercher & P.S.Y. Ho, 2006

The level of tourism potential of the asset is obtained through an overall assessment, which takes into account the results reached evaluating the aforementioned dimensions, and also a consideration on fatal flaws, which was an important shortage in the previous version of the model. However, being qualitative, the assessment still risks to be influenced by personal bias

and subjective perspectives. In order to avoid such circumstances, authors recommend cross-training in which tourism is the training emphasis for the cultural heritage management (CHM) sector and CHM principles are emphasised for tourism industry workers (McKercher & Ho, 2006). Two or more external auditors are preferred in this process in order to reduce risks of subjectivity. In this way, the potential emergency of divergences indicates the necessity to rethink the just done assessment.

Besides evaluating the competitiveness of a single asset, the model can also be used on a wider perspective, in order to assess the tourism potential of an area, a city or a region through an integrated analysis of the assets of that territory. In this sense, the use of the framework is necessary for the design of *formal action plans* on a micro level and more rooted *destination policies* on a macro one. In practice, after the assessment of every asset, the respective scores are tabulated and plotted on the *Market Appeal-Robusticity Matrix*. The resulting chart shows how the different heritage sites of the studied area distribute in the frames. In a proactive context in which destination management board needs to take decisions on the future local or regional planning, the outcomes give indications on most feasible options to develop and the ones to reject. The audit is also applicable reactively, assessing the potential of places already being promoted by the destination marketing organization that have been (or can be) subjected to an increase in visitation and/or a change in visitor profile, which need to cope with without being damaged in their tangible and intangible values.

The empirical setting

Given the exploratory nature of the research question proposed in this paper, a qualitative approach to the empirical investigation has been adopted. Two case studies have been explored (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009) to delve into the issue of managing cultural heritage in a competitive destination perspective. In particular, the two cases have been used to apply the three analytical models presented at the previous section, in order to highlight their limits and to contribute to push further the tourism literature in this domain.

The analytical process

The two cases have been analysed separately and in details: firstly, studying the context of the destination through the *Urban Tourism Product Model*, secondly moving the focus on the particular site. The historical and cultural value of the assets has been outlined collecting data from academic sources, press releases from 2008 to 2016, city statistics, online reviews and articles, legislation. Furthermore, field visits contributed to direct observation on site.

After this collecting phase, data have been re-elaborated according to the models' procedure. Therefore, Jansen-Verbeke and McKercher-Du Cros Models have been applied precisely on the various site dimensions, producing an extensive analysis on them. Successively, besides comparing the destinations through the most relevant aspects of the first framework, the other models have been combined and overlapped, in order to descend interesting results and to strengthen them. Their overlapping has been made possible thanks to the similarity of both models' indicators.

The destinations: Venice and Amsterdam

The choice of the case studies has fallen on Venice and Amsterdam because of their similarity, underlined and confirmed by analysis of Van den Berg, Van der Borg, Van der Meer (1995). On a primary product level, both cities are based on a peculiar urban structure, composed by water navigable canals and historical architecture, which make them worldwide-known tourism destinations.

The uniqueness of this landscape represents such a strong attractiveness factor that collocates the destinations in a long-lasting stagnation phase of the "tourism lifecycle" (Butler, 1980, 2006), in which the already high tourist arrivals keep growing year after year without stop. Such a situation, clearly characterized by a high tourism pressure and the exceeding of the carrying capacity, at least in certain zones of the cities, results in the so-called "vicious circle" (Russo, 2002). As a consequence of the evident overcrowding of the city center prices increase, thus tourists with a limited purchasing power choose to visit it anyway but for shorter periods. The reduction of the tourist permanence brings to a "bite-and-run-away" tourism and, thus, to a decrease of the quality of the tourists' experience, as well as negative effects on the perception of residents' life quality (Bertocchi, Van der Zee, Janusz, 2016).

This phenomenon affects both Venice and Amsterdam, and it is evident in the *tourismification* and *commodification* of mass tourist paths like Strada Nuova-Rialto-San Marco in Venice and

Damrak-Kalverstraat-Leidseplein-Museum Area in Amsterdam. As a matter of fact, the supply of these zones is completely visitor-oriented; this is observable in the substitution of residents' activities with tourism businesses, such as low quality souvenir shop and restaurants, the higher cost of housing, the increase of the number of beds in hotels and sharing economy accommodations. Furthermore, the visit experience is low-quality since most tourists do not take into account the rich cultural supply both cities provide: they focus on the major interest points (Van Gogh-Rembrandt circuit in Amsterdam, San Marco Square in Venice), causing over-utilization of some attractions and under-utilization of others.

The negative effects of *tourismification* are also visible in a decline of the most overcrowded areas of the city: in Venice this situation is exacerbated by *excursionists*, who "use" the city only during the day, bringing to its *disneyfication*; while in Amsterdam the problem is related to the "sex and drug" image of the city, which produces downgrading, criminality, insecurity, noise and gender discrimination, particularly in the zone near the Red Light District.

The clash with the local population is strong in both cases; but in Venice it has gradually brought to a serious depopulation phenomenon (Favero & Moretti, 2017). As a matter of fact, if in Venice the *tourism monoculture* is more exacerbated, Amsterdam keeps its vocation as a trade, production and business center, displacing to other zones of the city, as well as the residential function.

The comparison of the sites: Scuola Grande della Misericordia (Venice) and Oude Kerk (Amsterdam)

As aforementioned, having similar indicators, Jansen-Verbeke *Hardware, Software & Orgware* Model and McKercher-Du Cros *Robusticity-Market Appeal* Matrix have been overlapped: this allowed to strengthen both tools' outcomes. Thanks to this step, two main results have been confirmed: a very good comparability on the *Hardware-Robusticity* level of the two sites and a big gap in the *Software-Market Appeal* aspects. A third result, a *vision* difference, has been instead reached comparing sites' *Orgware* perspectives. They will be explained in the following sections.

A similarity in Hardware-Robusticity aspects

Despite not being a church, the physical appearance, the charitable original function and the history of the Scuola Grande della Misericordia make it very similar to the Oude Kerk.

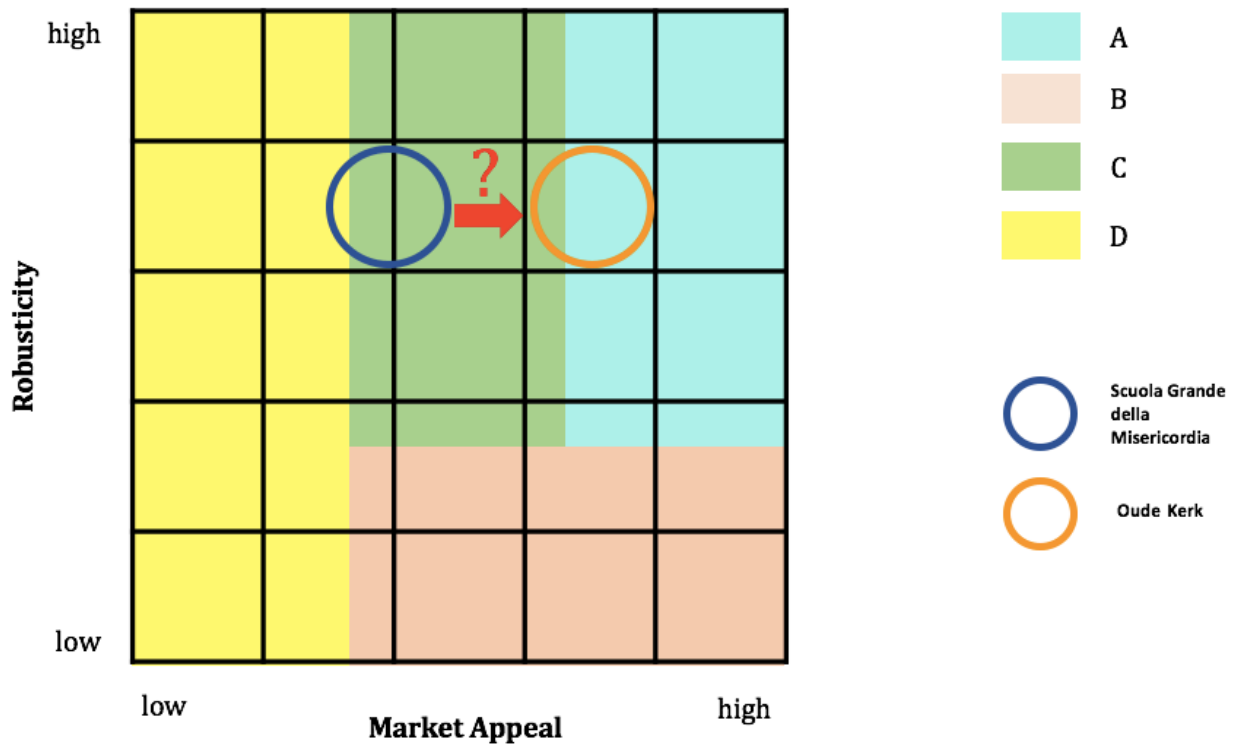
After a long situation of decline and degradation, both buildings have been undergone huge restoration works, which have ensured structures' robustness and allowed their reopening and their public fruition - in 2013 for the Oude Kerk and in 2016 for the Scuola Grande della Misericordia. Besides preserving high value testimonies of the past, both sites have the purpose of being used for events and temporary exhibitions, aiming at giving a new cultural value to a venue that was an important reference point for the local community in the past: the Oude Kerk was the first settlement of Amsterdam people and an important trade hub during the Dutch Golden Age, while the Scuola Grande was the headquarter of a powerful confraternity during Venice Republic and more recently the gym of the most acclaimed and successful basketball team of the city. This function is also easily adaptable with the architectures' size, internal spatial structure and iconic features. As a matter of fact, both buildings have huge dimensions; a compact structure and are rather "empty". The site external accessibility is good in both cases, even though the context in which the structures are located is different. The Scuola della Misericordia is situated in a harmonious Venetian urban landscape, but off the most tourist beaten tracks; on the other hand, the Oude Kerk is in the Amsterdam city center but within a quarter known for another kind of tourism, the one related to sex and drugs, which thus can create a contrasting tourist experience. Both the Scuola Grande della Misericordia and the Oude Kerk are not among the main tourist attractions of the two cities.

To confirm the strong comparability of the cases on the *Hardware* level, the application of McKercher-DuCros Model assigned the same score to the *Robusticity* variable (4, "moderate-high", as visible in the figure 5) to both sites, endorsing their excellent physical and cultural value.

A gap in the Software-Market Appeal aspects

What just stated for *Hardware*, cannot be affirmed as for *Software* characteristics, since the Scuola Grande della Misericordia has a deep gap in *Market Appeal* compared to Oude Kerk (as visible in figure 5, the former obtained a score of 2,5 – moderate low/medium – and the latter a score of 4 – moderate high). As for the *product* and *experiential values* of both sites, the major differences lie in the quality of interpretation, the creation of cultural programs and *themings* capable to link tangible and intangible heritage and the connected engagement in tourist experience.

Figure 5 - Du Cros-McKercher Matrix: a comparison between Scuola Grande della Misericordia and Oude Kerk



Source: Personal elaboration based on B. McKercher & P.S.Y. Ho, 2006

This result can be considered the starting point for a wider analysis of possible measures that the former's managers could take into account for an implementation of the site attractiveness, following the *best practices* offered by the latter.

A difference in the Orgware vision

The comparison is completed with an analysis of the *Orgware*, a fundamental variable in determining a positive development of sustainable and competitive *tourismscapes* (Jansen-Verbeke, 2013).

Both sites are managed on a local level by a private institution, the Scuola Misericordia di Venezia S.p.A. for the former and the Oude Kerk Foundation for the latter. One of the main differences between the two organizations lies in the way they perceive the role of tourism in the site and in the linked aspect of the revenue funds for conservation. The Oude Kerk relies

mainly on tourism and donors¹ to provide funds, while the Scuola della Misericordia S.p.A. earns its revenues especially by renting the structure for private events, in this way amortising the expenses held for the restoration, as the instrument of the project financing forecasts². Thus, in this case, the role of tourism, meant here as the public opening of the heritage site both for local and foreign people, does not seem to be primary, since an entrance fee is not required and the Scuola has been opened mainly for private corporate events. Hypothetically, this choice is part of a precise company strategy, which, however, does not exactly coincide with the building's vocation claimed by the S.p.A. itself. On the contrary, the Oude Kerk Foundation is a cultural enterprise with a transparent organization, the operations of which are based on a national code shaped on purpose for cultural entities³. The Foundation was established with the aim of conserving the building and opening it up to a broad public in a meaningful manner; such a vocation is evident in the constant opening to public through exhibitions and events, as well as in the consultations of the donors and the community for issues related to the church use and programme staging. Therefore, the analysis of the two sites' *Orgware* lets suppose that the role given to tourism is ancillary if compared to the one of the Oude Kerk because of the difference in the two types of organization. The former is probably more business-oriented and does not have that willingness and that interest in opening to a tourist public, which instead are clearly visible in the latter's, a "cultural enterprise *pur sang*". However, the latest re-opening of the Scuola should be taken into account too: the Oude Kerk inaugurated in 2013 and has had more time to set a specific vision and programme. The aforementioned Scuola's situation is related to the current time: this does not mean it will not change in a – near or far – future perspective.

¹ Besides occasional gifts, the Oude Kerk has elaborated two specific donation programs which offer specific treatments and activities in return: the Vrienden van Oude Kerk for lovers of heritage, art and music and the Tien Gilden van de Oude Kerk for organizations and companies.

² In 2008, the Municipality, the owner of the Scuola Grande della Misericordia, has given it into concession to della Misericordia Venezia S.p.A. (SMV S.p.A.). Through this concession, this private entity commits to finance the restoration of the building in return for the right of managing and economically exploiting the space. In particular, the concession envisages the possibility to manage a bookshop and café/restaurant enjoyable for the structure users and to rent the rooms for promotional events, corporate meetings and exhibitions. At the end of the concession period, lasting 42 years and 20 days, the private company commits itself to return an improved building thanks to conservation and valorization interventions.

³ The *Cultural Governance Code* is a Dutch normative framework which offers a series of practical recommendation and best practices for good governance and oversight in cultural organizations. The main principles the code is based on are: a clear division of tasks and responsibilities between implementation, management and supervision; monitoring independence; avoidance of conflicts of interest; ensuring expertise and diversity in the composition of the Supervisory Board; a well-organized and independent financial control.

Managerial implications from the observance of the two cases

The result obtained from the comparison between *Software-Market Appeal* aspects of the Scuola Grande della Misericordia and the Oude Kerk offered a series of best practices the former could take inspiration to in order to fill the gap the model underlined.

As aforementioned, the Scuola Grande della Misericordia lacks of interpretation, except for a weak connection with the *intangible heritage* represented by the past use of the venue as the city basketball team gym. No presentation is provided to make visitors aware of neither the present nor the past meaning of the place: there are no panels at the entrance nor in its interiors, no brochures or maps are available. As observed in the Oude Kerk, providing strong interpretation and presentation tools or creating a visitor center is not necessary: a peculiar “sketch” brochure and an interactive audio-guide are sufficient to lead visitors through the story and the significance of the building and the exhibition. They do not have physical impact on the structure’s authenticity and allows visitors’ personal reflection and space exploration. Furthermore, the Oude Kerk uses *interpretation* to link intangible occurrences with the site itself and its reputation: it is, for instance, the case of Saskia’s tomb, Rembrand’s wife, for which the church is famous and around which specific events are organized every year. On the other side, the Scuola Grande della Misericordia is famous in Venice not so much for the importance of the confraternity it originally hosted, but rather for its having been the gym of the Venetian basketball team when it was at its best. Even though weakly, Reyer Basket can currently represent an *interpretation* of the site based on a connection between a *tangible heritage*, the building itself, and an *intangible heritage*, the past glory of the team and the use of the building as a gym. Being still a strong memory in Venetian people, a particular *theming* capable to attract both locals and tourist could be created, also considering that the plaque and bell at the side entrance are, at the moment, the only evident linking signs with the history of the place. However, in order to maintain the cultural value of the building and valorize completely this heritage, an interpretation and a presentation capable of transmitting and describing also the original function of the Scuola is necessary. A *theming* about the Scuole Grandi in Venice can be thought, for instance, through the creation of a network and an itinerary including these other buildings, besides the production of informative materials. Thus, as shown by the Oude Kerk experience, *soft* interventions are enough to offer an experience with a higher quality level, capable of engaging and educate not only tourists who have never entered the building but also local people interested in the story of their own city.

However, being the space “empty”, good interpretation and presentation tools about the story of the place are not sufficient to attract a consistent number of people and keep them for a long time in its interiors. The Oude Kerk Foundation, aware of this limitation, has decided to set a precise programme composed of a temporary exhibition of contemporary art, lasting approximately 5 months, and a series of correlated events, ranging from workshops and artists’ meetings to dancing performances and concerts. Doing so, the church provides tourists with an interesting, durable and complete experience, thus rendering unique a simple visit to a church, and an always new way of discovering and interacting with the building, mainly for a local audience.

Although the new concept of the Scuola Grande della Misericordia focuses on its function as an expositive space and an event venue, Scuola Misericordia Venezia S.p.A. has never presented any similar program by now. In this case too, following the example of the Oude Kerk could be useful for:

1. attracting tourists, in particular those interested in Venetian history, culture and contemporary art, mostly following the destination less beaten tracks;
2. opening the Scuola also to citizens, through events that can be linked to the past and modern history of the city or to topical issues, as well as concerts and art performances.

Defining such a program would help in clarifying the *positioning* of the site and its image in both residents and tourists. Furthermore, such a use would avoid structure *commodification* risks, since it respects its authenticity, it is affine to city claim of public spaces and does not clash with the original function of the building.

Aiming the installation of a contemporary art exhibition at addressing to a huge public, both local and foreign, the interpretation, the presentation and the staging of a more precise program of events and exhibitions have also to be integrated with other interventions, in order to implement the *Market Appeal* of the Scuola Grande della Misericordia. It should be considered as a real *tourist product*, provided with its own specific promotion, online and in loco, and its integration within city cultural clusters, partnerships and other similar initiatives. The first steps towards the achievement of this aim could be:

1. its insertion in the *Venezia Unica* City Pass, in order to push tourists visiting the Scuola without any particular effort in terms of cost and information availability;
2. its appearing in the Tripadvisor section “things to do in Venice”, in order to shape a (possibly positive) reputation in tourists using this website;

3. the installation of adequate tourist information signs indicating the directions and the presence itself of the Scuola;
4. the already mentioned creation of an itinerary based on a *theming* about *Scuole Grandi* in Venice, since they are majestic historic buildings, representing an important heritage for the city, which are however not known by most visitors;
5. the improving of the website, adding more meaningful information for tourists, for instance openings time, entrance fees, accessibility
6. the improving of the social media presence through publishing more interactive contents for the web-audience, for example Facebook events, real-time posts, articles and links also promoting complementary activities, in order to make citizenry aware of its activities.

Conclusions and indications for future research

Understanding the forces that are transforming cultural landscapes into *tourismscapes* is a crucial step into visionary planning and responsible management of regions and places. Nowadays, the emerging gap between dynamic and less dynamic cultural regions is not much given by the actual accumulation of monuments, museums or historical landscapes, but even more on the liveliness and liveability of intangible heritage elements such as traditions imbedded in the agricultural or industrial history and habitat. In such a situation, the challenge is managing this interdependency between tangible and intangible heritage in an innovative and creative way (Jansen-Verbeke, 2007).

The purpose of this research has been to highlight the limits of the aforementioned tools and to uncover potential avenues for future research towards an integration of economic and management aspects in a destination governance perspective for the achievement of cultural heritage competitiveness.

The literature review showed the importance of different dimensions characterizing both the destination and the site: not only the asset and its cultural value, but also the way in which it is conveyed to visitors and managed by the stakeholders, underlining that competitiveness can be reached only with a good level of all these variables.

The results confirm this idea, highlighting that the quality of the sites and their attractiveness depend on the organization of a cultural product able to satisfy both tourists, towards whom the supply has to be differentiated according to the various targets, and residents, for whom

heritage in the local territory is the first reference to look at to satisfy their needs regarding good life quality, sense of community belonging, social cohesion and urban quality. Therefore, destination managers should be aware that, if strategically managed, cultural heritage can have a direct positive impact on the territory.

The literature review also underlined the necessity of a network approach for the destination governance, in order to reach cultural tourism destination competitiveness and sustainability. Therefore, cultural heritage can be considered as a “portfolio” composed by a series of different kinds of assets, which have to be implemented not only on the single asset level, but also as a *system* (Caroli, 2012), even considering the actors gravitating towards them.

In this perspective, giving a clear scenario and evaluation of the heritage assets features and collocation in the territory, Jansen-Verbeke and McKercher & Du Cros Models could be applied at a destination level, to the different sites composing the cultural supply of the territory. In this way, the results of this assessment will highlight:

1. the compatibility between sites tourist use and conservation: it could result that some heritage sites are not suitable for tourism visitations and thus they should be put aside from the future strategies;
2. the main sites weaknesses, where to address particular investments and measures for their improvement;
3. the attitudes and the characteristic of private and public stakeholders involved in the single assets management.

However, this is not enough: these models need to be renewed and integrated with other indicators in a network destination governance perspective. Thus, future studies should focus on the creation of frameworks able to insert and evaluate the synergies which can or cannot be created among the cultural sites of a destination and, consequently, capable to assess in a methodical way the performance of the whole network. This will support further comparisons and *best practices* analysis on a higher level, as well as the design of a more useful tool for destination managers.

Furthermore, a goal of future research could also be the inclusion of aspects related to the perception of the site in the local population, its potential participation into the visit experience and the sharing of tourist spaces, which these frameworks do not seem taking deeply into account.

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