

THE CORPORATE MUSEUMS AND THEIR SOCIAL FUNCTION: SOME EVIDENCE FROM ITALY

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Abstract

The Corporate Museum is a field of study that has been little explored and that occupies a particular position, at the intersection of the cultural realm of public museums and the world of business, and is characterized by a managerial vision. Corporate museums are physical structures in which the history and the memory of a company are told. The few works in this area look at these museums as a storehouse of organizational memory, as a tool for public relations and marketing, that is, for corporate communication. Although mainly framed in the context of corporate communication tools, studies conducted so far have neglected the potential of these structures as an expression of a social orientation of the firm, first demonstrated by attention to satisfying the legitimate expectations of the stakeholders (primarily, employees and local community). This paper intends to offer a contribution in this direction. We propose to strengthen studies that show a link between Corporate Museums and social oriented behaviors and to investigate the organizational conditions that could allow Corporate Museums to play a social role.

Keywords: Corporate museum, social role, social responsibility, territorial identity

Introduction

Despite their long pedigree, Corporate Museums (CMs) are a field of study that has been little explored. They are physical structures in which the history and the memory of a company are told. They manage collections owned by a company, are situated inside, and let visitors retrace both the past and the present of the business from different points of view, such as strategic, techno-productive, social.

The few works in this area focus on these museums as a store of organizational memory, as a projection of the corporate identity inside and outside the company, as a tool for public relations and marketing, that is, for corporate communication (Piatkowska, 2014).

Although mainly framed in the context of corporate communication tools, studies conducted so far have neglected the potential of these structures as a way of being for social responsibility, i.e. an expression of a social orientation of the firm, first demonstrated by attention to satisfying the legitimate expectations of the stakeholders, primarily organizational and societal stakeholders (Werther, Chandler, 2005).

While the research is still at an embryonic stage, this paper intends to offer a contribution in this direction. We propose to strengthen studies that show a link between CMs and corporate social behavior “in practice” and to investigate the organizational conditions that could allow CMs to play a social role.

Consistent with the research problem and considering the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative approach was chosen, based on an in-depth case-study [Yin, 1984], in order to better describe and interpret the “how” and the “why” of choices made by these museums structures and to assess the “results” achieved.

This study consists of a comparative analysis of two CMs in Italy - the Ferrari and Ducati corporate museums -, whose common traits are the belonging to the same sector and the being the spearheads of the Motor Valley of Emilia Romagna. We chose Italy for two reasons: (1) the phenomenon is particularly relevant in Italy, where it has developed the largest number of CMs that exist today; (2) the CMs were founded mostly by companies that have a long tradition and that produce goods cult, often icons of Made in Italy in the world, but especially that are strongly rooted in the territory and have developed a strong identity with the local area in which they are located: many of these companies show a strong social awareness. The two museums are assumed detectors of possible common foundations.

This paper is structured as follows: in the next paragraphs, the theoretical background is identified and the research methodology is described; then the results of the case-analysis are presented. The contributions of the study and the future lines of research are discussed in the conclusion.

Theoretical background and conceptual framework

Essentially, two strands of literature, centered upon CMs and Social ethics, respectively, constitute the theoretical framework underlying the present research.

Regarding the first strand, the theoretical contributions are still few from a numerical point of view and variegated in terms of approaches to study. The prevailing existing studies have yet to feature strongly in museology literature, in the form of articles in professional journals and magazines (Griffiths, 1999) or how-to guides for practitioners (Danilov, 1992; Amari, 2001; Negri, 2003; Nissley, Casey, 2002). Some investigations are carried out in the marketing and corporate branding literature (Kotler, 1999; Griffiths, 1999; Gilodi, 2002; Stigliani, Ravasi, 2007; Pastore, Vernuccio, 2006) or in the growing stream of research on industrial cultural heritage (Lane, 1993; Lalli, 2003; Montemaggi, Severino, 2007) and on industrial archaeology (Barbieri, Negri, 1989). Few studies have been carried out within the framework of organization studies and mainly in relation to the theme of organizational identity (Stigliani, Ravasi, 2007; Pratt, Rafaeli, 1997; Olins, 1989). As a whole, these studies have focused on the definition of the CM, its characteristics and the elements that distinguish it from traditional museums and the functions they perform (Bulegato, 2008). To the best of our knowledge, no studies address the social role of CMs with the exception of a work of Fanfani (2002).

With reference to the second strand, the contributions that focus on the content and on the scale of the concept of social responsibility (Carroll, 1991, 2000) are invoked and taken into consideration.

The Corporate Museums

The rise of the CMs can be regarded as a contemporary phenomenon, despite the fact that such museums have been in existence for over a century, becoming, in recent years a favored destination for visitors (Griffiths, 1999). They are an advanced form of investment in culture made by the companies that generally invest in culture through other tools: production of goods which are objects d'art, art collecting, patronage and sponsorship.

We can define the CM as an exhibit-based facility, owned and operated by a company, which collects and displays objects (products, visuals, photographs, prototypes, and other material from the corporate archives) to illustrate the history of the company itself (its roots, milestones, achievements, leading figures, brand, products' development, etc.) and/or its operations to employees, guests, customers, or other visitors (Danilov, 1992; Nissley, Casey, 2002; Lehman, Byron, 2007; Stigliani, Ravasi, 2007).

The main features of CMs can be thus identified: they are generally located inside corporate facilities or near the company's headquarters or next to the factories where the

brand products are manufactured; they are usually run by the companies themselves and, sometimes, by foundations to which companies donate their collection to be displayed.

The origins of CMs date back to the early 20th century, due to the process of industrialization, but companies' desire to exhibit technical products and technological know-how goes back to the end of the 18th century (Stigliani, Ravasi, 2007). The world-wide development of CMs, however, only occurred in the second half of the 20th century: about half of such museums existing today were founded in the 1970s or '80s and they can be found in a variety of industries, ranging from automobiles to furniture, from cosmetics to food and beverages, and from fashion to home appliances (Danilov, 1992; Bulegato, 2008). In Italy, the first CM is dated 1906 (Museo del Merletto Jesurum), but even in the early '70s, many Italian companies - such as Pirelli, Martini, Richard Ginori, Alfa Romeo - began to establish corporate collections and archives (which evolved into CMs) inside their facilities to preserve a tangible record of the development of their industries and to illustrate the business or their entrepreneurial history. This phenomenon reached its peak during the 80s and 90s, when CMs became a concrete presence in the cultural field (Kartell, Piaggio, Ferrari, Ferragamo, Alinari, Barilla, Lungarotti, Pelino, Campari, Lagostina). In the 2000s, about half of all CMs were in Italy (Amari, 2001; Negri, 2003; Bulegato, 2008).

Some features can be considered common characteristics of Italian CMs: to be founded by companies with a long history, that are embedded in their territory, and that produce cult goods which emphasize their symbolic and aesthetic content, thus representing an emblematic example of the so-called "Made in Italy" image. In addition, we can call to mind not only the extreme industrial sector differentiation of CMs, but also their spatial diffusion, often far from urban areas. These characteristics of CMs, in particular their differentiation and not homogeneity, have led scholars to research more deeply the founding criteria so as to better be able to grasp the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, within the different categories (Amari, 2001; Gilodi, 2002; Negri, 2003; Bulegato, 2008).

As far as the primary functions for CMs are concerned, they can be identified as follows: to preserve and convey the company's history; to develop employee pride and identification with the company (Stigliani, Ravasi, 2007); to inform guests and customers about the company, its product line and/or services; to influence public opinion about the company and/or controversial issues (Danilov, 1992; Piatkowska); to collect, document, preserve, interpret, show (Amari, 2001).

Leaving aside these distinctions, it is possible to note that at the beginning, CMs were seen as historical structures: they displayed documents, photographs and products of the past in order to tell an entrepreneurial history or remember, refer to and reconstruct the business history and to make organizational history and memory tangible (Kinni, 1999). In that sense, they have considered as a public relations tool. Afterwards, they changed their focus, becoming more strategy-oriented and shifting from being merely a passive collection of organizational artifacts to becoming an extension of the organization's marketing efforts (Danilov, 1992; Gilodi, 2002; Pastore, Vernuccio, 2006).

The managerial literature agrees that a company which has its own museum qualifies its image with respect to its competitors (Piatkowska, 2014). In addition, a company may use its museum in many other ways: as a "good lounge" (Fanfani, 2002), i.e. the initial introduction for those interacting or about to interact with the company for commercial or other points of view, as a means for reaffirming both inside and outside the company, the collective identity and the organizational core values; as a tool for inspiring designers and marketers in future product development; as a space in which to preserve brands acquired by business groups and multinational companies.

However, unlike the above-mentioned studies which focus in an almost exclusive way on the CM as a branding device or a marketing tool, we think that they can play another

important function, which would certainly not contrast with these, but, on the contrary, may further enrich and enhance them in a wider vision. We suggest that CMs can be viewed as a way to engage in social responsibility, thus becoming an expression of corporate involvement in the social field, a meeting point between company, territory and community.

In that sense, through its museum, a company may intercept territorial expectations related to intangible values, such as the promotion of culture and tourism, the dissemination of research on business history, the enhancement of creativity, innovation and memory, the education and training for the young generations in addition to what institutions could provide. The fact that CMs are considered a way for companies to be socially responsible, strengthens the idea that such structures can become a value for the territory, for local communities, public institutions or private associations and can achieve compatible goals related to marketing policies with a commitment to the communities in which the museums (and the companies) are situated.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is gaining increasing importance: companies carry it out through various activities, they express it through a different relationship between company and clients, business and stakeholders and they are progressively more mindful of the deep and profitable link between enterprise and territory.

Companies, in fact, are not only in charge of goods and services production, but also play a fundamental social role, i.e. in the cultural promotion and preservation not only of the historical roots of its production process but also of the territory and the surrounding community with its own culture, customs, world view.

The term CSR takes on different meanings depending on the actors who use it, and their cultural and organizational contexts. The earliest contributions (Bowen, 1953) have been progressively enriched in the last 20 years and have developed a rich debates (Carroll, 1991, 2000) involving academics from diverse disciplines: business, economics, management, sociology, anthropology, philosophy. The theme is still relatively little explored in organizational disciplines.

Four groups of theories form the core of this literature [30], related to four different approaches: instrumental theories (Friedman, 1962); political theories (Davis, 1960), integrative theories (Garriga, Melé, 2004), a collection of ethical theories, that include the approach of stakeholder (Freeman, 1984, 1983) and the approaches of sustainable development (WCED, 1987). CSR recognizes the importance of the actions of an enterprise in four areas. The first area is the relationship between businesses and local communities in the context in which the company carries out its activities. It is a responsibility in terms of its contribution to the social and economic development of the territory: from guarantees for employment to respect for the culture and traditions of the place; from support of the industrial fabric of the territory to partnerships with local entrepreneurs and the development of relationships with local public institutions; and so on. The second area is in fact a specification of the first and considers the environmental impact of the business, therefore the assumption of responsibility with regard to the limitation of polluting emissions arising from production processes. The third area concerns the relationship between the company and the market, and in particular, current and potential customers. The fourth relates to the internal management of the company, and in particular, the relationship with its employees at all levels. In this case, the ethical and socially responsible behavior of the company is measured through: the emoluments; the recruitment and training policies; the working conditions (“physical” context); the forms of work organization; the evaluation and incentives system , etc. For the purpose of this work, we focus on the relationships between the company and the

environment, the market, local communities and organizational reflection can be involved in matters relating to arrangements for liaison with external actors.

Research methodology

Given the exploratory nature of this work, the research design of this study relies on an inductive approach, based on typical case study methodologies (Yin, 1984), according to which several methods and empirical sources contribute to offer a holistic understanding of the phenomenon investigated (Eisenhardt, 1989). These cases represent a “special” ones, which allow us to gain a certain insight that would be difficult to find in other contexts (Siggelkow, 2007). To this end, we acquired the necessary information by combining multiple methods of data gathering: in-depth interviews, analysis of secondary sources and personal visits. First, the Heads of the two CMs were interviewed for a variable length of time, anywhere lasting from one to more than three hours each. The interviews were conducted by using a semi-structured questionnaire and according to the narration approach: the Heads of the two CMS are left free to reconstruct the origin, the purpose, the history of single CM in such a way as to give a most complete picture. This picture should include the organizational characteristics of CMs (type of structure, organizational location, number of employees and their competences, opening hours, types of visitors) and, especially, the initiatives organized and carried out, the nature and typology of existing relations with other actors in the territory. Then, in order to complete the data thus collected, we analyzed secondary sources (including official documents, web sites, press archives of local and national newspapers, previous studies, industry databases) some of which was done before and after the interviews. We also gathered further indications from direct visits to the museum facilities. In order to obtain more robust evidence (Jick, 1979), we checked for triangulation of different data sources

A brief history of Ferrari and Ducati corporate museums

The Ferrari Museum are relatively recent as it was inaugurated in February 1990 and until 1995 was managed by the Municipality of Maranello, owner of the property where the museum is currently housed. Since 1995, it has come under the direct management of Ferrari S.p.A. The historical reasons for its founding are two-fold: the need for Ferrari to ease the growing pressure of visitors to its production plant on the one hand, and the town of Maranello’s desire to recognize and acknowledge the social role played by Ferrari, on the other hand. The evolution of the Museum has been linked to the commercial development, growth and consolidation of the legendary Ferrari image that the industry’s and the motor racing sport’s successes have helped to create. The Ferrari Museum was born as the true custodian of the Ferrari legend and of the history of its founder, Enzo Ferrari. It houses cars, images and trophies that have characterized the history of the brand and have been hugely successful on commercial markets and worldwide circuits. In the 1996, with the advent of Luca Cordero di Montezemolo as chairman of Ferrari S.p.A., the management of the Museum became highly integrated into that of the company and important changes were made to increase museum holdings. During the last decade, the number of visitors coming from all over the world has greatly expanded (almost 250,000 per year). Today, however, the Ferrari Museum has a different identity that can be fully understood only by widening the perspective of analysis and projecting the activities of the Museum onto the territory.

In fact, it is possible to think of this CM an expression of the expectations that come from many stakeholders, such as: *the company*, interested in highlighting the history of its founder and its evolutionary path, in enhancing its supportive role in the development of the sector and the technological progress of the entire country, in communicating and strengthening the underlying value of the business idea (the constant commitment to

innovation and the deep-rooted ties to traditions); *employees*, who may consolidate their pride in being members of the company and their identification with it through the activities of the Museum and the symbols, images, artifacts kept inside it; *owners and private collectors of Ferrari cars*, considered potential partners in the preparation of exhibits but also “guardians” of a historical heritage that has to be safeguarded in the collective interest; the whole community of *people passionately fond of Ferrari and of Ferrari fans*, who call for the development of leisure facilities around the cultural asset; *the general community*, for which Ferrari cars are “works of art”, an expression of the so called “Made in Italy” image and of Italian genius; *the town of Maranello*, the owner of the property and of the area where the Museum is located, and *the entire local community*.

The Ducati Museum, established in 1996 inside the factory in Borgo Panigale (Bologna), was inaugurated in 1998. Conceived as a “dream-like circuit”, its aim was to reconstruct the history of the company and to preserve Ducati’s industrial success and sports achievements. Another reason for setting up the museum was to revive the “legendary” Ducati brand: in that sense, it would be a sort of shrine for all Ducati fans and museum visitors. Finally, there was a growing awareness of the importance of preserving this heritage: it was considered a source of inspiration for designers. The Ducati Museum extends the range of its activities over a large territory, meeting the expectations of a plurality of stakeholders, internal and external to the company: the territory and the community of Borgo Panigale has developed a strong sense of identification with Ducati.

The Ducati Museum extends the range of its activities over a large territory, meeting the expectations of a plurality of stakeholders, internal and external to the company: *the local town and the local community* who see the Museum associated with Borgo Panigale and perceive the benefits from the intense tourist flow; *the national and international associations* that benefit from the awareness of the cultural value of the Museum; *brand clubs* (the tribe of the “Ducatisti”) that recognize in the Museum a cornerstone of the entertainment formula; *the owners and collectors* involved in partnerships with the Museum, who are interested in consolidating this relationship in order to preserve the historical heritage; *employees* that can strengthen their sense of belonging to the brand thanks to a wider knowledge of the history of the company; *the company and its owners* that consider the Museum part of the corporate competitive strategy and, in collaboration with the Ducati Foundation, part of the corporate social policy.

Results and discussion

Beside the cultural value of the CMs, not only in terms of preservation and enhancement of the heritage and the historical memory of the company, but also for research, study and training, these structures can give substance to the social function of the company. In fact, you can think of these museums as collectors of complex interests and as a place in which a plurality of interests converge (economic, aesthetic, social, cultural, ethical), which are, in turn, an expression of the expectations of multiple stakeholders: the company, its employees, owners and private collectors of cars/motors, the whole community of Ferrari and Ducati fans, the local town and the local community, the national and international associations that benefit from the awareness of the cultural value of the museums.

In the case of Ferrari Museum, the social dimension can be considered as the projection of Ferrari’s activities on the surrounding area. All the territory in Maranello is identified with Ferrari which has, over the years, promoted development by encouraging the growth of highly specialized allied activities and recruiting most of the employees from the province. At the same time, the identification of the Ferrari with the territory is also very strong, not only for the origin of the staff and the location of many strategic suppliers: in Maranello there are the Ferrari factory, the Wind Tunnel, the monuments and the auditorium

dedicated to Enzo Ferrari and his home. The initiatives promoted by the “Culture, sport and entertainment Public Authority” of the town of Maranello see the Ferrari Museum involved in conducting cultural events and organizing rallies and other sports activities. The company contributed to the development of the municipality, until then largely agricultural, was also crucial due to the growth of an induced highly specialized and renowned. The Ferrari Museum contributes to weld this link with the territory by participating in the cultural events of the province, in the organization of meetings and other sports activities, in the initiatives undertaken by collectors, associations, public and private sponsors, so bringing to the entire population the economic benefits of tourism fueled by visits to the CM.

The passive role played by the Ferrari Museum in the early years has been replaced more recently by an active one. The Museum is the root node of a network of relationships with many other external actors: it coordinates many of the initiatives and selects the cultural content of events. It has also widened and intensified its contribution in the field of education by developing numerous initiatives with schools and technical institutes, in order to contribute to the development of professional skills coherent with the needs of the training sector. The Ferrari Museum funds and provides a teaching laboratory equipped with 12 touch screens, which can be used by pairs of students, for a total of 24, a plasma screen for the tutor, an “augmented reality” workstation, a totem with original audio and video contributions, as well as interactive exhibits. The aim is to enrich the quality of education and to facilitate the process of guiding children and teenagers through their compulsory education, by giving “good images” of the world of work, so as to help reduce the gap between the supply of and the demand for professionalism. The longevity of Ferrari, the pride of “ownership” that has always characterized its employees, the strong identification of suppliers with the core values of Ferrari, testify to a system of ethical values, whose origin is to be found not only in the Ferrari family but also in the territory.

Not very different is the case Ducati Museum: the territory and the community of Borgo Panigale has developed a strong sense of identification with Ducati. In this case too, the company recruits and selects its own employees in the area, fosters relationships with many local suppliers, establishes technological relations with other important partners in the area around Bologna. The Ducati fits inside of this network of relationships by taking a very active role within a territory that radiates from Borgo Panigale towards the surrounding areas, and by promoting a “cultural and social function” for the company and the brand. There is a continuous dialog with public institutions and there is very close cooperation with players in the field of culture, entertainment and sports. The initiatives undertaken in collaboration with public administrations or local associations are often promoted by the Museum: guided tours organized for schools, motorcycle rallies, numerous themed events, special exhibitions held outside the Museum, and so on. Finally, there are many tourists that visit the Museum (almost 60,000 a year), bringing undoubted economic benefits to the entire community.

Both museums have also chosen to join the “Motor Valley - Land of Motors” project. Begun as part of “Bologna 2000 - European city of culture”, this project gradually grew, becoming a touristic product and gaining regional interest initially, with the involvement of many players caught up in and revolving around the “mechanics” culture (Alberti, Giusti, 2014). The fact that museums were already a source of tourist attraction, albeit at a primary advantage of their respective companies, has fostered the participation in the project, the rise of many collaborations with local tourism stakeholders (the regional tourism agency - APT) and with other economic actors. Ducati and Ferrari Museums have contributed to the definition of touristic packages able to involve and leverage the potentiality of the heterogeneous resources of the project (company museums visits, guided tour to famous manufacturer, sport activities, participation to sports events and exhibitions and so on. Moreover, these two CMs have made available to the project and shared the network

relationships that these companies had developed over time with the ancillary companies (who worked for the majority of the brand) and with research centers (at the Universities of Bologna and Modena and other research centers), allowing the creation of a network between major firms in the motor industry, artisans, tourism organizations, sport facilities, institutions. The jointed and coordinated action of all these actors, then, has created a tangible and intangible cultural heritage that has nurtured tourism flow and fostered regional competitiveness.

Thanks to the collaboration with public actors (above all the Emilia Romagna Region), the development of training projects has also made possible (Bonti, 2013). On the one hand, the CMs have contributed to the training of museum guides who integrate their basic preparation (artistic and literary) with knowledge about the world of engines through meetings with mechanics, journalists and experts in the field. On the other hand, Ferrari and Ducati Museum have spoken on behalf of the need to preserve some important crafts and “professional figures” that are on the brink of extinction. This refers specifically to the training of professionals or master craftsmen in the field of restoration (repair and maintenance) of vintage cars and motors. This is an activity based on the culture of things made or done by hand and translates into an “artistic” craft. It is also an activity that creates a great number of collaborations and synergies in a greatly diversified sector (coachbuilders, auto-body repairers or panel beaters, sheet metal chassis-makers, paint-restorers, upholsterers, motor manufacturers, mechanical and electrical experts, etc.). Despite the potential offered by this sector from an employment point of view, the lack of skilled labor and schools suited to teaching these skills threatens to lead to the disappearance of a wealth of knowledge and know-how. The school of restoration for vintage Italian cars and motorcycles is an initiative that developed within the project Motor Valley - Land of Motors (with the collaboration of the Ducati Foundation and the Province of Bologna, along with the patronage of the Ministry of Productive Activities). The school’s goal is to rediscover, enhance and pass on the technical-professional heritage of the territory, as well as the tradition of hand-restoration of cars and motorcycles; moreover, it facilitates the coming together of fans and admirers of what could have become a lost art.

Conclusion

The analysis of the two cases has highlighted the different roles played by corporate museums, not only in the field of preservation and enhancement of the heritage and the historical memory of the company, but also in the field of research, study and training, making clear the social function played by them.

Both working alone, either within a public-private network, the CMs have been promoting the enhancement and development of the local territory, helping to strengthen a responsible competitiveness of the regional territory. Both CMs that the public administration are aware of the benefits that their collaboration has made and will make to the territory and the local community, even if these benefits are not easily quantifiable.

The present research is still in the early stages and presents the typical limitations of a case study. Anyway, we believe that the exploratory analysis of the cases has revealed some interesting results, even if we need more information in order to have a chance of better framing CMs as a way of engaging in a social responsibility of the business and of the territory. We are aware that the analysis was based on interviews of only two CMs and, in addition, there is the possibility of biases due to the perception of the interviewed managers. It is necessary to delve more deeply into the reasons that have prompted companies to join the project; how the relations between the public institutions and businesses can develop in a circular way, producing benefits at different levels: the level of individual companies, of

systems of relationships that revolve around the single company, of the system of relationships generated by the Motor Valley – Land of Motors project.

Further steps of the research, in addition to trying to overcome some of the above mentioned limitations, will be aimed to investigate how to measure the value generated by CMs: we will examine the possibility of identifying evaluation tools able to better express the cultural, social, economic value produced by CMs, in relation to the different types of stakeholders.

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