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CORPORATE MUSEUM AND ORGANIZATIONAL MEMORY IN AGRI-FOOD ORGANIZATION SECTOR

Keywords: Corporate Museum, Knowledge Transfer, Organizational Memory Agri-food Sector

Abstract. The competitive environment is becoming more complex. For this reason, it is called VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous). Firms must identify new ways to maintain and increase their competitive advantage. Firms based their competitive advantage on the enhancement of knowledge and innovation. From this perspective, despite the vast literature on KM, corporate museums represent a little observed phenomenon. Corporate museums represent a new mechanism for the enhancement of knowledge and organizational memory. Despite this, studies on corporate museums focus only on the aspects of marketing and corporate branding. Few studies have addressed this phenomenon from the point of view of organizational memory and knowledge transfer. This study fits into this gap in the academic debate. From the point of view of organizational theory, the study analyzes the phenomenon of the corporate museum as a mechanism for transferring knowledge and organizational memory. This work uses a descriptive qualitative methodology. The study analyzes information from a public dataset. The analyzes focus on corporate museums in Italy, with particular attention to the agri-food sector. The results of this study highlight that the corporate museum assumes a strategic value to reduce the risk of “organizational oblivion” and increase the sharing of organizational culture. This study offers some initial observations on the phenomenon of the business museum and on the relationship with organizational memory.

1. Introduction. In this competitive context, firms must increasingly base their competitive advantage on the enhancement and transfer of knowledge and innovation. Some sectors have shown a greater propensity to enhance and implement knowledge in their internal processes. Indeed, a current of studies shows this propensity of some sectors such as automotive (Canonico, et al., 2021) or in public administrations (Wiig, 2002; Syed - Ikhsan and Rowland, 2004; Massaro, et al., 2015). Some

entrepreneurial forms have also proved particularly inclined to the enhancement of knowledge such as start-ups (Myers, 2009), spin-offs (Antonelli, 2004; Vesperi & Gagnidze, 2019). Few studies, on the other hand, have focused on the agri-food sector (Vesperi, et al, 2021). Despite this little attention from the literature, the agri-food sector and agri-food organizations have an important “weight” in creating the value of a local economic system. Precisely for this reason, the agri-food sector and agri-food organizations represent a new challenge for KM scholars. Most agri-food organizations are micro and small dimensions (Ménard & Klein, 2004; James, et al., 2011) with low propensity for innovation and low investment in R&D and characterized by low-knowledge managerial practices. Despite this, the agri-food organizations in order to enhance traditional knowledge (Ragavan, 2001) have created corporate museums. Corporate museums are the object of great attention from scholars, involving a plurality of disciplinary fields. There are still few studies that deal with corporate museums connected to agri-food organizations, making use of theoretical frameworks based on organizational theory, and in particular by linking corporate museums to knowledge transfer and organizational memory. Studies on corporate museums have focused from the perspective of marketing (Piatkowska, 2014; Carù, et al., 2017) and corporate branding (Iannone, 2020) others in the more recent one of corporate culture (Nissley & Casey, 2002; Felipe, et al., 2017).

This study aims to offer some initial reflections to fill this gap in the literature. In particular, this study - in the context of organizational theory studies - analyzes the strategic role of the corporate museum as a form of organizational memory and assets capable of transferring knowledge. To achieve this goal, a descriptive qualitative methodology is used based on the analysis of secondary sources. We present the remainder of this work as follows: after this (i) introduction, (ii) the main theoretical elements on Corporate Museum, Organizational Memory and agri-food organizations are discussed. Following, (iii) the methodological process is illustrated. Finally, (iv) the main conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework. Corporate Museum and organizational memory. The Corporate Museum phenomenon is a relatively young phenomenon. In his study Danilov (1992), he traces the first appearances of corporate museums in the United States, in the early 1900s. Danilov (1992) also notes that in the following years the first corporate museums appear in other countries, such as Great Britain (1906), Germany (1911) and Italy (last twenty years of the 20th century). The first corporate museums took on a historical nature, i.e. corporate spaces dedicated to collecting and exhibiting corporate documents, photographs and historical production machines, or they sought to reconstruct the history of the company or the contribution of the founder and other leaders to its growth. Alongside

these dedicated company spaces, factory visits take on the same function (Axelrod & Brumberg, 1997; Mitchell & Orwig, 2002; Lin, 2020). The main purpose, therefore, of the early corporate museums is to "collect" the company's artifacts (Iannone and De Chiara, 2019; Martinez, 2020). Some authors do not identify this configuration as a corporate museum, but as a corporate collection (Nissley & Casey, 2002; Booth & Rowlinson, 2006). The corporate collection has no strategic value, but represents a simple collection of organizational artifacts. In this way, the corporate museum takes on a strategic value. Corporate museums represent tools capable of sharing and transmitting the knowledge and values created within an organization, through the representation of organizational memory. The representation and narration of the organizational memory allows the organization to improve dialogue with its external and internal stakeholders (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2020). Several authors have proposed corporate museum classifications. For example, Amari (2001) creates a classification based on the ownership of the museum (public or private ownership, single or multi-company). The same author provides a further classification based on the nature of the artifacts collected. On the basis of criteria, we can distinguish corporate museums into: generic of the product, generic of the sector, company history, territorial and complementary products. Only a few studies have investigated the phenomenon of corporate museums using theoretical frameworks of an organizational theory, in particular based on the constructs of organizational memory and the transfer of knowledge. This article explores corporate museums as a form of organizational memory and when used strategically as a tool for transferring knowledge from the organization to the stakeholders. The concept of organizational memory takes on different conceptions in the academic literature. An interesting line of studies focuses on the definition of organizational memory as a repository (Huber, 1991; Grant, 1996; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020; Zahra, et al., 2020). According to this line of studies, organizational memory represents a collection of knowledge present within an organization in the form of documents, information material or any other form that can facilitate internal activities and with easy access. From this perspective, the artifact takes on a particular meaning. The corporate museum represents a form of organizational memory that must be used in a conscious and strategic way. The corporate museums allow the transfer of routine practices and knowledge through the narration of culture and organizational memory.

Organizational culture has distinctive and lasting characteristics and is part of the organizational memory. Organizational culture is linked to the nature and success of the company and are the starting point on which external relations and decision-making processes are based. Some of the elements that characterize the organizational culture are codified and shared in the formal documents of the

organization (such as official company documents, strategic plans, internal communications, disciplinary procedures). These documents become organizational artifacts, often exhibited and used in corporate museums. These artifacts make an organization immediately distinguishable from other organization. The organizational culture, also, influences the way the individuals work within the organization.

3. Methodology. This document aims to understand the phenomenon of corporate museums in Italy, in the agri-food sector. For this reason, this research presented is based on qualitative and descriptive study in order to comprehensively understand and frame the general dynamics of the phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994; Ventura, et al., 2020). This study is based on a methodological process divided into two steps.

The first step aimed to frame the corporate museum as a new mechanism knowledge transfer and organizational memory. In this phase, by analyzing the main theoretical references, we tried to understand the strategic value of corporate museums, in order to understand them and evaluate the strategic role in the transfer of knowledge and organizational memory.

The second step - on the job - the corporate museums in Italy were identified. This phase was carried out by analyzing those present in the public and free dataset created by Museimpresa. Museimpresa is an Italian association, aims to promote the enhancement of business archives and corporate museums. The data were observed up to the date of 04/10/2021 (mm/dd/yyyy). In the dataset, 101 corporate museums in Italy are reported.

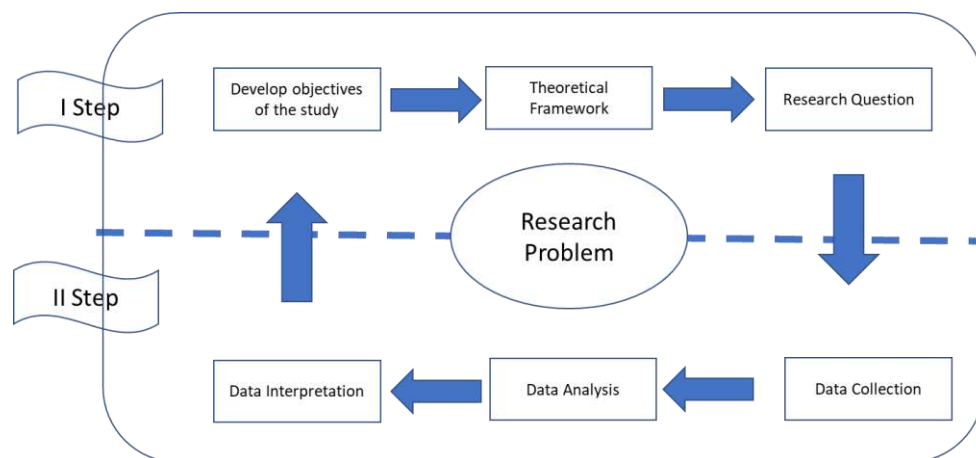


Figure 1. Methodological Process

Source: Our Elaboration

4. Results. The geographic distribution of corporate museums in Italy is shown in Figure 2. The dataset is made up of 101 corporate museums. From the observation of Figure 2 it emerges that the geographical distribution is not homogeneous. Lombardy is the region with the highest concentration of corporate museums. Lombardy was among the first Italian regions to experience the industrial revolution. The regions with the highest concentration of corporate museums are the regions with a widespread and consolidated industrial and entrepreneurial fabric. The Valle d'Aosta, Sardinia and Molise regions do not have company museums. The other regions have at least one company museum.



Figure 2. Geographical distribution of Corporate Museum in Italy

Source: own elaboration

From the analysis of the Museimpresa dataset, it emerges that over a third of company museums in Italy are connected to the agri-food sector. The massive presence of corporate museums linked to the agri-food sector highlights the economic impact of the sector.

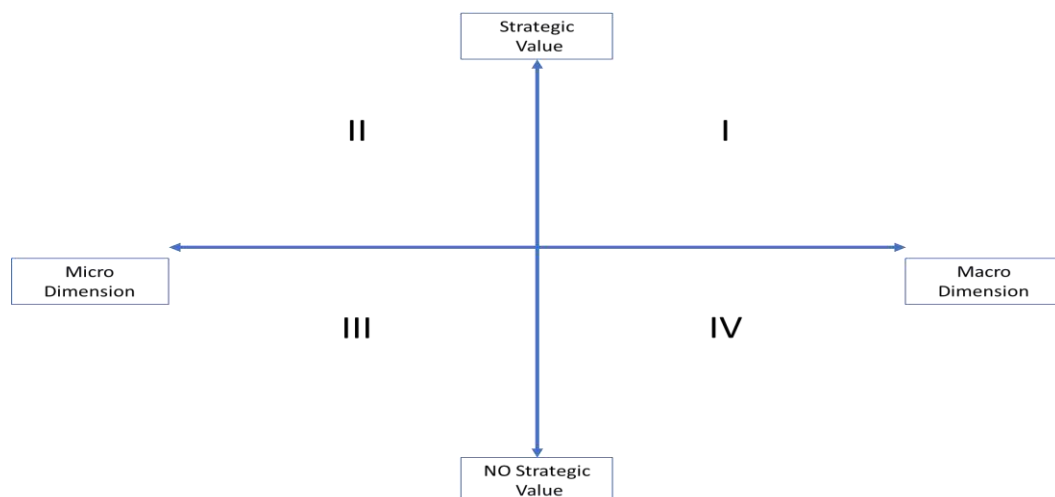


Figure 3. Framework on Corporate Museum

Source: Own Elaboration

Figure 3 relates two aspects of corporate museums: the size (micro/macro) and the strategic value. The scheme makes it possible to classify corporate museums based on the strategic value that is provided to the organization. The second dimension is based on the breadth of organizational artifacts collected in the corporate museum

Conclusions and Recommendations. The challenges of VUCA competitive environment have become a central topic in academic (Mack, et al., 2015; Cousins; 2018) and practitioner debate. This has generated a copious and vast literature on the effects that entire sectors and organizations are facing. The agri-food sector (Vesperi, et al, 2021) and the corporate museums in the agri-food sector seem to have been neglected from these debates. This study aims to offer first reflections on corporate museums in the agri-food sector, from the point of view of organizational memory and knowledge transfer. The introduction of new innovation (or knowledge) in agri-food organizations has a direct and positive impact on the level of well-being. To respond to the rapidly changing competitive environment, agri-food organizations need to integrate different types of knowledge. Furthermore, agri-food organizations must design new mechanisms for the transfer of knowledge and enhancement of organizational memory.

This study is not without limitations. In fact, the main limitation of this study is represented by the dataset. The analyzed dataset does not include all corporate museums in Italy. Registration is on a voluntary basis, so some corporate museums may not be registered. Furthermore, since the purpose of the study was to offer an overview of the phenomenon and for convenience, a clear distinction was not made between corporate museums, historical archives and hybrid forms. Despite these limitations, the results of this study offer interesting insights for the development of future studies on the subject. In particular, a gap emerges in the literature on corporate museums, from the point of view of knowledge transfer and organizational memory.

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ЦИФРОВА СТРАТЕГІЯ БІЗНЕС-ОРГАНІЗАЦІЇ У VUCA-СВІТІ

Ключові слова: цифрова стратегія, VUCA, бізнес-організація, цифрова трансформація

Анотація: досліджується динаміка середовища діяльності сучасних компаній, що характеризується зростаючою нестабільністю, невизначеністю, складністю та неоднозначністю для їх бізнес-результатів. Одночасно цифрові трансформації поширюються на все більшу кількість бізнес-організацій і потребують обґрунтованого власного розуміння ними впливу цифрових технологій на їх бізнес. Визначено, що цифрова стратегія допомагає проаналізувати діяльність і процеси, які потрібно трансформувати, щоб забезпечити кращі послуги для клієнтів.

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DIGITAL STRATEGY OF BUSINESS ORGANIZATION IN VUCA WORLD

Keywords: digital strategy, VUCA, business organization, digital transformation

Abstract: the dynamics of the environment of modern companies determines the growing instability, invisibility, complexity and ambiguity for their business results. Digital transformations are spreading to an increasing number of business organizations and require a sound understanding of the impact that digital technology has on their business. Digital strategy instead looks at the activities and processes that need to be transformed to provide better services for customers.