

Enhancing Place Reputation of Local Service Systems in the Performing Arts Perspective. An analysis of regional cases

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<Session: Business models to manage networks and service systems >

Abstract

Purpose – Humans have always told stories to each other about the places they have been. The significance of such stories for strengthening the value proposition and value co-creation for such places is becoming recognised. Through digital media, people can be encouraged to tell their stories and share their experiences in their beloved place. The performing arts and storytelling can enhance the reputation of a place, and make it more competitive for tourism and other commercial activities.

Design/Methodology/approach – Our methodology integrates the Service Science Management Engineering and Design (SSME+D) and Viable Systems Approach (VSA) from a Performing Arts perspective. This integrated approach implies a new physiological worthiness to storytelling. Storytelling can be managed in a local service system for enhancing brand competitiveness. Important premises with Service-Dominant Logic (S-D logic) are shared: 1) operant resources are the relevant sources of competitive advantage; 2) customers are always co-creators of value; 3) service systems are customer and stakeholder oriented; 4) value, in service systems as well as in service art, is experiential, contextual, and relational.

Findings – Place storytelling enables local stakeholders to identify themselves telling their personal stories about their beloved places. The way local governments understand and encourage place storytelling is decisive for the success of a place. Conceiving place storytelling as a process capable of influencing place communication encourages a strategic use of narration. This occurs especially in locations that are more structured than others and based on a service systems perspective.

Research limitations/implications – Our analysis and cases demonstrate that place storytelling enables strategic communication supporting building sustainable competitive advantage. Further research could identify useful drivers in place storytelling to investigate visitor perception of place stories and their effect on intentions to visit a particular place. Future contributions could clarify the role of fictional stories in developing place awareness.

Practical implications – By means of the analysis of “Umbria on the Blog”, an innovative project which joins place and web 2.0, and “Il Mangiastorie”, which tends to promote wine and food and tourism of some Campania internal area, we highlights the relevance of conceiving and managing place storytelling as a strategic communication that involves stakeholders in the place identity building process to enhance the reputation of the place.

Originality/value – To explore new models of performing arts and storytelling for involving stakeholders in the multilevel process of local governance.

Key words: Place storytelling, Governance, Service Science Management Engineering and Design & Viable Systems Approach, Performing Arts perspective

Paper type – Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

Humans have always told stories to each other about the places they have been. The significance of such stories for strengthening the value proposition and value co-creation for such places is becoming recognised. People like to tell stories, and people enjoy listening to them. People who live in a place have considerable experience in that place and often develop a deep love for that place. Through digital media, they can be encouraged to tell their stories and share their experiences in their beloved place. Such deeply felt stories can stimulate interest and motivate tourists (and residents) to expand their experience in the place.

In particular, storytelling refers to the act by which a certain story is actually conveyed by one or more actors to some audience (Genette, 1976). Stories and the telling of stories have been with humankind since the beginning of human existence, and, in one sense, stories and storytelling help to define the nature of humanity (Tobin, 2006; James, Minnis, 2004). Stories, including myths, legends, and folktales (McLellan, 2002; Reamy, 2002), have been used to pass on wisdom, knowledge, and culture for thousands of years (Sole and Wilson 2002: 1).

Therefore, the desire to tell stories, as well as the desire to listen to them, have always permeated our existence and in every age man has told stories. "Storytelling begins with the very history of mankind, there has never existed anywhere a people without stories" (Barthes, 1969). From immemorial time, hence, stories, first oral then written, and now currently "multimedia", are used as devices to organize thinking and for preservation of memory (Ong, 1986), narration should be seen as an existential and organizational condition in which we are immersed (Fontana, 2010). Stories define the issues and provide a means to make subtle but powerful arguments. The power of myths, legends and parables in illuminating the essential elements of a cultural text is widely accepted. The fact that every great religion and culture have expressed their central tenets through one or more narratives is testimony to the power of stories in preserving and consolidating these tenets (Guhathakurta, 2001).

Storytelling is important in business to convey culture and knowledge. "Big or small, every organisation is dependent upon countless stories for its functioning" (Mitroff and Kilmann, 1975: 18). Since the mid-nineteen nineties, corporate storytelling meets a surprising success in organizations which begin to use narrative formulas for computing and communication of corporate identity. Corporate storytelling develops in the United States in the mid-nineteen nineties and is adopted later by organizations (non-profit, public and even political) also in Europe (Comin, 2010). What has determined its success was probably the need for the relationships and involvement, that audiences are increasingly requesting to replace mere information. Currently organizations are using storytelling in an informed way, on the one hand, to satisfy the innate need to tell stories and convey them and, on the other, because they are forced to devise new ways to communicate with target audiences and get their attention. In fact, we all love to hear stories, leverage on the emotional aspects rather than on the intellect and that awaken our ancestral mechanical brain to make us more receptive about what we are reading or listening to (Lamb, 2008).

Storytelling comes in many new forms as media and fashions change over time. Sharing experiences through stories is emerging in various professions and sectors; in fact, also with reference to place communication, typical tools for the promotion of the territory (brochures, catalogues, leaflets, etc.) may no longer be sufficient; innovative techniques and tools are required. In this sense, place storytelling, not merely a formal place description, represents an innovative modality of communication, telling the territory through anecdotes, experiences and stories shared with stakeholders. Such a communication process needs several operative and technological tools to involve stakeholders and for experience sharing, so as to align the value proposition provided by the territory and the value effectively co-created by local partners, governance mechanisms and targets). Greater inter-territory competition now even more challenging in a globalized setting (Beck, 1999) to position place brand in ever more complex markets requires new modalities of place communication. Place storytelling is part of such new communication modalities and is related to the ability of an integrated territorial system to narrate and present itself in the market with a distinctive competitive advantage.

Both because of the historic importance of storytelling, new forms of storytelling that are now possible, increased travel and competitiveness between regions and place storytelling is becoming an active area of research. By this means, the value of storytelling as a central tool for communicating the experiential value of a place should be given greater recognition. Consequently, our paper demonstrates the strategic role that performing arts, in general, and the storytelling process, in specific, can play in defining the reputation of a place and enhancing its competitiveness.

2. Literature review

The study of the literature aims to identify and examine key studies of storytelling. Due to the effective lack of contributions about place storytelling, studies of corporate storytelling are needed to understand how different streams of study have faced the issue. An investigation of the main contributions shows the presence of three perspectives on storytelling, informing this literature review:

- social construction perspective;
- organizational storytelling (organizational symbolism);
- storytelling management.

According to Scholars belonging to the social constructivist perspective, mankind is characterized by a universal need for meaning and order. They suggest that as individuals engage in the construction of their personal meaning, so the collectivity engage in the construction of a social reality (Berger, Luckmann, 1967) through legitimisation and socialization. The salient aspects of this stream of study are that:

- a) stories are useful for commitment;
- b) familiarity with dominant stories can be an indicator of adaptation;
- c) a story can be a vehicle for social control;
- d) meaning can develop consciously and/or unconsciously.

The second perspective informing this review is that of organizational symbolism. Organizational symbolism involves the construction of meaning in organizations and “expresses the underlying character, ideology, or value system of an organization” (Dandridge, Mitroff, Joyce, 1980). The starting point is the idea that stories, legends, myths, rituals and ceremonies can be considered expressions and results of the deep core of a culture (Mitroff, Kilmann, 1975; Schein, 1984).

According to a third perspective, that of storytelling management, the art of storytelling is intended as a technical gimmick used to make communication more engaging and appealing (Snowden, 1999a e 1999b; Swap et al., 2001; Denning, 2000). Place storytelling is conceived as a useful management tool (Boje, 1991; Snowden, 1999b; Sole, Wilson, 2002) which may have positive impacts in various ways. In this context, managers should try to govern uncontrolled stories about the organization, i.e. those generated spontaneously, but mostly stories set up ad hoc in the belief that the author’s narrative is given to satisfy specific place situations. As previously illustrated, it would be short-sighted to think of place storytelling as a simple and sterile “telling of a story”, a mere chronology of facts or description. With reference to what is currently reported in the literature about corporate storytelling, storytelling may be applied to territory as a means to (Denning, 2002, 2005 and 2006, Fontana, 2009; Barone and Fontana, 2005):

- share specific place goals;
- spread and justify place values;
- generate operations of sense-making, to give meaning to the actions of organizational reality and to motivate visitors as well as local residents to reach a place;
- maintain the memory, ensuring a continuity of knowledge and guidance of behaviour;

- creating trust, confidence and sense of belonging;
- share tacit knowledge;
- share norms and values: stories convey norms and values powerfully across generations within the territory;
- understanding changes taking place;
- emphasize emotional components of local products;
- reformulate place story and re-engineer narratively place image;
- provide value categories and interpretative patterns (Barile, 2009).

Although several Authors (Czarniawska, 2000; Boje, 2005; Fontana, 2009) agree on acknowledging that corporate storytelling is a useful tool to spread culture, share specific objectives and give sense to behaviours, the literature on place communication does not address much attention to this issue. Notwithstanding the extensive discussion in the literature regarding the use of stories and storytelling as an organizational tool, no formal academic research conducted in relation to place communication has been found.

Consequently, the aim of our paper is to bridge the gap in literature, by exploring the value of place storytelling within place communication activities. The thesis we propose is that storytelling, typical of corporate communication, may be applied to other fields and in particular, to place communication, whenever “place” is conceived in a system and service perspective and consequently in terms of capacity for building competitive identity in order to obtain reputation by means of value co-creation processes (Piciocchi, Siano, Confetto, Paduano, 2011; Piciocchi, Siano, Bassano, Conte, 2012; Bassano, Spohrer, Piciocchi, Galvin, 2012). In other words, we intend to highlight the strategic role of place storytelling in place communication activities, not limiting its contribution to mere operational aspects. Therefore, an attempt will be made to understand how place storytelling should be managed for supporting local government in place communication activities to enhance territory competitiveness.

In particular, the originality of our work is to explore new models of performing arts and storytelling for involving stakeholders in the multilevel process of local governance.

3. Place storytelling as a process for strategic communication

Given the novelty of the issue considered, the eminently exploratory nature of this contribution should be stressed. In order to propose a framework for place storytelling management, several contributions on corporate storytelling were considered (Fombrun, Van Riel, 2003; Boje, 1991; Denning, 2005, Swap et al., 2001). As a result, storytelling management can be divided into three macro-stages.

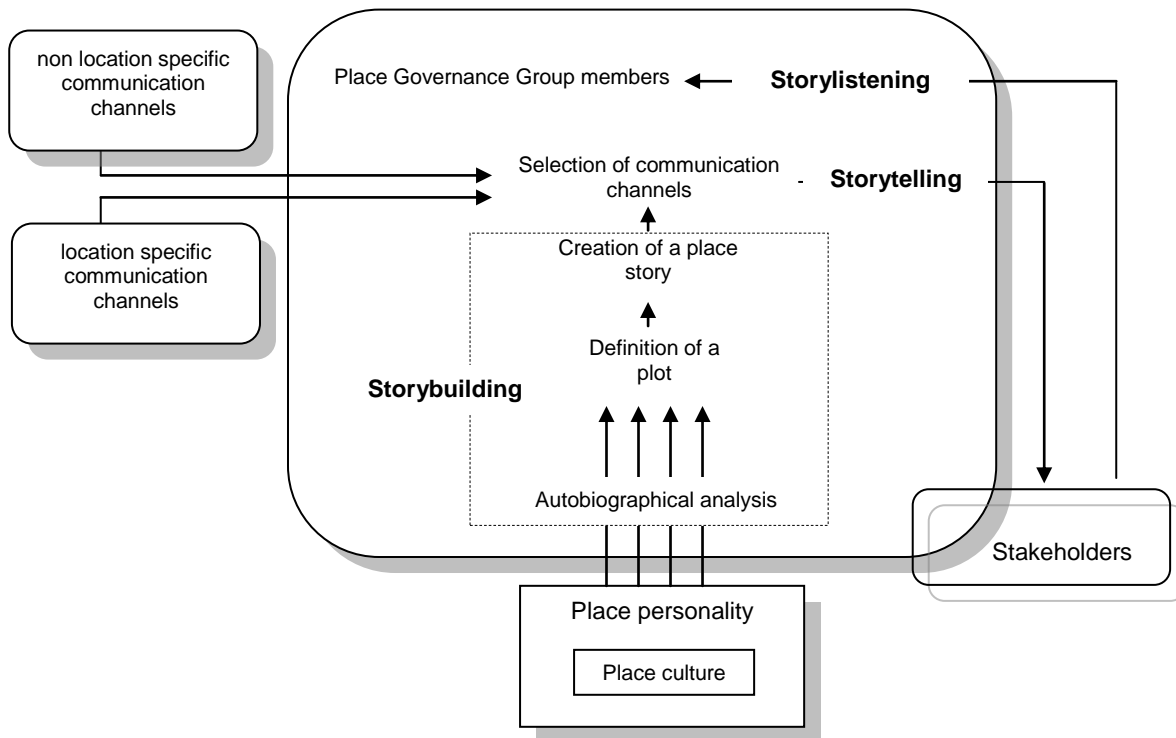
A member of the place governance group is the decision-maker on corporate strategy and corporate communication activities (Siano et al., 2008) and, as such, also on place storytelling activities. The decision maker manages the process of storytelling taking into account the three stages of creation of a place story (storybuilding), telling it to place stakeholders (storytelling), and receiving feedback (storylistening).

As Figure 1 shows, the preliminary stage of storybuilding is divided into the following sub-stages:

- autobiographical analysis, which aims to select the unique aspects that characterize a territory (the past actions of its members, place culture and values), recurrences and important events, if possible already associated spontaneously by stakeholders to a territory (Longo, 2008; Schultz et al., 2000; Traini, 2008). Place stories should be based on distinctive aspects, place critical factors of success (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2003), to enable the territory to differentiate itself from competitors;
- definition of a plot - narrative structure - to be used (epic drama, melodrama, comedy, evocation, etc.) (Fontana, 2009);

- creation of a place story. A place story is a structured textual description (usually between 400 and 600 words), conveying the essence of a place to its stakeholders, to strengthen the ties that bind people to the place, to successfully position a place against competitors (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2003).

Fig. 1: Place storytelling management: the three stages of storybuilding, storytelling and storylistening



Source: Piciocchi et al., 2011.

A selection of media to spread the story is needed to implement effective storytelling: a wide range of alternative channels may be used and it is possible to distinguish between local media of communication (journals created to convey news about the area, signage and kiosks that are placed in the territory, intranet, place television, etc.). The use of local resources in itself does not ensure the necessary visibility and notoriety of a place: to contact non residents, even far from the territory, it is necessary to select communication channels and services (advertising and communications agencies, public relations agencies, dealers, press agencies, providers, infomediaries, etc.) available outside the territory, traditional media should be bypassed through the creation of a blog where users can not only post, but also re-post on their social networking profiles.

The last step is storylistening, which concerns monitoring the success of the story. This is carried out to check the popularity of the story, made even easier by the interactivity of digital media. Furthermore, points misunderstood can be revised, improved, or deleted, according to a logic of co-creation of content.

4. Methodology

Our methodology integrates the Service Science Management Engineering and Design (SSME+D) and Viable Systems Approach (VSA) from a Performing Arts perspective without changing the nature of storytelling. This integrated approach implies a new physiological

worthiness to storytelling, because it helps to clarify how it could be managed in a local service system for enhancing brand competitiveness. The integrated SSME+D&VSA approach and the Performing Arts perspective share important premises with Service-Dominant Logic (S-D logic): 1) operant resources are the relevant sources of competitive advantage; 2) customers are always co-creators of value; 3) service systems are customer and stakeholder oriented; 4) value, in service systems as well as in service art, is experiential, contextual, and relational.

As will be explained, place storytelling increases the communicative value of brands, as well as place identity. However, to make storytelling effective, local governments have to conceive of place marketing and place storytelling from a service systems perspective rather than an individualistic perspective.

The key concept that has contributed to a shift from a static to a dynamic view of the concept of Local Area is that of “system” (Golinelli, 2000, 2011), core issue of the VSA. This approach is designed to analyze the viability of the systems in complex contexts (Golinelli, 2000, 2010; Barile, 2001, 2009), argues that the survival and development of a system depend on the government’s ability to create value for themselves and for stakeholders. In this perspective, even a territory as a complex system, has to improve the harmony/consonance of relationships with stakeholders (potential for value creation) and develop resonance interaction (flow and distribution of widespread value).

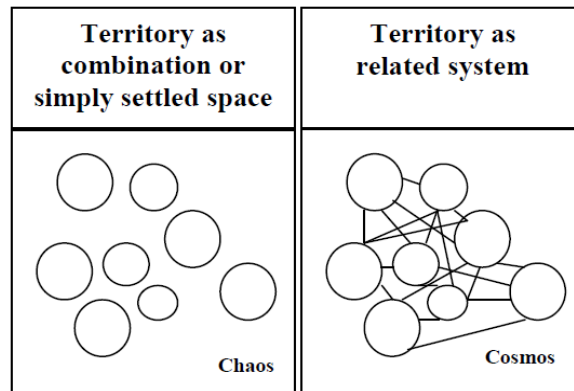
In particular, the territorial consonance can be read from the internal and external point of view. The harmony/consonance between the internal components of the system refers to the ability to share resources in order to achieve the common goal of sustainable and participatory development. This potential depends on the structural compatibility between the components of equipment (which already exists) and systemic components (which can be attracted and connected to the local system, or from the communion of suitable informative varieties and collaborative participation.

The latter, in fact, characterizes the external consonance with indigenous systems and do not necessarily derived from structural compatibility of the territorial system with the expectations and needs of stakeholders (investors, funders, users, etc. ..). In this perspective, the consonance ensure a shared understanding of the context, which is an essential prerequisite for the realization of synergy in terms of relational vocation and identity.

This means, in fact, share information units (data) and category values (strong beliefs) through effective communication between all actors (nodes) of the network, in order to determine a general interpretative scheme/pattern of the environment (Barile, 2009) that, representative of the informative variety in the system, qualifying on the one hand, the influence of context and, secondly, the synergy and equi-finality of the components. However, the structural consonance does not guarantee the durability and stability of the relationship, as they depend on the resonance (participation and sharing) developed in the interaction and, therefore, the perception of stakeholders - internal and external - about the characteristics of the offer of the activities and behavior of the territorial system.

Therefore, as part of the system, it is crucial the role played by local governance, able to establish guidelines and a general order to share with stakeholders (Piciocchi *et al.*, 2009a) (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Territory as combination or as a systems



Fonte: Piciocchi *et al.*, 2009a.

As the figure shows, according to the VSA, the territory should not be construed as a defined space in a simplistic way (static view), but rather as the result of interactions between systems and resources, aimed at achieving a common goal (equi-finality) for survival (dynamic vision). The concept of territory as a viable system represents the central element of local cultural planning: effective method through which policy makers identify the needs of the local community (McNulty, 1991; Mercer 1991a, 1991b; Grogan *et al.*, 1995).

Besides the VSA, the SSME + D approach is determined for the qualification of a Local Area in terms of Smart Local Service System. It combines various disciplinary perspectives to drive innovation, competitiveness and quality of life through the services (Spohrer, Maglio, Bailey and Gruhl, 2007; Spohrer, 2010). Starting from this presupposition, viable systems are designed as “systems of local services”, i.e. dynamic configuration of resources (people, technology, organizations and shared information) capable of creating and providing a service (IFM and IBM, 2008). In particular, the SSME + D considers the service as a result of the interaction between the provider (in VSA terms, the territory) and the client (in VSA terms, stakeholders): the main actors of a system of services. Both contribute to the co-creation of value of the services: the provider with his knowledge and expertise, the client with its resources.

It should, however, point out that, contrary to the assumption in the Good Dominant Logic (G-DL) or the Service Dominant Logic (S-DL) (Vargo and Lush, 2004) who consider the goods and services as two distinct and opposing entities, this approach considers the same as two sides of the same coin. While the assets relate to the tangible aspects of the territorial (structural dimension), the services are related to those assets (systemic dimension - processes, interactions, exchange of information, adaptability). Consequently, according to this new approach, the service is “the systemic configuration of goods”, the “product in action” (Golinelli *et al.*, 2010), because it comes from a process of sematization (sense-making) of the good, useful for creating the best conditions of consonance and resonance with the context.

The integration between SSME + D and VSA highlights the concepts of structural variety - the territory as a static set of resources - and systemic interactions - and equi-finality resonance between the different actors of the network.

In this context, the Smart Local Service System can be qualified as a network of services oriented to the value co-creation of both internally and externally to the physical environment of the system. A SLSS, in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the territory must:

- on the one hand, provide the structural conditions for the definition and sharing of a value proposition (place identity, location branding) recognizable and consistent with the internal local characteristics and externally aligned with the expectations of stakeholders, in order to attract the same territory on the basis of a correspondence between the value proposition of the SLSS and the required value;

- on the other hand, systematically engage stakeholders in the process of defining and co-creation of the service, to obtain a valid and solid value proposition of the SLSS and improve the overall competitiveness of the SLSS (place reputation) by the mutual satisfaction of interacting systems (Gronross , 2008).

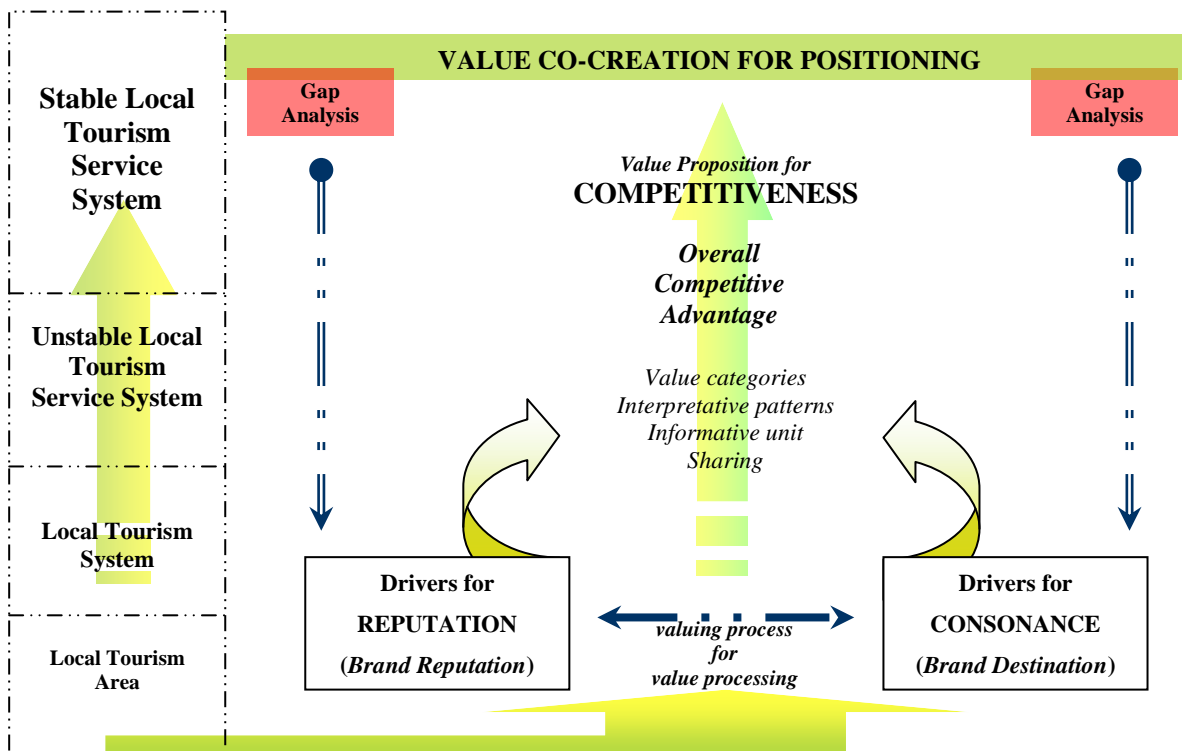
In particular, a SLSS can be defined structurally as a combination of human and material resources intended to the amplification of value co-creation: any socio-economic entity participates in the distribution of value, according to the law of increasing returns (Arthur , 1994) or the win-win logic (Gummesson, 2008). At the systemic level, a SLSS consists of a network of cooperation and collaboration able to strengthen the competitiveness and place reputation through the functions of a smart multilevel governance.

The latter rests its ontological roots on the theoretical reference of the history of governmentality (Foucault, 1977-1978, 1978-1979), according to which governance is regarded as the actual result of the continuous process of transformation of government from an administrative governmentality, referring to the formation of national states, the liberal governmentality of welfare, until the governance identified as a redevelopment effort of the relations between state, market and society in the context of neoliberalism.

As part of this work, the reference to governmentality (Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999) should be seen in the direction of the necessary structural changes of government, or new forms of governance, based on the concepts of power/prestige and competence distributed and related the configuration of multilevel governance system: a new form of governmentality in which live share paths of government authority and a reconfiguration of collaborative decision-making logic (Piciocchi, Siano, Bassano, Conte, 2012).

Finally, matching these two contributions, (Piciocchi, Siano, Confetto, Paduano, 2011) we have defined a tourism territorial configuration as LTSS characterized by resource integration and value co-creation processes, in our opinion better able to compete successfully in today's globalized scenario, because of competitive advantage based on reputation and strategic co-planning (Fig. 3).

Fig.3: The bottom-up process to create for LTSS positioning value



Source: Piciocchi, Siano, Confetto, Paduano, 2011.

Therefore, through this methodological framework we intend to investigate the role that place storytelling can play in the process of enhancing LTSS competitiveness. Before illustrating our methodology step by step in detail, we intend to specify that reading place storytelling from a VSA-SS perspective does not mean changing the nature of the object of study. Traditionally, in fact, storytelling is considered as a process of communication able to support an entity, simple or complex, to reach specific goals in terms of communication, by means of the conveying of stories based on informative and/or emotional aspects. Therefore, even if in this work storytelling is interpreted from a VSA-SS perspective, the nature of storytelling as a process continues to be the same. In other words, storytelling doesn't acquire a new ontological definition by virtue of a VSA-SS interpretation, but rather, assumes new worth in physiological terms.

Storytelling represents a new modality of communication consistent with the view of territory as a service system (Piciocchi, Siano, Confetto, Paduano, 2011) for two specific reasons. Firstly, in a context where a tendency to consume more experiences than products is becoming established (Lamb, 2008), a story represents an example of extremely evocative content provided to clients. In fact, storytelling allows territories to tell stories which arouse special atmospheres and involve real or future clients emotionally, increasing their sense of territorial belonging and identification. In this regard, McLellan maintains: "Stories speak to both parts of the human mind – its reason and emotion. [...] stories reveal patterns and bring to the surface valuable information that might otherwise go unnoticed, unharvested" (McLellan, 2000). Another reason is related to the dynamic nature of stories, the semantic value of which is never determined by a single entity, but by all those that, directly or indirectly, come into contact with them and, inevitably, contribute to defining their meaning.

This preamble enables us to investigate and explain the effective contribution of VSA-SS to place storytelling.

5. Findings: investigating the role of place storytelling in place communication from a VSA-SS perspective

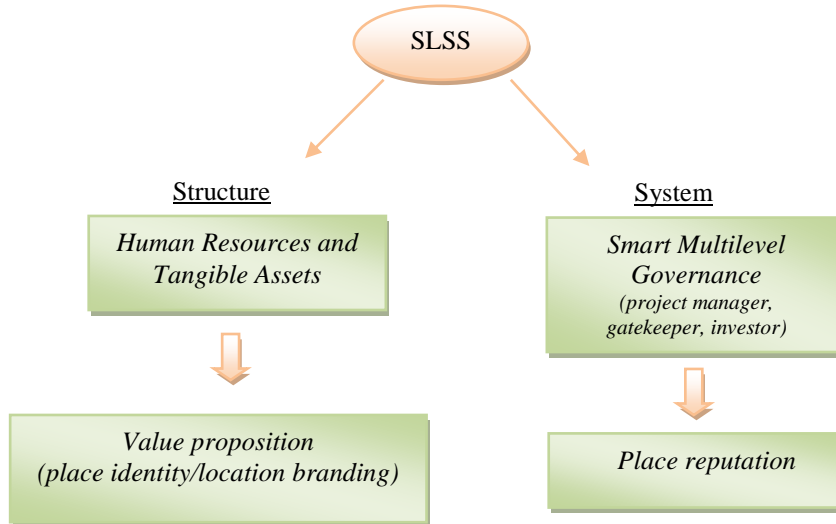
Place storytelling enables local stakeholders to identify themselves and tell their personal stories about their beloved places. We believe that the way local governments understand and encourage place storytelling is decisive for the success of a place. Using place storytelling as an operative tool can impede the construction of a strong and distinctive identity. This scenario is typical of locations lacking a service systems perspective. On the contrary, conceiving place storytelling as a process capable of influencing place communication encourages a strategic use of narration. This occurs especially in locations that are more structured than others and based on a service systems perspective.

Based on our methodological perspective, governmentality (Foucault, 1982) can be configured according to four basic profiles:

- the project manager who coordinates the development of ideas in the area;
- the gatekeeper to communicate and share ideas;
- the investor to support collaborative projects;
- the promoter to communicate the SLSS in the global market.

As the figure shows, the territorial government is more "intelligent/smart" and "cohesive" as much as more is defined by the presence of these four types of profiles, which show a highly integrated smart governance (Piciocchi, Spohrer, Bassano e Giuiusa, 2012).

Fig.4: The SLSS from a structural and systems dualism



Source: Piciocchi, Siano, Bassano, Conte, 2012.

In a global scenario, a SLSS, driven by a multi-level governance, is able to guarantee the achievement of a distinctive competitive advantage for the territory through the creation of a positive reputational capital. The reputation is one of the most important intangible resources to build and maintain the consent of the various stakeholders (Fombrun and van Riel, 2004), an essential condition for the establishment of a relationship of trust with the territory.

The viability of a SLSS requires, therefore, that the smart governance (Piciocchi et al., 2012) is able to mediate between the expectations of the various stakeholders and enable shared projects based on the enhancement and coordination of the territorial “réseau”. Indeed, in a multi-stakeholder approach, in the local context intersect and interact needs, goals and values very heterogeneous and differentiated: the institution requires harmonization of interests on the part of those involved in the governance and management of both direct and indirect activities of an organization, company or local (Sacconi, 2004).

To this end, we need a conceptual reinterpretation of the government, conceived as an institution (structure) and practice (system), which requires the development of a new art of governmentality (Foucault, 1982). The latter is considered as the result of the political, economic and technological process characterized by network cooperation and collaboration at all levels of organizations and/or society. In particular, collaboration requires the design and development of strategies, tools and attitudes that are able to build and sustain partnerships between local authorities and stakeholders which must ensure “respect for diversity and the learning of tolerance” (Mulroy and Shay, 1998).

In other words, in the search for models to be adopted for the smart governance of the territory, it is important to reject the top-down logic, based on individual and despotic power and embrace the logic of bottom-up governance networks (Triantafillou, 2004; Piciocchi and Bassano, 2009; Trunfio, 2008), built on a common knowledge and a relationship of trust between all relevant territorial (terms of prestige). Only in this way a local area can be interpreted as a SLSS characterized by the integration of resources and processes of value co-creation: a fundamental requirement for a country in order to successfully compete in today’s globalized context and achieve a competitive advantage based on reputation and strategic co-design.

Modeled on the scheme proposed by Golinelli (2002) and the assumptions of the SSME + D & VSA approaches, it is possible, however, to distinguish different interpretations of the local area according to the different territorial configurations (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Different interpretations of the various territorial configurations

Territorial configurations	Source of competitive advantage	VSA	SSME+D	SSME+D & VSA
Territory as Resource	<i>Personality</i>	<i>Embryonal System</i>	<i>Good (GD logic)</i>	Tourism Local Area (TLA)
Territory as Product	<i>Identity</i>	<i>Evolving System</i>	<i>Extended good (GDL>SDL)</i>	Tourism Local System (TLS)
Territory as Scenary	<i>Image</i>	<i>Unstable Accomplished System</i>	<i>Unstable service system (GDL<SDL)</i>	Unstable Tourism Local Service System (U-TLSS)
Territory as System	<i>Reputation</i>	<i>Stable Accomplished System (Viable System)</i>	<i>Stable service system (SSME & SDL)</i>	Stable/Smart Tourism Local Service System (S-TLSS)

Fonte: Bassano, Spohrer, Piciocchi, Galvin, 2012.

If the territory is considered as a “resource to consume”, competitive advantage is based merely on territorial personality. Personality qualifies “what a system really is” (Siano, 2001) and so its Structural Variety. In this situation: components interact without a common evolutionary planning; their purposes are independent; relationships have an opportunistic nature; it is not possible to identify a shared government which provides directions and rules. In the VSA view, this configuration qualifies an embryonal system which lacks a shared and clear identity within and outside the network. The territory is conceived as “good” from which get tangible benefits. Focus is on the structure, rather than system. In the SSME+D view, this means that the service component is only expressed by a functional use of the territory.

If the territory is considered as a “product to promote”, competitive advantage is focused on territorial identity. Identity defines the set of visual element through which a system is represented in the context (Siano, 2001). In this case, competitive strength depends on the ability to read the context and establish communication consonant with stakeholders expectations. In the VSA view, this territorial configuration seems to be similar to an evolving system. Government can be identified with rules, regulations and responsibilities; moreover, components interact in a co-evolutionary design, albeit their behavior remains opportunistic. Although dominant logic is still focused on goods, the service component is coming to the fore: the territory becomes an “augmented good” (Kotler, 2000) which has not only a functional use, but also the role of supporting and adding value to the product.

If the territory is conceived as a “scenary”, competitive advantage is based on image. Image corresponds to the perception that stakeholders have of the territory at certain period in time (Siano, 2001). Such a perception is unstable because it is the result of fragmented actions on the part of local decision makers, as well as private and public institutions. This configuration qualifies an accomplished system: a government which provides directions and rules and exercises power of control. However, this system is not stable because of decision making variability and contrasting viewpoints. The outcome is the incapacity for creating reputational capital requiring action and commitment. In terms of SSME+D, the focus is on the service, but value co-creation is subject to rapid destruction as no sediment is left on the social fabric.

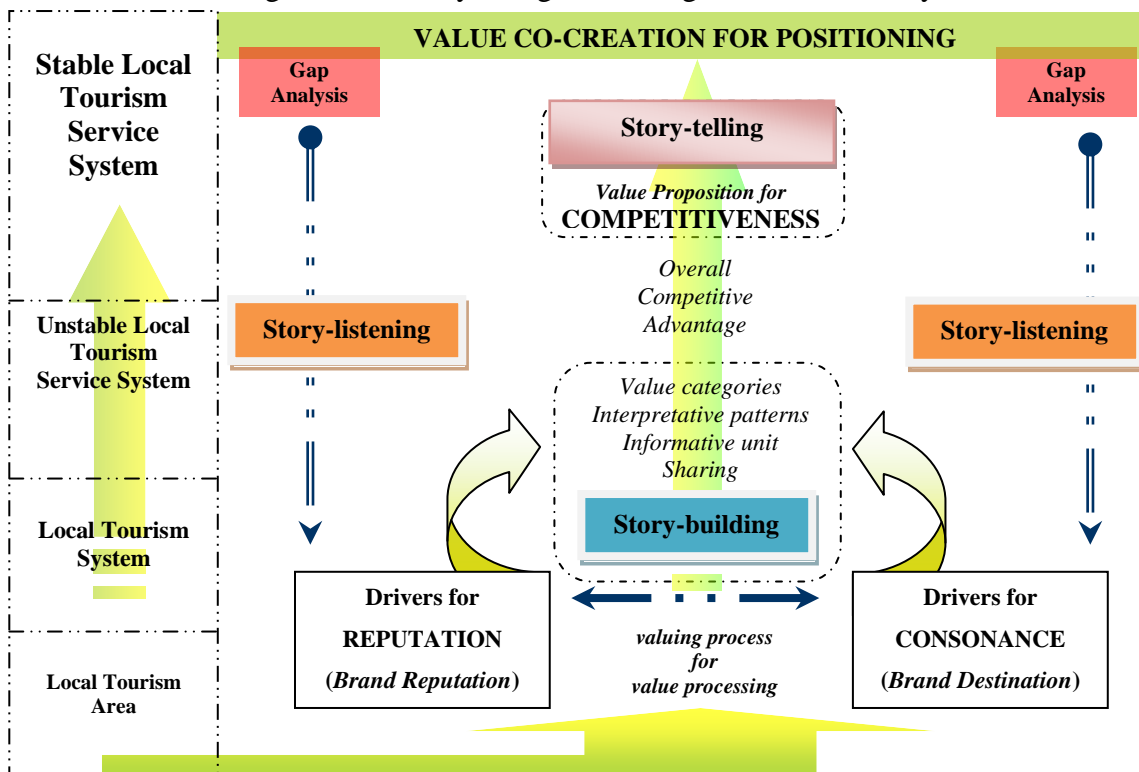
If the territory is conceived in terms of “system”, competitive advantage is based on reputation. Reputation is the result of a socially shared judgment based on the ability to create value for and with stakeholders (Siano, 2001). This means that the territory can be qualified in terms of a stable accomplished system/viable system in the VSA view or in terms of a stable service system in

the SSME+D view: the offer is not merely focused on product and tangible benefits, but on the product, tangible benefits and intangible ones (in other words, service). In this situation, components co-evolve regardless of political changes and time factors.

The emerging configuration, in SSME+D&VSA terms, is that of a Stable/Smart Tourism Local Service System which we can qualify as an accomplished territorial configuration capable of building from a structural viewpoint, a clear brand destination (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999; Hankinson, 2007; Invernizzi, 2010) to improve, from a systems viewpoint, place reputation (Siano, Confetto, Siglioccolo, 2009).

In the previous paragraph, we pointed out that the integrated SSME + D & VSA approach does not change the ontology of storytelling, which preserves the nature of process, regardless of any interpretation it may stimulate. However, this approach confers a new physiological worthiness to storytelling, because it helps to clarify how it could be managed in a local system for enhancing brand competitiveness. As it will be explained, place storytelling is related to the processes tending to increase the communicative value of brand, as well as place identity. However, to make storytelling effective, territorial government has to conceive place in systems and service-based perspectives rather than individualistic. In an individualistic perspective – i.e. a perspective focused on the single node of the network (in reference to a local tourism system, a restaurant, a hotel, a shop, and so on) – storytelling is used by the various components as a mere operative tool of communication for purposes of individual growth. This is due to the lack of a common view of the territory and, consequently, of a shared communication plan. In other words, components interpret the place to which they belong in their own way, ending up telling stories that often are inconsistent with those told by other entities. The result is negative communication of place identity that, in all likelihood, will in its turn influence stakeholder perceptions negatively. On the contrary, in a systems and service-based perspective, storytelling becomes an effective form of communication of place identity because it is conceived in a communication plan shared by all nodes of the network. In this situation, components do not operate in isolation, but in synergy with others: they are conscious that the success of the place depends on the collaborative synergies established between the nodes (win-win logic) (Gummesson, 2009).

Fig. 5: Place storytelling in a configuration of territory as LTSS

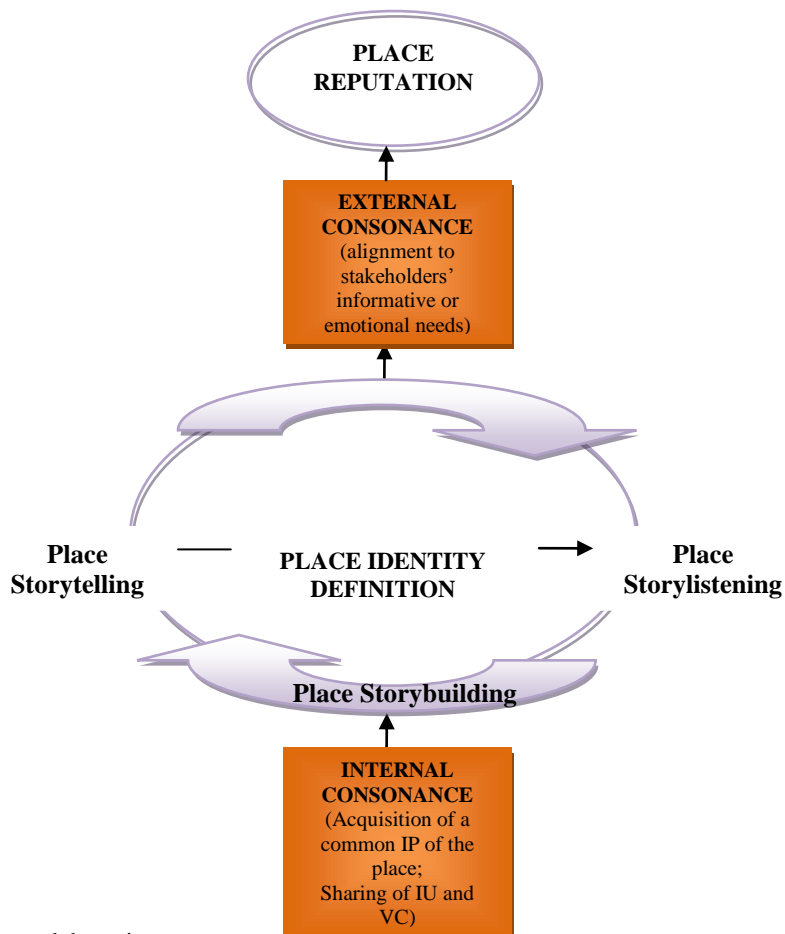


Source: adapted from Piciocchi, Siano, Confetto, Paduano, 2011.

The sharing of a common communication strategy allows components to tell stories that, although suited to the different personalities of nodes, are characterized by a mutual semantic coherence. This enables the communication of a stable identity of the place as a whole, for enhancing the competitiveness of territorial brand. According to this view, the building of place identity and consequently place storytelling management, have to be thought of as processes of value co-creation characterized by the synergic contribution of all systems in interaction (Fig. 5). In metaphorical terms, territory has to operate as an orchestra in which each component plays its own instrument to produce a common symphony.

As the following Figure shows, this perspective postulates strong cohesion inside LTSS, and thus the search for internal consonance. This means counting on the presence of a local government which has to see that all the components share Informative Units (IU) and Value Categories (VC), so that they can acquire a common General Interpretative Pattern (IP) in order to communicate the place uniformly, avoiding dissonances between the messages. This enables the building of a place story shared by all components. The place story, i.e. the result of a common interpretation of the territory, materialized in several stories told to stakeholders by the various components. By listening and interpreting these stories, stakeholders help government to review storybuilding constantly in order to better answer the audience's needs. In other words, place storytelling, corresponding to the moment of the production of stories, and storylistening, that in turn corresponds to the moment of consumption of the stories, nourish the virtuous circle of place identity definition for the positioning or repositioning of a territorial brand (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6: The strategic role of place storytelling to enhance territorial brand competitiveness



Source: our elaboration.

However, in order to develop reputation, it is also important to predispose and tell stories that meet the expectations of audiences, i.e. stories in which stakeholders can recognize themselves and that are different from those of competitors thus promoting competitive advantage. Involving clients in the process of storybuilding, constantly investigating their needs, their level of satisfaction and their complaints is the best approach. In this regard, it should be remembered that stories have a dynamic nature. Their content changes as they are handed down by other people. Therefore, local government has obviously to predispose the narrative structure of the stories but at the same time, it has to monitor the evolution of their content constantly so as to influence communication on its own behalf.

6. Practical implications: some experiences for deriving a local service systems reputation model

Our study, integrated with the analysis of some useful cases for demonstrating that place storytelling in its operative sense enables a process of strategic communication which contributes to supports the building of sustainable competitive advantage. In this respect, the case study of “Umbria on the Blog” is analyzed. The project aims to enhance and re-define Umbria’s identity by means of several stories conceived by a blogger team after visiting different Umbrian towns in search of traditional place values, anecdotes and experiences. Secondly, the case study “Il Mangiastorie” is analyzed. This initiative of the Wine and Food Chain Integrated Project by means of storytelling, wine and food and tourism of their inland areas, promotes the Italian provinces Avellino, Benevento and Caserta.

These cases are interpreted according to a VSA-SS perspective: the places of Umbria and Campania are conceived as potential LTSS and as territories able to express their vocation and identity by means of the enhancement of hard and soft components (Golinelli, 2002). While hard components refer to the environment (natural, artistic, structural, urban and infrastructure), soft components refer to customs, and traditions that, as is well known, can be reproduced by competitors much with more difficulty. Both these components become important elements for the construction of the place story useful for positioning or re-positioning the territory. They can or otherwise reflect the place personality fully (Siano, 2001), but if inserted in a story, they are certainly able to give an identity to the territorial brand. The case studies are analysed with the support of Figures 4 and 5 which clarify the role of place storytelling in defining place identity.

“Umbria on the Blog”

“Umbria on the blog” is a project, or rather an experiment of innovative tourist destination communication, applied for the first time in Italy and based exclusively on the territory. Ten bloggers were involved, travelling with the intent of bringing to life authentic experiences and identity. The project was carried out by “Confindustria Alberghi”, the Confederation of Umbria Hotels and Tourism. The purpose of the initiative consisted in experiencing life in Umbria and reporting the experience on the Web.

A group of bloggers were taken for a weekend through the streets of the Region in search of stories to tell and genuine emotions to be lived. The project had as its main objective to tell all about the good and beautiful in Umbria and the [re]discovery of the traditional values that this country Region incorporates.

Umbria is conceived as the ideal Web platform narrated through the participation of bloggers, hosted directly on the territory, becoming its real central character of narration. Bloggers were chosen to live in picturesque Umbrian villages and landscapes, and to experience contact with the locals for authentic and indigenous storytelling. The nature and the aims of the project are reported on the web site www.umbriaontheblog.com, where it is possible to read a short bio of each blogger and the stories written. Analysing the case study by means of the framework identified in Figures 1, 5 and 6, it can be seen that the role of “Confindustria Alberghi”, the confederation that planned the initiative, is crucial, seeing as it selects the bloggers involved and the places to be described. The

bloggers provide support in defining place identity which, in the case of Umbria, has not yet been well characterized, above all for foreign tourists. The opportunity to leave a comment on the story through the feedback tool (e.g. “Do you really think this opinion is useful?”, where the reader can choose a score from 10% to 100%) enables the local headquarters of Confindustria to collect information useful for improving the strategy of communication of place identity. In this sense, the effective co-creation of value enables Umbria to be defined as a stable local tourism service system. The authors choose mainly evocative plots to narrate the place and at the same time, rediscover the traditional jobs of artisans in the Middle Ages and typical local life. Local distinctive competences were considered when describing the traditional jobs and skills held by residents. For spreading the stories non location specific channels were used: the whole stories are reported on several web sites or blog (e.g. www.trivago.it, www.zoover.it, www.minube.it, etc.).

“Il Mangiastorie”

“Il Mangiastorie” is an initiative of the integrated Wine and Food Chain project which promotes, by means of storytelling, wine and food and tourism of internal areas, the Italian provinces of Avellino, Benevento and Caserta.

As can be read on the website, the name of this initiative calls to mind a fictional character in the tale of Pinocchio: Mangiafuoco (Fire-eater), puppeteer and theatre owner, known for proposing a different show every day to his audience in which he embodied genuine characters, transposing people’s stories onstage while the audience attended the show. As a spectator, Pinocchio recognizes the various puppeteers as his brothers and joins them in a flurry of embraces [...] neck grasps [...] and nips of friendship [...] and pumpkin of a true and sincere brotherhood.

Similarly, with this project, the Provinces of Avellino, Benevento and Caserta perform a great show, “Il Mangiastorie”, the setting being from time to time, in a diverse territory of Campania, relives stories experienced by real and imaginary people, in which the audience is not merely a spectator, but also an actor. In other words, “Il Mangiastorie” is inspired by the concept of “journey”. A journey from history to history, from country to country, from tradition to tradition, from myth to myth, legend to legend, in the presence of storytellers, real people, fairytale or imaginary characters who narrate themselves, their land, culture, art and food, in a continuous cross-reference to the past, present and future.

The initiative aims to promote the knowledge and comprehension of the various places and products of the Wine and Food Chain of Campania, in order to attract local and foreign tourists. In this sense, a virtual platform has been predisposed to register all itineraries followed by the “sense bus” to enable potential tourists to discover the typical wine and food products of the ancient suburbs of Avellino, Benevento and Caserta.

A dip in the traditional agricultural and food product scenario of rich country regions and their cultural heritage provides an event in terms of the development of new tourist routes where a vision and the original paths of ancient villages often forgotten are proposed Italian and foreign tourists. These vision is proposed through food tasting known as taste workshops and moments of performance to describe the excellence of three important areas in the Region.

The stories here assume the shape of a simple description of the typical food products, for instance, of Irpinia. Local products have been used for giving a particular positioning to the image of Irpinia. Apart from this feature, no other element is considered in creating and sharing this story; there is no indication of traditional skills and other marks of traditional local culture. Furthermore, the stories are diffused only through an informative brochure, which does not allow for any type of receiving feedback and monitoring, other than in terms of copies distributed.

In this sense, the name of the initiative tends to be misleading, as stories are only simple descriptions of places and local products; the role of Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage is limited to promoting the territory, without receiving any feedback from tourists or residents. This configures the territory as a Local Tourism Area, which only assumes a defined place identity, not co-created with people who live or visit the territory.

7. Conclusion and further research

Despite the limits - related to the restricted number of cases analyzed – the value of our paper lies not only in filling a gap in the literature of place storytelling, but also in recognising the strategic role that this process can play in defining the identity of a territory and enhancing its competitiveness. Through the framework described in Figure 6, we show the close relation between place storytelling, place storylistening and place storybuilding. The analysis of the cases enables the understanding that different management of storytelling leads to different results in place communication. This means that the way by which government conceives place storytelling is decisive for the success or the failure of a territory. Using place storytelling as a mere operative tool can impede the construction of a strong and distinctive identity. This scenario is typical of that of territories lacking a systems and service perspective. On the contrary, conceiving place storytelling as a process capable of influencing place communication encourages a strategic use of narration. This occurs especially in territories that are more structured than others and based on a systems and service perspective.

The value of stories in value co-creation in a territory is becoming recognised as never before. People like to tell stories, and people enjoy listening to them even though there may be scepticism surrounding the truth of what is being said. People who live in a place can have considerable experience and through digital medium can be encouraged to tell stories and share experiences. Good stories must display the characteristics that help to stimulate interest and motivate tourists and residents to live the experience offered by the territory.

This consideration implies that the value of storytelling in the place communication process should be given greater recognition; our study represents only a preliminary analysis of the issue which certainly deserves more attention from Researchers and place communication managers. The case studies considered give a preliminary overview of place storytelling and provide us with understanding as to its operative use.

Further research could perhaps identify useful drivers in place storytelling management relative to investigating people and visitor perception of place stories and the effect the latter has on intentions to visit a particular place. Furthermore, future contributions could perhaps clarify the role of fictional stories in developing place awareness.

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