

**CONVIVIALITY AND ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES: THE EMERGING
RELATIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL AND BUSINESS NETWORKS**

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Abstract. Conviviality is an interdisciplinary concept and a key phenomenon in the entrepreneurial communities. Entrepreneurial communities are social units that share values, experiences, emotions, rituals and traditions. They give rise to personal contact networks that are sets of formal or informal individual relationships. Conviviality means sharing, openness and participation; in this sense, it can be a tool to foster, animate and amalgamate a community. Thus, it can increase social relations that stably bind individuals and thus, becomes a source of business relations. Drawing from literature analysis and three cases of fashion entrepreneurial communities, we propose to investigate how conviviality affects social network and the relations between them and business networks.

Keywords: conviviality, social networks, business network

Competitive Paper

INTRODUCTION

Although conviviality is an interdisciplinary concept, it can be seen as an integrating component of entrepreneurial communities. These latter can be read as personal contact networks made up of formal and informal relationships among individuals. They are social and convivial spaces where it is possible to share rules, traditions, experiences and values. Thus, conviviality as synonymous with sharing, openness and participation, is inherent to business communities. Its tools can contribute to creating and developing a sense of community.

In this paper, we do not investigate the tacit and spontaneous conviviality mechanisms already existing in business communities but rather we explore a generated conviviality - externally or internally organized by community members - whose tools can act as driver of social networks and also of business networks. We adopt the concept of conviviality proposed by the philosopher Ivan Illich whose perspective envelopes that of other convivial community scholars. According to Illich, convivial tools leave ample space and capacity for individual intentions. Thus, they create moments of self-revelation and of self-identification. For him "productivity [of the capitalist sort] is based on having, while conviviality on being" (Illich, 1973, p.42). In line with this view, we aim to investigate how convivial tools influence social relations and, thus, social capital emerging from a social network and how the resulting social relations can activate business relations and, thus, the relation capital circulating in business networks.

In the first part of the paper, we introduce the concept of conviviality as it emerges from interdisciplinary studies and from the consumer and business community literature. Then, we describe the paradigms of social networks and business networks as they relate to conviviality. Finally, we show the results of our exploratory study of three fashion entrepreneurial communities; two located in Italy (Tuscany) and one in China (Hangzhou). The methodology is based on case analysis employing ethnographic interviews with community directors and a substantial nucleus of entrepreneur-members.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

CONVIVIALITY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONCEPT

Conviviality is quite a new topic for managerial disciplines. Indeed, up to now the main contributions to the topic have come from the fields of philosophy, sociology and anthropology, in which some authors have explored conviviality as a mediator of cultural and tourist offerings (Lloyd, 2002, Robert Maitland, 2008). For example, Lloyd (2002) investigates the positive impact of conviviality on public fund raising policies in 18th-century London. Robert Maitland (2008) convincingly argues that, for tourists, "getting to know the city [London] was a convivial experience – local people and local places to drink coffee or shop were important" (p.21). Other authors consider the politics of conviviality as one form of the "politics of the popular" that arises in contexts of rapid change, diversity and mobility. In this regard, Williams and Stroud (2013), exploring linguistic practices as powerful mediators of political voice and agency, view "linguistic citizenship" as the foundation of a politics of conviviality. In other studies, conviviality emerges as a feature of a new cultural food movement. Germov, William and Freij (2010) analyse the portrayal of the slow food movement in the Australian print media. Some major aspects of conviviality that have emerged stem from analyzing the social pleasure associated both with sharing good food,

which can in turn be linked to localism (the social, health and environmental benefits of local producers), and with romanticism (an idyllic rural lifestyle as an antidote to the time poverty of urban life). Some authors have even proposed measuring conviviality. In particular, Caire, Alcalde and Sombatheera, (2011) set forth formal measures of conviviality for networks using a coalition game theoretic framework. Among the contributions to the topic, which goes furthest in defining the concept of conviviality is *Tools for Conviviality* by philosopher Ivan Illich (1973). Illich considers conviviality as a collective participation which creates “free space” of interaction, one in which people can exercise their right to autonomous action and, more generally, freedom, without being controlled. In this way, conviviality can also foster individual creativity by contributing to the reduction in regulation, standardization, dependence, and the abuses typical of capitalist societies. Illich argues that conviviality is based on being and not on having. In other words, its tools leave ample space and capacity for individual intentions. Everyone can use them, effortlessly, whenever and as much as they wish, for their individually defined goals. Thus, conviviality becomes a conductor of meaning and a translator of intentionality between people and society. In this paper, we propose to investigate the role of conviviality as Illich (1973) has defined the notion in business communities. In his perspective (consistently with that of Marx and Hegel), people seek realization in the community or in a horizontal space of relations among individuals who are equally free and supportive. Conviviality creates spaces where individuals reveal themselves, talk about themselves, share and identify with each other. In the next section, we specify the context where conviviality materializes assuming different forms. This context is that of communities.

COMMUNITY AND CONVIVIALITY

The relation between conviviality and community is a close one. Conviviality seen as participation and sharing is a founding element of consumer communities, and thus of an aggregation of individuals who stay together as they have something in common (Cova 1997). An example are brand communities. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) describe them as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among users of a brand” (p.412). These communities form a fabric of social relationships where participation is due to a consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions and a moral responsibility among members (Schau, Muñiz and Arnould, 2009). Thus, conviviality tacitly animates consumer communities, which, to the extent that they are rooted in a brand, find in its values the engine of member affiliation and socialization (Brown et al., 2003). Recently, technologies have generated online communities (Kozinets, 2002) and thus contexts of brand observation (Cova 1997) involving actors who assume different roles (current or potential customers, enthusiasts, experts). They foster virtual and convivial spaces by spontaneously shaping opinions, knowledge, feelings about their brand experience (De Valck, 2005). Schau, Muñiz and Arnould (2009) have identified tools to consolidate and reinforce social ties in on line brand communities. They include social networking, impression management, community engagement and brand use. All these tools are managed directly by community members. They generate *convivium* moments that increase social interactions, community involvement and brand perceptions of tangible attributes. Brand communities can take on the form of tribes. In tribes “the use value [of a brand] (functions and symbols at the service of the individual as a means of distinction) is being sought as much as the linking value (link with the other or with others and means of tribal symbiosis)” (Cova, 1997, p.311). Tribes are groups of people emotionally connected as they share the same social linking value of a brand and reflect in it their identity. Thus, the social linking

value acts as a convivial tool within a community. Its strength is manifested in the resulting aggregation and internal cohesion. From scientific contributions, it emerges how in consumer communities conviviality is essentially self-sustaining and self-generated.

Although conviviality seems to be inherent to consumer communities, it would be intriguing to broaden the perspective and to investigate conviviality in business communities, which, after all, constitute one of the archetypes, along with segmentation, fragmentation and self-selection, that entrepreneurs employ in their market representation (Burrelli and Guercini, 2002; Guercini 2003). The community category, from the entrepreneurial perspective, distinguishes consumer from business groups. It has an external, but also an internal nature that indicates a space where entrepreneurs develop formal or informal relationships (Carson et al., 1995) by initiating processes of information sharing and knowledge production. While relations in consumer communities recall to what Tönnies (1957) defines *Gemeinschaft*, relations in a business community are often close to what he identifies as *Gesellschaft*. The first is a community characterized by informal social relationships and shared values that connect people and hold them together. The second takes the form of collective organizations that weave amongst themselves a web of social relations that are less intimate, more impersonal and based on formal rules and regulations governing appropriate behaviours. In a *Gesellschaft* conviviality and, thus, community participation, finds its assumptions in “rational will”, “regularity” and “shared social values” (Tönnies, 1957). A community and its social context is the result of human will and exists, therefore, only through the will of individuals to associate and to develop a sense of belonging. A group life also requires regularity seen as order, law and morality. Order is based upon convention; law emerges from legislation and custom; morality is an expression of socially rooted and shared human conscience, reason and ideals. The social values aggregating organizations can be economic, political, intellectual or spiritual. The more shared they are, the greater the understanding, harmony and friendship among individuals within a community. All these elements can be found in a typical business community, that of the industrial district. This is an ideal-typical model of a local productive system where a nucleus of people coexist with a localised industry. More specifically, it is a socio-territorial entity marked by the active presence of both a community of individuals and a population of firms situated in one naturally and historically bounded area (Becattini, 1987). The will to create aggregation is the result of an historical and social stratification of the community, where people share a homogenous system of views and values. The preservation of this system is an indispensable requirement for the development and the temporal reproduction of the district. Moreover, a set of internal rules and of institutions (family, school, etc.) has a substantial role: they spread common values throughout the district, transmit them across generations by fostering a social and economic community life. The resulting district community is shaped by the industrial atmosphere. This latter acts as the tacit engine of a local integration and coincides with “a set of shared cognitive, moral and behavioural attitudes drawing on locally-dense cultural interactions and which orientate technical, human and relational investments towards forms consistent with local accumulation” (Becattini, Bellandi and De Propris 2009, p.viii).

Conviviality and thus, a sense of collective participation underlies the consumer and business community, although it assumes different forms: in the former, social life dominates economic life, while in the latter, both lives are more closely related. As we have said, in brand communities conviviality is created around brand values and, recalling Illich’s words, is based more on being than on having, whereas in the business community conviviality conceals an economic soul. It is more business driven and, consequently, more closely tied to having than to being. In such communities, conviviality seems to lose one of its most intrinsic purposes, that of creating free spaces of open dialogues. We believe that in a business community, a generated conviviality based not on formalisms but on social and open tools

(dinners, informal meetings, seminars, etc..) is able to create such spaces and to lead to the growth of the social capital of a community impacting its members economically. In other words, a business community participation, if mediated by created convivial moments based on genuine tools which leave greater room to the participants' perspective of being, may have a positive influence on the perspective of having. In order to better investigate the relation between an existing community and convivial tools in an *ad hoc* conviviality, we will examine the business community as business network, which can be broken down in turn into the social and the business components.

BRIDGING SOCIAL AND BUSINESS NETWORKS

In our study, we explore conviviality within business communities as moments of self-revelation, and real occasions to get to know each other better, to share experiences and, thus, to generate individual relations. The idea is not to investigate in depth the tacit and spontaneous conviviality already existing in a business community (like that which distinguishes an industrial district) but to examine a generated conviviality - externally or internally organized by community members - whose tools can act as driver of social networks. Social networks are seen as the sum of social relations that form stable bonds between individuals and that become a source of social capital (Bourdieu 1980; Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman 1988). This is an "aggregate of actual or potential resources", resulting from the "more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu 1980, p.2). In a community it stems from the interactions between individuals (Burt, Jannotta and Mahoney, 1998) and consists of all the available resources that arise both from the networks to which the individuals belong and their position in each. Social networks can gain their members privileged access to information and opportunities (Granovetter, 1973) or develop reciprocal obligations due to emerging feelings of gratitude, respect and friendships (Bourdieu, 1996). In cases of restricted memberships, they can produce social capital in the form of social status and reputation (Burt, 1992). Nahapiet and Ghosal (1998) describe social capital as resources internally articulated in structural, relational and cognitive dimensions. The structural dimension concerns the overall patterns of connections between actors – that is, who you reach and how you reach them (Burt, 1992). Facets of this dimension include the presence or absence of network ties between actors (Scott, 1991), network configuration (Krackhardt, 1989) and appropriable organization (Coleman 1988), which consists in reciprocal influences among networks thanks to social ties developed in one of these. The relational dimension concerns the kind of personal relationships (respect, friendship, etc...) people have developed with each other through their history of interactions (Granovetter, 1992). This leads to trust, shared norms and reciprocal obligations. The cognitive dimension concerns collective representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning among parties (Cicourel, 1973). Its facets include common language and code and shared narratives. All these dimensions affect the production of social capital, and also resources exchange and combination generating intellectual capital. This latter can be defined as "the knowledge or knowing capability of a social collectivity such as organization, intellectual community or professional practices" (Nahapiet, Ghosal, 1998, p. 245). Thus, intellectual capital identifies the collective knowledge of a social network. The social capital it embeds can foster the relational capital within business networks.

The relational capital has an economic value and takes shape in relations among organizations that make exchanges and share activities to generate joint value (Johanson and Mattsson 1988; Easton and Håkansson 1996; Håkansson et al. 2009). It populates the business networks that consist of a set of "tangible and intangible investments that comprise

the connected relationships between more than two businesses” (Håkansson et al. 2009, p. 236). Their structure includes a set of actors, activities, links, resource, ties and bonds. They emerge from social networks in the sense that business relations can result from personal contacts. In some emerging markets, such as the Chinese, the dependence of business relations on social relations is essential for success. In this case, some studies (Björkmann and Kock, 1995; Ranfagni and Guercini, 2014) demonstrate that the development of social relationships is a prerequisite to penetrate Chinese business networks. Personal contacts act as mechanisms for reducing the cultural distance between individuals (Cunningham and Homse, 1986), for entering in local social networks (based on interchanges of social obligations and on moral attitude to exchange favours) and for generating business exchanges. Social networks fill, in fact, the lack of codified and widespread public information and animate reciprocity conditions to develop local business relations. At the same time, social networks are an essential component of developed business networks. In this regard, Håkansson and Snehota (1995) highlight that “the individuals involved in a business relationship tend to weave a web of personal relationship, and this appears to be a condition for the development of inter-organizational ties between any two companies” (p.10). Thus, though business relationships are established between organizations, they are actually managed by individuals. It follows that the social capital embedded in social networks can reinforce the relational capital of the correlated business networks.

The interpenetration between social and business networks rests on the relational mechanisms produced by mutual trust and commitment in the social bonds. Mutual trust can be seen as “one party's belief that its needs will be fulfilled in the future by actions undertaken by the other party. (Anderson and Weitz, 1989, p. 312). In business relations, this is expressed as a willingness to be vulnerable to each other; vulnerability is the consequence of beliefs that the actors involved develop. Both of them believe: (1) in the good intent and concern of exchange partners (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale, 1990; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994), (2) in their competence and capability (Szulanski, 1996), (3) in their reliability (Ouchi, 1981; Giddens, 1990) and (4) in their perceived openness (Ouchi, 1981). Trust impacts on mutual commitment and, thus, on the belief of an exchange partner that the ongoing relationship with another is so important as to deserve maximum efforts at maintaining it indefinitely (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

In our opinion, conviviality can produce similar relational mechanisms acting as converter of social relations in business relations. This is not to be confused with the concept of atmosphere, which corresponds to an aspect of the business relations. While conviviality can be understood in terms of self-managed participative acts of a collective and formal nature or created ad hoc, the atmosphere, as it is described by IMP Group studies, is regarded as an articulated concept. It is conceptually viewed as both a product of the relationship and a factor contributing to future relationship development and can be articulated in terms of “the power–dependence relationship which exists between the companies, the state of conflict or co-operation and overall closeness or distance of the relationship as well as by the companies' mutual expectations” (Håkansson, 1982, p.29). Power can be defined as the ability of one party to influence the actions of the other (Gaski, 1984); thus, the relative dependence between the parties in the relationship determines their relative power (Hallen, Johansson and Seyed-Mohammed, 1991). Cooperation is the willingness actors express to attain common benefits, while competition implies a company attitude to pursue individual goals to the detriment of its competitors. (Hallen and Sandstrom, 1991). Trust presupposes a longer-term relational attitude together with the belief of positive relations development, while opportunism implies a short-term interactive perspective stemming from opportunities that are grasped to reach individual interests at the expense of hitherto accepted modes of behaviour. Closeness implies a restricted nucleus of relations and can depend upon

psychological, social and cultural distances while openness requires a willingness to understand and to be understood by the other party and implies a willingness to seek and develop collaborative relations. The expectation depends on the evolutions characterizing all the other aspects of the atmosphere and they emerge from past actions involving the actor-parties (Hedaa and Törnroos, 2007). Each actor relates to the atmosphere's elements in a personal way in the sense that the resulting relational situations they produce depend on the individual perceptions. Now we illustrate the main results emerging from our empirical analysis and, in particular, we will focalize our attention on the relations between convivial tools and social capital produced by social networks, and on the mechanisms these tools activate to transform social into relational capital and, thus, to build a bridge between social networks and business networks.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES AND OBJECTIVES

Our study is exploratory in nature and based on a case study (Yin, 2009) of business communities and in particular of three important Italian entrepreneurial communities belonging to the fashion system. Two are rooted in Italy (Tuscany) and one in China (Hangzhou). The communities situated in Italy include two associations that for reasons of confidentiality have been respectively denominated Textile Association and Leather Consortium. The first was founded in 1983, includes about forty entrepreneurs operating in textiles and clothing. The second, on the other hand, emerged in the sixties and seventies and gave rise in 1997 to a Consortium, which groups more than fifty leather entrepreneurs. Both consist of companies that have mainly business-to-business dealings. Their customers are multinational fashion and luxury goods companies. The leather producers have been monitored by one of the two authors since as early as 2005, and the implications of their functioning in terms of business networks have led to previous publications (Guercini and Woodside, 2012a). The third community we investigate is composed of Italian entrepreneurs and is localized in China, exactly at Hangzhou in the Province of Zhejiang where one of the main Chinese textile-clothing districts is located. Named Italian Fashion Association, its entrepreneur-members operate mainly in the textile and clothing industry and have as clients both local and international fashion companies. The purpose of this Association is to develop and strengthen relations among Italian entrepreneurs who have decided to intensify their business activity in China trying to facilitate their social and business integration. The next section presents the main results of a series of ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) conducted with the President of the Consortium and the Director of the Textile Association. These are combined with others realized at Hangzhou involving the Director of the Italian Fashion Association and six entrepreneur-members (Table 1). In all the three cases, we integrate personal interviews with occasions of immersion in the community life. The unit of our analysis are the convivial moments. Thus, the topics of each interview include: a) the associations/consortium history, internal organization and activities; b) convivial activities (which kinds, tools and management.); c) conviviality and technologies; d) experiences of conviviality (their impact on social relations); and e) conviviality as mediator between social and business relations. Each interview has been transcribed, discussed and interpreted by each author. The aim of the research is to study conviviality in entrepreneurial communities. Specifically, with reference to conviviality, we propose to shed light on a) the forms it takes and how it is managed; b) its possible effects on social relations especially in terms of resulting social capital; c) the connective links it might produce between social and business relations.

Table 1 – The interviews in our exploratory analysis

Actors	Date of the interviews	Location	Role of interviewee(s)	Interview tools	Number of (research) hours
Textile Association	17 November 2015	Florence (Italy)	Director	E-mail, qualitative analysis protocol, recorder	3
Leather Consortium	18 November 2015	Florence (Italy)	Director	E-mail, qualitative analysis protocol, recorder	4
Italian Fashion Association	15 and 16 January 2015	Hangzhou (China)	Director 6 entrepreneur-members	Skype, e-mail, qualitative analysis protocol, recorder	7

MAIN RESULTS

Leather Consortium

In the late 1990s a group of leather goods producers who had been associated casually for years took the opportunity to create a consortium in response to “the need to counteract an economic policy that the country was pursuing, namely outsourcing production”. In this consortium, conviviality was not only an instrument unifying the community, but also the reason underlying its very creation. In this regard, the director states: “... fifteen years of convivial meetings ensured that when the need to set up a consortium of some importance emerged, it was easier to agree because we could understand each other and therefore trust each other. Trust within the community developed over time by involving convivial activities. Over the years, conviviality...resulted in organizing family dinners... at least twice a year (Christmas and pre-summer holidays)... [which included overall] fifty entrepreneurs with their families”. This conviviality was characterized and fostered by unflagging attendance and the variety of activities carried out together. “[It gave rise to a] real convivial celebration, in which the topics were not bags or leather, but rather the desire to be together and to know each other in depth”. The director adds that “other convivial moments are the football tournaments which have been quite successful. We deepen our mutual knowledge professionally and each of us knows the business experience of the other with all the problems and successes”. What facilitated the development of the consortium was also the existence of competitive relations among businesses, that is a reciprocal understanding not only of a human nature but also in terms of business relations. “What leads to the creation of the consortium is a work relationship in which we are at times united, at other times direct competitors, genuine reciprocal understanding, and profound respect at an interpersonal level”. The results are the Consortium, the Italian Superior School of leather goods, and a number of other projects never before attempted in Italy, such as those regarding the introduction of high technology to leather goods production ...”. This case shows how human contact based on individual relationships cannot be replaced by new online and social media technologies. Specifically, “social networks are... instruments. Just as there used to be envelopes with stamps, nowadays we can use new online social media ... they are faster, quicker, more penetrating, but they cannot replace convivial occasions. Human relationships are the core of real convivial situations and must be preserved through frequent meetings and the exchanges of ideas.

“Conviviality is a way of creating involvement and conveying passion and entrepreneurial values. In other words “conviviality [can be an] associative marketing tool ... [to identify with and to transmit to] young people the idea that a business opportunity may come from the opening of a new business in addition to their passion for a job ...[and this can be facilitated by] sharing some paths and convivial acquaintances”. What is important is to avoid the (once feared) risk of making convivial activities self-referential. The director asserts: “Convivial life is still as active today as it was in the past, but it has changed a lot, and nowadays it is completely different. I think that conviviality today is partitioned off, fragmented and has become much more self-referential, hence the need for transverse conviviality that is not shared (solely) among individuals in the same organization, but among individuals of different organizations. We have convivial acquaintances in the same business group for supply to and convivial relations with a large customer, but we do not enjoy transverse conviviality, which involves components of different groups (trans-conviviality). And I think this is a problem, because conviviality helps in (opening up) important business pathways through the transverse flow of thoughts and knowledge”.

Textile Association

This association bases many of its activities on the organization of discussions concerning the future of the town where it is located. Issues are investigated through seminars, training courses and meetings. Conviviality is seen as a free, participatory and interdisciplinary dialogue that “makes it possible to dissect a problem, to go in detail, [...] to communicate with people at the table about basic problems like the reorganization of the road network. There is no one who listens to you, there are no journalists”. Conviviality is a direct and spontaneous comparison, usually organized around a "long table so that people look each other in the face, revealing themselves: [this is because] it is necessary to express our ideas in front of others." Convivial occasions require time, concentration and are not restricted to the community members. In this regard, the director says: "We organize residential meetings devoted to a specific subject, dedicating two days of full immersion to the problem ... [these meetings] are open to a wide audience..". To power the intensity of participation we try to share individual experiences that are filtered through cultural events. “In the summer months the Textile Association was used to organize an important event.. [it] consisted in the screening of a film on business issues and in a [follow-up] debate. All this is useful to rebuild the business experiences of the participants and make them shareable".

In the case investigated, it emerges how conviviality, if it is well managed, can affect the personal contact network of participants: it widens social networks and encourages individual growth processes within new communities. "People that have been members of the Textile Association, and have then found themselves holding public offices, have become institutional figures, have gained awareness of the problems and learned to gain confidence in themselves and in their beliefs ... All this animates our members and makes our association attractive". It follows that the identity and reputation of the business community can help to extend its boundaries and to involve new members.

Management of conviviality can involve an animator. “He makes sure that those who are at the table express their ideas, because people are not all equal. There are shy people who have difficulty stating their opinions. It is necessary to help them so opinions come out, otherwise the dialectic, the debate is absent... ". The human component is then embedded in the conviviality, which when compared to the new technologies, can only be integrated.

Although "... the new technologies lead to an acceleration of the times ...there is still a need to strengthen the direct comparison, which cannot be replaced by technology." Moreover, social relations fostered by social occasions seem also open to business

relationships. The conditions for this to happen are, on the one hand, mutual sympathy and, on the other, trust and an individual shared style. "The members are chosen because there are sympathies, mutual understanding, a style they like and adapt to dialogue even in a more specific way". What, beyond assumptions, seems to trigger the development of business relations is the social position that the convivial has within the community. "[Business relations] emerge externally [outside of our Association] and not all are well classified [we feel that] since professional associates (accountants and lawyers, for example) have entered, business relationships among companies of different sectors are much better developed, ... [but] what all this has actually generated cannot be recognized, it would be necessary to ask our participants. "

Italian Fashion Association

The entrepreneurial community in Hangzhou was formed recently and organizes convivial occasions in the form of dinners and meetings whose purpose is that of exchanging information and generating support and mutual understanding in a high cultural distance context. The Director of the Italian Fashion Association argues that this group "is an important point of reference for the Italian business community ... many entrepreneurs attend it with a certain continuity. After registering, they take part in events, dinners and meetings and find them educational and informative...". One entrepreneur points out that "before the dinners, we have the opportunity to meeting, have exchanges, support each other, even revealing and share real problems ...we also talk with managers who are expressly invited...and because of their skills they become interesting cases to listen to. These people can drive us in our business". Ultimately, the Italian Fashion Association creates a sort of island of social relations in which Italian immigrant entrepreneurs exchange views, recount their experiences by sharing successes and problems. The Director adds, "overall, we are a good number of people, there are about 70 of us, although the group that meets more often, at least five times a year, is smaller. Participation in the Italian Fashion Association is something takes place without commitments, obligations and supervision. The Associations is supported by the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai ...and here, we organize everything that can foster aggregation".

The social relations that are developed involves the sharing of experiences and makes it possible to find solutions both at work and in personal situations. In this regard, one entrepreneur relates that "during the dinner you can meet other Italians working in the same area and you may often exchange life and professional experiences. We exchange opinions, information ... and very often, the resulting situations can become a problem solver. It is a personal pleasure because we speak Italian, which is not to be taken for granted... then, if someone needs an attendant or a local supplier, they send a collective e-mail and ask if we have somebody to propose". New technologies (mailing lists) become a tool to give continuity to social occasions and to foster a constant exchange of information. The Director states that "I created a mailing list and periodically send news related to Zhejiang ... these messages can be useful from a professional perspective. When you are away from your native country, there are also human aspects that become important ... may be the kindergarten for children, the supermarket where you can find Italian products and other. So, the technology allows you to spread information and to fuel the collective participation of the group".

Mutual knowledge, the sharing of personal and work situations fosters mutual participation and trust. One entrepreneur, in fact, affirms that "conviviality helps you to live better and to face everyday life; given the distance from home it is quite spontaneous to assume a participatory attitude to shared problems within the group ... then, ultimately, if we

live better, we work better and, what's more, we can find appropriate solutions to work problems". This state of emerging mutual empathy does not necessarily transform social relations into business relations. The Director points out that "the community is scant and members are unable to develop business together. We have often spoken of creating buying groups as an evolution of our Association but for the moment, this is not happening. More specifically, we have considered the joint purchasing of packaging materials and, thus, of materials that are not competitive. It is something we have thought about, but that we have not yet put into action. It takes time and we need someone who could organize business collaboration among community members. Some of us cannot do these things as it means taking time away from our work as entrepreneurs". What seems to be lacking to make the social relationships sources of business relations is the ability to organize business together. The fabrics of social relations become, however, a way to develop their business. They increase the contractual power of the community in cases of negotiation with the Chinese governmental institutions. Conviviality contributes to enhancing the relationships between the Italian community and the local market. "Until now we've limited ourselves to forming a group in order to interface with the local government. This is one of the aspects that we would like to develop. Joining forces you have a different relationship with the government. If I, alone with 50 employees, show up at a government office a specific request, I find the door locked. If we present ourselves as a group of 20 companies, the government pays more attention".

The social relations among the Association's members do not become socially transverse and, thus, they do not involve local entrepreneurs or, otherwise, workers. The Italian community, in fact, is limited to interacting with the Chinese community on specific occasions organized by Chinese employees working at Italian firms. "The only social relations that we have developed are those with some of our employees. Outside this circle, we have not created relationships with other people. Our family situation is very particular and, feeling ourselves a bit foreigner, we tend to create our family and we do not have really opened up toward the outside. So we have held dinners, we've got to know the families of our employees with whom we try to create bonds. Beyond this ... nothing. Moreover, the Chinese are closed, they always work and their social life plays itself out within the family group".

Social relations with local people take place outside the community organizations and, thus, assume an individual rather than a collective form. "In Guangdong's textile entrepreneurs meet regularly, have their own textile associations and meet regularly for informal dinners ... these Chinese communities are very closed, they are Chinese and they want to stay with local people and they want to speak in their native language." The limited social relations, although they foster processes of sharing and mutual trust, do not contribute to developing local business relationships. One way to create a sort of bridge between the Italian and Chinese entrepreneurial communities is to exploit the social relations that Italian entrepreneurs have developed with their employees (and a state of trust) and make them mediators between their personal social relations and local business relationships by producing a positive impact for the company where they work. One entrepreneur observes that "your employees should use their social relations to activate business relations and, thus, to create for us a local business network. The social relations we have with them are useful for our business. Personal relationships here in China are critical across the board, in any aspect of life, both personal and professional. Knowing the right people at the right place, you can do everything; it is still the network family, ex-classmates ... that allows you to open many doors in China. However, these relations are maintained by Chinese with Chinese. For us in the West, it is difficult to be able to integrate into their communities"

DISCUSSION

The cases show that in the communities investigated ad hoc conviviality is based on common tools such as dinners, meetings and discussions. These tools can be internally self-managed or may involve animators whose role is to promote the intensity of community participation during the various social occasions. Conviviality tools contribute to creating or animating business communities to the extent that they are able to stimulate effective commitment on the part of members and to develop social relations, by creating a positive outlook in terms of collectively shared social capital production. The shared capital emerging from convivial occasions has *dimensional contents* that seem to be, in some cases, internally enriched, and in some others, more focalized respect to those described by Ghosal and Barlett (1998). Now we try to explain in which sense (table 2 – A and B). The *structural dimension* is also defined by an *introspective base*; convivial moments are, in fact, opportunities that allow their members to reveal the real self in their social relations. The members express themselves freely more than they could do in other relational situations. The *cognitive dimension* consists of narrated and shared stories, and thus focuses on *experiential contents*; there ensue social relations, which, being enriched by shared experiences, are able to foster exchanges of knowledge about the potential characterizing community members in terms of their skills and competences. The *relational dimension* takes form around a trust that is *empathy-based*; conviviality tools, in fact, favour the development of trust through processes of mutual empathy. There emerges, as a consequence, an *internalization of social relations* and a sharing of contexts and of rules of judgment and of choice among community members (Guercini, 2012). Certain choices, such as the foundation of a Consortium, take place thanks to the confidence generated by the mutual understanding of individual situations. The more conviviality is able to facilitate individual opening up in terms of *self-revelation*, the *sharing of experiences*, and *state of identification*, the greater is the *social capital* embedded in the social network underlying the community.

Business communities animated by convivial tools may exploit the emerging social capital by transforming the social relations that it generates into business relationships. This stage is not simple and cannot be taken for granted. The results of our exploratory research show that it depends on the ability of convivial occasions to interfere, already at the level of social relations, on the antithetical elements making up the individual components of the relational atmosphere (Håkansson, 1982). It seems that these elements, if the business relations are to emerge from the social relations and, thus, from the social capital they produce, have to be perceived no longer as one opposed to the other but rather as one producing the other (Table 2). Of course, this is a preliminary interpretation, which will be interesting to investigate and deepen with subsequent empirical studies. In the Leather Consortium convivial moments (table 2.A), for example, generates *mutual knowledge* among competitive actors of their potential skills. This has helped to identify entrepreneurial synergies capable of transforming competitive conflict into a source of cooperation (competition as source of collaboration). Among leather goods dealers, for example, *trust emerging from situations of empathy* (self-identification) has become instrumental in making business decisions, collectively opportunistic with respect to strategic decisions taken by competitive competitors external to the community (trust as source of opportunism). The Consortium is, in fact, the result of a shared choice aimed at capturing an opportunity not perceived by those companies (prevalent at the time), which preferred to grow delocalizing their manufacturing processes abroad instead of preserving their local roots. It follows that *mutual knowledge* and *empathy-based trust* can be seen as social capital resources, which act as transformers of social relations into

business relations. Mutual knowledge, if it leads to self-identification, allows making cooperation a source of community opportunistic behaviours, which arise from the need to further individual interests through the satisfaction of collective interests. The case of the Consortium also shows that conviviality, if it is *cross-community*, makes the ability individual communities have to animate convivial moments (internally circumscribed by specialized resources) a source to foster transversal experiences sharing and, thus, reciprocal contamination among communities (closeness as source of openness). What may follow is the development of conditions (knowledge of potential, empathy-based trust) to generate business relations. Therefore, also a *cross-community conviviality* can indirectly contribute to creating a fabric of business and socialization.

In the convivial moments of the Italian Fashion Association (table 2.A), this plot emerges when the *trust based on mutual understanding* (empathy) can overcome cultural and professional barriers that can elapse between companies as bearers of different competences. This makes it possible to intensify the dialogue between actors, which, would otherwise remain closed in their spheres of action. More specifically, expert service firms (lawyers, accountants, etc...) adapt their specialization to develop new collaborations with the community of fashion companies enlarging or intensifying their business relations. It follows that *empathy-based trust* not only coexists with forms of collective opportunism (see Consortium), but also can intermediate specialization closed to some actors and makes it a source of openness in terms of interactive business perspectives (closeness as source of openness). Cross-community convivial experiences together with empathy based-trust contribute to the coexistence of closeness and openness. The empathy based-trust can have a more direct impact on business relations to the extent to which self-identification already embeds the reciprocal knowledge of potential abilities.

In the case of the Italian community in China (table 2.B), trust due to self-identification in experiences both professional and of real life characterize the internal social relations but this is not by itself able to convert into business relations. The emerging *empathy-based trust*, in fact, must be managed and channelled towards the development of business relations. The conversion is therefore not spontaneous, but mediated. It is up to its management organisms (*intracommunity social relations mediator*) which identify, propose and organize collective business activities exploiting Italian companies' business motivations. They can make *individualistic* business attitudes a source of *collectivistic* entrepreneurial attitude. In this sense conviviality seems to enrich the relational atmosphere with another trade-off, that of individualistic versus collectivistic business culture. This is a trade-off that further refines that between *closeness* and *openness*. In China, convivial moments that are self-managed can favour social relations between managers of the Italian companies and their local workers. However, these relations are not directly transformed into business relations; if this is to take place, they have to be mediated through other social relations that are locally developed and managed. More specifically, internal workers are members of an Italian community and a local community. They can create a bridge between the two. Thus, they are in the right position to exploit their social relations to develop business relations to the benefit of the company where they work. Therefore, convivial moments that are not institutionally formalized develop social relationships whose change into business relations requires an intercommunity mediation. This mediation has not only an organizational nature like that of intracommunity. In fact, it also depends on the trust resulting from the mechanisms of mutual respect and the exchange of social obligations (Cunningham and Homse, 1986) the mediator has in the local social network. The mediator is, thus, a mediator of trust, which lays the foundations for regenerating the local underlying mechanisms in the relations between the Italian company and the Chinese community (*intercommunity social relations mediator*). The possible reproduction of a protected environment involving the two communities generates

openness in terms of business activities (closeness of the Chinese community as source of openness). The trust it generates, considering the strong personal content, tends to take empathetic characters that is of mutual understanding.

The components of the atmosphere that do not emerge from the conversion of social into business relations within the communities investigated are those related to power/distance and expectations. The analysis of these factors will require specific insights with the community members. However, our exploratory results show that the elements of some atmosphere components coexist at the moment in which the social capital produced is transformed into the relational capital; their coexistence is as if it fuelled a *sort of zero-moment of relational conversion*. We wonder what will happen after this time-zero. In other words, it could be interesting to investigate whether the elements that, assembled, constitute the atmosphere break up and regain their autonomy together with the development of the relation. If this were so, it would mean that with time we would be witnessing a continual evolution of the poles trust/opportunism, openness/closeness and collaboration/competition. Thus, we ask ourselves if conviviality effects on the atmosphere components are short term or long term. The activation of the moment-zero of conversion depends upon the social capital that emerges in the course of the convivial moments from specific trade-offs characterizing its dimensions. These may be formulated as revealing vs concealing oneself (the introspective dimension), narrating vs describing oneself (the experiential dimension) and recognizing vs alienating oneself (the empathetic dimension). These trade-offs lay the foundations for the generation of common, shareable resources that can lead to new business relations and, consequently, to important effects in terms of relation management. The community social capital generated by genuine friendliness could lead the participants, especially entrepreneurs, to rethink their business activities and hence reshape their business relations to modify the structure of the business networks they belong to. In the final analysis, aside from the results just described, it emerges that the relation between conviviality antecedents and tools, social network and relation network is complex and may be approached from a range of analytical perspectives (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Conviviality tools as a process unifying social and business networks

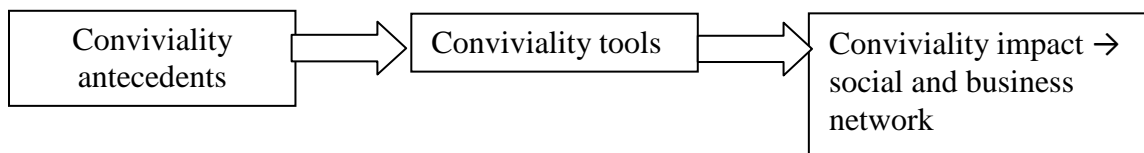


Table 2.A – Conviviality tools and management: their impact on social capital and on the relation between social and business networks						
	Tools	Management	Technology	Social Capital in convivial business network (some examples)	Bridging social and business networks	Bridging driver(s)
Leather Consortium	- Dinners (Christmas and pre-summer holidays) - Football Tournaments	Self-management of conviviality	Complementary and instrumental tool	<p>“[It gave rise to a] real convivial celebration, in which the topics were not bags or leather, but rather the desire to be together and to know each other in depth” (<i>Introspective content</i>).</p> <p>“We deepen our mutual knowledge professionally and each of us knows the business experience of the other with all the problems and successes” (<i>Experiential content</i>).</p> <p>“Fifteen years of convivial meetings ensured that when the need to set up a consortium of some importance emerged, it was easier to agree because we could understand each other and thus trust each other” (<i>Empathetic content</i>).</p> <p>“Conviviality [can be an] associative marketing tool ... [to identify with and to transmit to] young people the idea that a business opportunity may come from the opening of a new business in addition to their passion for a job” (<i>Empathetic content</i>).</p>	<p>- Mutual knowledge of reciprocal potential makes competition a source of collaboration (<i>competition as source of collaboration</i>)</p> <p>- Empathy-based trust is instrumental in making business decisions, collectively opportunistic (<i>trust as source of opportunism</i>)</p> <p>- The cross-community conviviality makes the ability individual communities have to animate convivial moments (specialized resources that are internally enclosed) a way to foster the sharing of transversal business experiences among communities (<i>closeness as source of openness</i>) → There may emerge conditions (potential knowledge, empathy-based trust) as drivers of business relations.</p>	<p>Knowledge of reciprocal potential skills</p> <p>Empathy-based trust</p> <p>Cross-community conviviality</p>
Textile Association	Seminars, training courses, periodic meetings	Master of ceremony	Complementary and instrumental tool	<p>“Conviviality is a direct and spontaneous comparison, usually organized around a "long table so that people look each other in the face, revealing themselves: [this is because] it is necessary to express our ideas in front of others” (<i>Introspective content</i>).</p> <p>“To power the intensity of participation we try to share individual experiences that are filtered through cultural events”. (<i>Experiential content</i>).</p> <p>“The members are chosen among them because there are sympathies, mutual understanding, a style they like and adapt to dialogue even in a more specific way”. (<i>Empathetic content</i>)</p>	<p>- Trust empathy-based intermediates specialization of some community members (lawyers, accountants, etc.) and makes it a source of openness in terms of interactive business perspectives (<i>closeness as source of openness</i>).</p>	<p>Empathy based trust</p>

Source: our elaboration from empirical data

	Tools	Management	Technology	Social Capital in convivial business network (some examples)	Bridging social and business networks	Bridging driver
Italian Fashion Association	Seminars, training courses, periodic meetings	Self-management of conviviality	Technology as a means of preserving collective participation by giving continuity to convivial events..	<p>“Before the dinners, we have the opportunity to meeting, have exchanges, support each other, even revealing and share real problems” (<i>Introspective content</i>).</p> <p>“During the dinner you can meet other Italians working in the same area and usually you may exchange life and professional experiences (<i>Experiential content</i>).</p> <p>“Given the distance from home it is quite spontaneous to assume a participatory attitude to shared problems within the group” (<i>Empathetic content</i>).</p>	<p>- <i>Intracommunity social relations mediator</i> → able to manage and channel the emerging empathy-based trust towards the development of business relations. He identifies, proposes and organizes collective business activities exploiting foreign companies’ business motivations (<i>individualistic business attitude as source of collectivistic entrepreneurial attitude</i>).</p> <p>- <i>Intercommunity social relations mediator</i> uses his social relations as a source of business relations with local actors to the benefit of the Italian business where he works. He is a mediator of trust capable of regenerating the underlying mechanisms (exchange of social obligations, mutual respect) in the relations between the Italian company and the Chinese community. Thus, the reproduction of a protected environment creates openness in terms of business activities (<i>closeness as source of openness</i>).</p>	Intra/Inter community social relations mediator
Source: our elaboration from empirical data						

Limitation and conclusions

The current research is an attempt to delve into the mechanisms of sharing generated by conviviality and their impact on social and business networks. Although this brief discussion is the outcome of a purely exploratory analysis, it represents the motive force for continuing on to the next stages of research, which is to consist of ethnographic immersion (Le Compte and Schensul, 2010) into the community under study as well as others.

Our paper has some limitations. First, the limited number of interviews, which were carried out in depth. Then, it is also necessary to examine in greater detail the mechanisms that transform social relation into business relations. In particular we aim to investigate the impact that conviviality tools have on the trade-offs of the relational atmosphere, the sources that make them coexistent as well as the relation trade-offs and the relative sources able of fostering the moment zero of conversion.

Despite the path we are aware must be undertaken before reaching a scientific conceptualization of the phenomenon, we believe that our analysis of conviviality enables the identification of new approaches to the understanding of the mechanisms operating between social and business relations. Moreover, we believe that the approach adopted can, in addition to assessing the actual impact of conviviality on business relations, also contribute to responding to the crisis, in terms of loss of identity and unifying values, now affecting our national business system. In this regard, we are quite convinced that conviviality, especially transverse and non-self-referential, can reduce current trends towards social individualism (Flint and Robinson, 2008), which has become an end in itself and likely represents a significant weakness in our industrial system, and open up greater possibilities for a revival in both social and business practices based on a stronger sense of participation and collective sharing.

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