

THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE CITIZENS**Roberto Bruni**

University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, r.bruni@unicas.it

Siniša Zarić

Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade, sinisha.zaric@gmail.com

Marcello Sansone

University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, m.sansone@unicas.it

Abstract: *Considering the fast development of some countries and societies around the world and the complexity of markets and economies, technology and knowledge represent the main resources to involve place actors in generating opportunities for a sustainable development and a better quality of life for countries, cities and organizations. The aim of this work is to highlight the power of knowledge as a key resource to be shared, diffused and managed within territories and places, with a focus on the first stakeholders for a place: the citizens.*

Around the world, from the perspective of the quality of life and wellbeing of people, the geographical areas emerge as places to live when stakeholders perceive the opportunities to be involved as active actors in the place development at different levels. For this reason, governments, institutions, organizations and people should be interested in integration of their actions with territories and geographical areas that are involved by their activities. Citizens are the first category of stakeholders in territories and the knowledge is the key resource to make possible the involvement and participation, for instance in thinking, designing and shaping the place of the future; the citizens-sourcing is a key for this approach.

Place marketing framework and SD-Logic approach are used to explain that the final goal in a place management activity is to stimulate the value co-creation and the generation of a strategic benefit for actors involved in a place; this could be the way to stimulate the emerging of sustainable development, improving the quality of life, co-creating value.

Keywords: *Place, knowledge, citizens, citizens-sourcing, sustainability, value co-creation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Different contexts in the world are affected by high level of complexity in terms of markets, communication, social life and economy. The demography of different territories has been changing fast and governments and organizations are becoming interested in the effects of this movement every day. The increasing of people in Africa and Asia is not a temporary situation but it is generating new needs and fast reorganization of the territories. Not only temporary ‘poor migrants’ are the interest of so called ‘developed countries’ but a lot of good professionals, workers, researchers, high cultured people are moving around the world providing their experiences, cultures, traditions and opportunities. For this reason, countries need to be ready to give much more opportunities to people to share knowledge, projects, place development ideas to be much more flexible, ready and fast to organize the government of the place to the change. Flexibility and readiness for the change are the key words to manage (or positively exploit) this tendency to the increasing of the ‘melting pot’ of cultures, new ideas and evolving/changing societies in each country. Unlike the past, this fast change is supported by the rapid diffusion of technology and communication and, for this reason, much more people are ready to understand news, information and, of course, share different levels of knowledge.

Following the stimuli previously presented and building the place marketing frameworks and the Service Dominant Logic approach (Vargo and Lusch 2004; 2008) this work highlights the power of knowledge as a key resource to be shared, diffused and managed within territories and places, with a focus on the citizens as relevant stakeholders for a place. The citizens are the relevant actor in the place able to actively contribute with their knowledge in generation of the strategic benefit for the place.

This conceptual work contributes to explain the opportunity to shift the centre of the place management from the input coming from the government to the citizens as a source of value in place development. The knowledge diffusion between citizens could contribute in stimulating specific actions (involvement, participation and citizen-sourcing) that

encourage the value co-creation and the generation of strategic benefit (in terms of quality of life and wellbeing) through the value co-creation. Briefly, the work explores the actor-to-actor relationship in a place focusing on the role of knowledge for citizens in co-creating value and it is organized as follows:

After the presentation of the theoretical background, the relevance of the citizens in a place marketing activity within the place is described. It is followed by the role of knowledge in citizens activity. A particular focus on the role of citizen-sourcing is presented, explaining how new technology and the concept of citizens involvement could be actively used. The work closes with the conclusions and implications.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this work the technology, the place marketing and Service Dominant Logic are useful themes that explain the dynamic of the context understanding the role of the knowledge in the development of the place and, of course, the relevance of the knowledge as a key resource for citizens in a place.

The use of technology to communicate and stimulate the interaction with users and consumers is not new (O'Brien and Toms, 2008); in any case, in the last years the technology has been the center of society and place development. Technology has been developing rapidly and affecting everyday life, for example in one-to-one communication with mobile devices and the Internet of Things (Miorandi et al., 2012; Gubbi et al., 2013), or in optimizing the cities management with SMART cities projects (Caragliu et al., 2013; Zanella et al., 2014) and in the production within companies and industries (e.g., Industry 4.0) (Brettel et al., 2014). Territories and places are involved in this change and the technology has a relevant role in place communication development and in integration of place stakeholders (Florida, 2002; 2005; Berry & Glaeser, 2005; Glaeser & Berry, 2006). For this reason, each intervention in territories is powered by technology and this has a relevant role. The theoretical background of this work is based on place marketing and service dominant logic approach. Here below the place marketing framework research roots are presented, followed by the Service Dominant Logic.

Place marketing is a discipline studied from different perspectives from the early '90s. The first perspective was based on the role of place marketing in place promotion (Ave, 1993; Borchert, 1994; Schmidt, 1993). In the middle, new influences around business management and companies affected the place marketing, designed to apply to the territories the same marketing framework applied in companies' activities. In that way, place marketing became much more 'strategic' (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993; Kotler et al., 1999). Gertner in 2011 suggest considering both place marketing and place branding evolution to reflect around the application of strategic and marketing approach to the territories and place. In particular the author (Gertner, 2011) sustains that place marketing and place branding present 4 periods of evolution. The first between the 1990-2000 in which the places are considered brand (Henderson, 2000; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000), the second in which the research in place marketing and place brand increases and the authors are making their efforts to explain what place marketing and branding are and how is possible to use and measure the frameworks (Hankinson, 2011; Anholt, 2002). In the third period different authors present qualitative research about place marketing and place branding (Kotler et al. 2004; Kavaratzis 2007) and some research journals become diffused between researchers and practitioners. The last period considers different research works published around the world interesting different countries and, in particular, involving government and universities in researches, studies and considerations around the role of place marketing and branding of the politics of the place (Cubillo-Pinilla 2009; Parker, 2008; Sansone et al. 2012; Bruni, 2014; Asworth 2016).

The S-D Logic approach is presented briefly below to highlight the contributions useful in explaining the role of resource integration and value co-creation in place relationships. S-D Logic approach could be explained briefly looking at the 5 axioms. First, the S-D Logic proposes the shift from the logic based on goods and on the role of material resources as assets of value to the concept of application of specialized skills and knowledge as fundamental base of exchange considering the 'service' as the fundamental base of the exchange (Axiom 1). Within the exchange each actor is relevant, and value is always co-created by each actor including the beneficiary of the service (Axiom 2); in this exchange all social and economic actors are resource integrators (Axiom 3) and the value is exchanged by the service provision. Is the beneficiary that is able to determine the value (Axiom 4); this beneficiary has the opportunity to evaluate thanks to the measure of 'value in context'. There is a connection between value identification and the environment context. In fact, the last axiom (Axiom 5) suggests that value co-creation is coordinated through actor generated institutions and institutional arrangements (the connection between actor and context/territory emerges).

Considering the complex and fast changing situation that is characterizing the world in this period, an integration of the two previous theoretical perspectives could be useful to explain some behaviours in places and, of course, some probable evolution of relationships between actors within the society.

It is quite simple to find analogism between S-D Logic and place marketing framework because within the social sciences the goal is to explain social dynamics trying to find solutions regarding the human behaviours and relationships in different contexts. The context in fact is the first object to be considered and, of course, the place in place marketing represents a contextualization of the human behaviour and activities in geographical space (Cresswell, 2004). In S-D Logic, Vargo e Lusch (2004,2008) argue that value is perceived as ‘value-in-context’ by the customer/user. Companies/organizations can only make their value propositions and the contextualization of these value propositions (resources) by the different actors involved (integration) to stimulate the emerging of the value that is co-created. As stated by Ashworth (1993), each consumer of the place is an individual consumer that realizes and individual product by the process of assembly for consumption. That is useful to explain the co-created nature of the value for a place and for a consumption experience. The place is a co-created value that emerges through the integration of resources. Following the S-D logic, material resources (operand) and immaterial resource (operant) should contribute in value generation. For this reason in places it is possible to find different tangible/material resources (mountains, squares, cities, infrastructures, monuments) that will be activated and powered by intangible/immaterial resources [social, cultural, physical- Arnould, Price, Malshe (2006)].

Between the immaterial resources that should belong to the people (and of course to the citizens) it is possible to find the cultural one, in which the knowledge is present. It is possible to find a lot of types of knowledge and these characterize the perspective of the people around the place and the meaning given to the value of the place.

The traditional approach to place marketing is considered ‘demand-driven’ (Asworth, 1993; Caroli, 1999; Cercola, Bonetti and Simoni, 2011) and consists of a system of activities and strategies proposing a value for the demand, identified between interested subjects (residents, investors, various stakeholders). It is possible to argue that place marketing is a system of activities that contribute to the emergence of place value through the combination of material and immaterial resources and relationships. Following the perspectives explained before, the place marketing within a value co-creation logic (Bruni, Caboni, 2017) considers the application of competencies to create benefits for other parties involved in resource integration and service exchange. It is a different and general approach that proposes an alternative that is not based on a clear source of value creation/proposition. From this perspective, everyone in the territory/geographical area can stimulate the value proposition and contribute to its characterization. This approach to territories/geographical areas is based on the key role of the immaterial resources of stakeholders and the relevance of knowledge diffusion; in that way, the value is always co-created by the interaction of the actors (users/stakeholders) involved in the place. If the actors share the opportunity to interact together to co-create value, it is likely unnecessary to stimulate the reaction with a specific proposal.

This approach is useful to explain the scheme that follows (Figure 1) where an actor-to-actor interaction is explained in a context of diffused knowledge.

3. KNOWLEDGE VALUE CO-CREATION AND CITIZENS

Each theoretical approach is useful to explain what is happening in a specific territory when some social dynamics emerge. Of course, to understand what the rules of some behaviours are it is necessary to develop the right tools and the theoretical instruments are useful in this activity.

Talking about knowledge and citizens (or territories) it is important to consider that different cultures, traditions, and social structures can, of course, make the difference in results and future opportunities in place development.

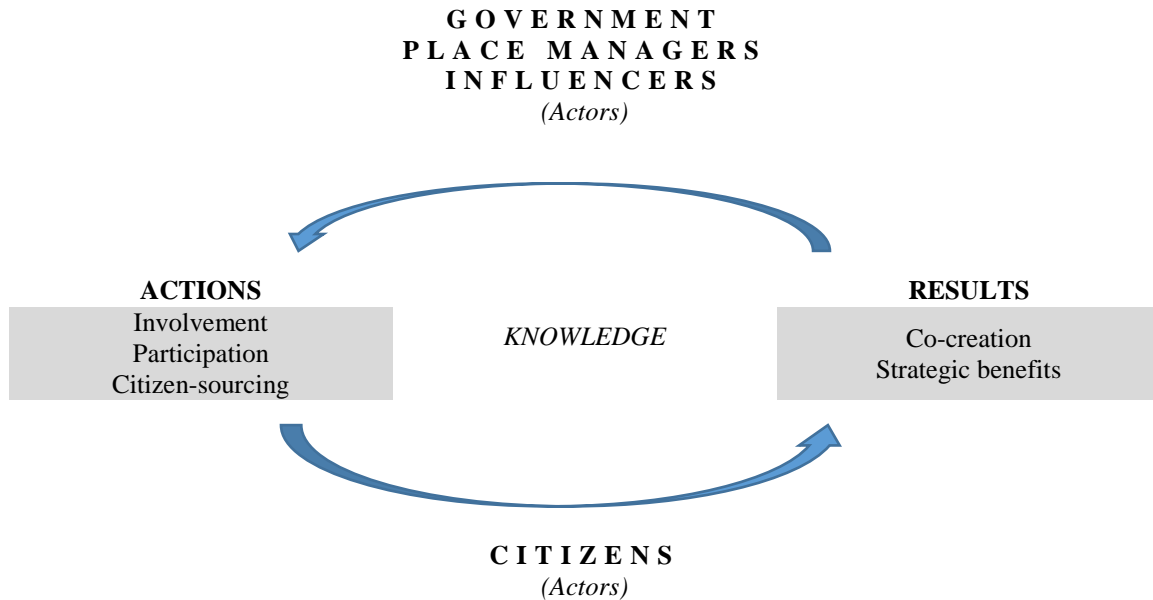
Below it is presented model to explain the dynamic of knowledge, actions and results in a relationship between actors in a place. The first assumption in this relationship is the availability of each actor to cooperate, to be available to learn new ways to be active, to improve itself. In one word, the first condition to have the opportunity to try, to apply the model it is to be ready to change.

The scheme below in figure 1 will be explained following the theoretical assumptions but, of course, it will be implemented and developed when the actors involved will be ready to accept to integrate their resources and cooperate (each one with its knowledge) to achieve a common goal in place development.

The place marketing framework helps to organize the right system of steps and activities able to achieve the goal, to recognize an emerging value but, as explained, within the scheme, the relevance is in the resource integration and, of course, the value emerges by the meaning that each actor is ready to give to the material resources (operand) thanks to

the own immaterial resources (operant). Between those immaterial resources, the knowledge in this example could be intend in a more wide meaning and could represent the system of immaterial resources including the capabilities to take care to the wellbeing and quality of the life. In this scheme the knowledge is the immaterial resource able to stimulate the belonging to the main project of place improvement looking at the wellbeing of the citizens and population.

Figure 1. actor to actor relationship and the role of knowledge



Source: elaboration of the authors

This scheme should be interpreted following the S-D Logic approach (Vargo, Lusch, 2004, 2008) and it concerns a classical situation in which it is possible to have an actor to actor relationship. The value co-creation and the strategic benefit for actors involved are the result of the interaction. In any case, different territories, cultures and contexts, could be characterized by different situations of contact between the involved actors. Of course, it is simple to think that then government or place managers could be the first actor to stimulate the input in citizens' involvement in place value co-creation but this is not always true. Let think of alternative situations (for e.g. the bottom up place management activities) where the citizens are fully involved in the design or thinking of specific projects; in that way it is possible to think that the government is in the centre of the process. But it is the same when a private company (or public-private company) involves citizens or a specific geographical area in a project where it is possible to integrate resources of a lot of actors in co-creating value and generating benefits for the community in terms of quality of life and wellbeing. In a public-private situation, of course, the stimuli could be managed in a mixed mode and, sometimes, the relationships between the actors is not always clearly hierarchically identified. The constant is the role of knowledge considered at the centre of the process. Each actor is involved within the relevance of the knowledge in managing the process or simply being part of it. The complexity of the context can be simplified through the knowledge (Barile 2009; De Toni and De Zan 2015) considering the opportunities to actively and critically participate in co-creation activities within the place.

In general, knowledge permits the increase in opportunities understanding, participating and changing the development of society in complex environment (Inglehart, 1997; Close, 2016). Knowledge permits the spreading of the place marketing strategy and the implementation of the stakeholders' engagement in place value proposition (Bruni, Caboni, 2017).

Looking at the results coming from the actions regulated and powered by the knowledge, it is possible to briefly present the co-creation (in particular the value co-creation) and the strategic benefit for actors involved. Of course, a lot of combinations could be considered between the actors involved but the focus in this work is on the citizens and, for this reason, it is necessary to reflect on the value co-creation and strategic benefit stimulated by the action provided by the citizens.

4. VALUE CO-CREATION AND CITIZEN-SOURCING

The value co-creation is the expression of the resource integration and service exchange (Vargo, Lush, 2004; 2008). If the citizens are involved in this activity, they are, of course, activating a process able to generate opportunities for the place development. A positive view of the place and actors involved should be the guide in this process because the actors (in that case the citizens) should share the same goal: generate a strategic benefit that in the middle and long run should be based on the general principle of searching for sustainability, wellbeing and a better quality of life. The knowledge diffusion is a general goal and, often, the responsibility for this goal is up to the government (or place managers) of a place. The modern technology and the innovations in communications are multiplying the opportunities in knowledge diffusion and, for this reason, everyone could be a content generator, eventually diffusing information, traditions, projects and ideas. These kind of ‘nudges’ could represent the first step in knowledge diffusion, in particular among the citizens.

Although government and place managers are not the unique source of inputs in a modern society that has been working on place opportunities improvement, of course, they could have much more possibilities to provide projects and ideas towards a territory.

For this reason, in specific countries in which the government of territories has been working on finding new ways for development, the role of the government is fundamental, and the place managers could represent the first influencers within the general project of citizens involvement and participation. Techniques of crowdsourcing (Howe, 2008) are fostering creating values together. Originally born in the world of business, as outsourcing tasks to the talents and knowledge of the many (Zaric, 2014), this modern approach is moving from the private to the public area. Utilizing the crowd and “tapping into the collective knowledge and talent of the citizens”, is showing a gradual rise and development of citizen sourcing. In case of the place managers/government as coordinators of the development, it is possible to act in different ways, stimulating the involvement and the participation of the citizens.

First, it is possible to generate the conditions to diffuse the right knowledge (and tools) to participate working on training activities, focus groups, seminars, conventions. Second, it is possible to disseminate specific information through the citizens working on specific communication around the projects, ideas and opportunities to involve citizens. Sometime the stimulation activity could be simpler than the control and the monitoring face because after the stimulation and involvement, people need to cooperate being active and contributing with own resources and knowledge. This is a process of actors engagement and can be effective when a strategy of coordination and goals definition is defined. For example, it is possible to think about the concept of place marketing from the perspective of value co-creation.

Looking at this framework, the actors involved in a place strategy (and activity of implementation) need to specify steps, stimulating actors to be connected. Looking at the scheme in figure 1 it is possible to understand how to create the conditions for actors engagement, knowledge diffusion, citizens participation and generation of strategic benefits.

To achieve these goals it is possible to follow the same steps, applying a place marketing framework following a value co-creation logic (Bruni, Caboni, 2017):

- A. A clear definition and sharing of place-identity and state-of-the-art of the vocation of the territory/geographical area;
- B. Identification of the key actor (or key actors) interested in stimulating the place marketing project, according to a value co-creation logic;
- C. Defining and sharing goals to achieve (mainly the wellbeing of the people and improving quality of life)
- D. The availability of tangible and intangible resources needed to develop a strategy;
- E. Identification of the emerging place through the synthesis of the different place perceptions and identification of place key points (strengths and weaknesses);
- F. Shared institutions in managing the process of value co-creation between government and stakeholders (including the citizens);
- G. Introduce citizen-sourcing for public policy (Loukis, 2018), when possible.

H. Competencies for managing the relationships with a broad network of actors who agree to collaborate;

I. The adaptation ability of each actor involved in the process:

The value co-creation process within a place marketing framework implies that each actor is able to cooperate in creation and for this reason, needs to have the right knowledge to be active in resource integration. The participation in value co-creation implies the respect of the other actors and the will to share the same goals generating mutual benefits for the network of actors that represent the place.

These premises highlight the necessity to go beyond the simple activity of ‘communication’ within the marketing activities and a new need emerges. It is necessary to develop activities of training between cooperative actors, explaining ways and behaviours to cooperate following the general rules based on the respect of the whole goal of the place and the mutual benefit of each actor involved.

The goal of this process is to disseminate knowledge, develop shared value propositions, make the territory or place more adaptive and responsive to change, reduce error rates in defining marketing strategies and attribute a significant role to perceived and co-created value (value in context), rather than value creation *for* the demand.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Different changes have been affecting the societies, the economies of the world and the traditional relationships between actors in value creation have been changing fast. Companies and territories need to change the approach with markets and communities because the sources of new ideas, projects, cities reorganizations, investments, new functions and opportunities to live and develop have been identifying new determinants and codes in defining the value. A lot of actors have been involved in place development and the concept of value generated by the network of interactions seems to be the paradigm useful to understand the evolving of economies and societies. Within this scenario, the knowledge emerges as the most relevant immaterial resource able to activate the actors’ cooperation and the resource integration toward the value co-creation. Value is co-created by each actor involved in the process of place development and the citizens represent the principal actor to be involved in the process of evolution.

Place marketing value co-creation driven presents the tools in line with the evolution of the relationships and could represent the framework to highlight the passage from a hierarchical responsibility for the place development (top down) to a much smoother resource integration where the relevance of the ideas and projects come from the effective possibility to obtain positive results from the investments and projects. In that way each actor (with the right knowledge) interested to the place development could be the stimulator, animator, influencer or the first active actor that involves other actors towards the common goal around the improving of wellbeing and quality of life.

Another implication comes from the actors’ engagement in the place development. Each actor should be stimulated to participate in resource integration, sharing the common goal of the place and, at the same time, the actor should show the will to cooperate in specific activities that, sometimes, are far from the immediate return or revenue; that comes from the culture, tradition, knowledge and place attachment. In some cases, the participation in a place management project (especially for citizens) gives back a value that is recognizable only in the satisfaction to be part of the project thinking to the place development. But, as Bulgarian professor Bosnakova, analyzing crowdsourcing practices states, in the very beginning there must be a good plan (Bosnakova , 2016). In a territory with a medium level of diffusion of technology, wellbeing and knowledge, the place managers (or other interested actors) must focus their attention on the engagement of actors to be involved in the place development. Each actor engaged should share the general final goal of the territory and his work will be part of a system of actions integrated in a mutual recognition of the value of a common project of place development.

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