Clusters & Institutions

The impact of institutional thickness on the economic performance of a creative cluster

Student Name: Leonardo Fuligni

Student Number: 419148

Supervisor: Mariangela Lavanga

M. A. Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

Creative clusters are now a popular topic in academic literature and a lot has been written on the positive externalities that emerge from the spatial co-location of similar firms in the same geographic area. At the same time though, academic literature has not yet provided strong empirical evidence on why clusters develop in certain regions. Scholars most often attribute the causes of the development of a cluster to two factors, namely specialisation and human capital. However, a third, less explored approach considers institutions as an equally important determinant of a cluster's development. The argument of this thesis is in line with the institutional economist perspective and bases its scope on Amin & Thrift's notion of *institutional thickness* (1995). In other words, it maintains that the emergence of formal and informal (alternatively, *de jure* and *de facto*) institutions is not merely a consequence of agglomeration economies, but rather a key determinant in stimulating the endogenous potential of a region. In particular, the present thesis offers an account of how an increase in institutional thickness affects the economic performance of a creative cluster in terms of buzz and internal interactions, knowledge creation: spillovers and innovation, labour market, and openness and external interactions. This research adopts a mixed methods approach and focuses on Italian fashion clusters, which in the beginning of the 1990s started experiencing severe economic problems and losing competitiveness on the global markets, despite their high levels of specialisation and human capital. In particular, it investigates the economic impacts of Apulia Fashion Makers, a *de facto* institution that coordinates the activities of a fashion industrial district in the South of Italy, a region often disregarded by academic literature in the field and considered backward in terms of both economic performance and social capital. The analysis is then completed by comparing Apulia Fashion Makers with Consorzio della Moda, a similar, but more established *de facto* institution that is located in the Northeast of the country and that is considered as a best practice by AFM members. This thesis finds positive results for each indicator and concludes that by increasing its learning-base competitiveness and local and global buzz, institutional thickness is able to shape the long run sustainability of a creative cluster.

KEYWORDS: creative cluster, institutional thickness, buzz, knowledge creation, cluster openness

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 5
1. Introduction 6
2. Literature Review 9
2.1 Industrial districts and clusters 9
2.1.1 Definition 9
2.1.2 Creative clusters 10
2.1.3 The concentration of creative industries: empirical evidence 12
2.2 The economic performance of a cluster 13
2.2.1 Localisation and Urbanisation economies 13
2.2.2 The buzz 16
2.2.3 Openness of the cluster 18
2.3 Italian fashion clusters 19
2.3.1 General characteristics 19
2.3.2 The current issues for Italian fashion clusters 21
2.4 How creative clusters develop 23
2.4.1 Three theoretical approaches to clusters' development 24
2.4.2 Institutional thickness 25
3. Methods 28
3.1 Research design and operationalisation 28
3.2 Data sampling 30
3.3 Data collection 32
3.3.1 Quantitative research 32
3.3.2 Qualitative research 33
3.4.1 Quantitative research 35
3.4.2 Qualitative research 36
3.5 Limitations 37
4. Results and Discussion 39
4.1 Apulia Fashion Makers 39
4.2 Consorzio della Moda 41
4.3 How institutional thickness affects the economic performance of a cluster 42
4.3.1 Buzz and internal interactions 42

4.3.2 Knowledge creation: spillovers and innovation 45
4.3.3 Labour market 47
4.3.4 Openness and external interactions 49
5. Conclusion 52
References 56
Appendix 60
A. Interviewees Overview 60
B. Survey 61
B.1 Italian version 61
B.2 English version 66
C. Interview guidelines (Italian version) 71
C.1 Structured interview guideline for educational institute (Italian) 72
C.2 Structured interview guideline for educational institute (English) 73
D. Overview of codes and categories 75
E. Relationships among categories 77
F. Quantitative results: average scores and standard deviation per statement 78

Index of Figures

Fig. 1: Absolute employment in creative industries by LLM 13
Fig. 2: AFM has increased our contacts with similar firms in our cluster (survey results) 42
Fig. 3: AFM's contribution to knowledge creation (survey results) 46
Fig. 4: AFM's influence on the cluster's openness and external relations (survey results) 50

Index of Tables

Table 1: Localisation and Urbanisation Economies 11
Table 2: European Commission's definition of SMEs 19
Table 3: Interview Guidelines 30

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1. Introduction

The concept of cluster has been present in economic theory for almost more than a century now (Marshall, 1982), but it is only in the recent years that it has reached the attention of academics and policy makers as a catalyst for economic and social development, innovation and urban regeneration (Chapain et al, 2010; Santagata, 2014). Indeed, ever since the publication of the work of the Italian scholar Becattini (1990), a conspicuous line of research has started investigating the positive externalities that firms seemed to enjoy by simply being located in the same place. Taking as examples the industries in the Third Italy, Hollywood or San Francisco, scholars were able to demonstrate that the reason why certain regions could impose themselves as leading centres of production on the global market was a series of endogenous factors that were determined by geographic colocation (Scott, 2008). Externalities such as reduction of transaction costs, knowledge spillovers and skilled labour force were found in patterns that characterised the economic performance of industrial districts and determined their long run sustainability. Particular attention was paid to *creative clusters*, given a general tendency of the firms in this sector to locate in the same geographic area (Lazzeretti et al., 2008; Boix et al., 2014). Indeed, the colocation of creative firms in industrial districts and metropolitan areas appears correlated with peculiar localisation and urbanisation economies, which Lorenzen & Frederiksen (2008) thoroughly describe in terms of industry, of labour market, and of institutions and infrastructures.

A renewed emphasis to economic geography and agglomeration economies led to significant attempts at the political level to reproduce the unusual success of these regions elsewhere. Nevertheless, this has not always been possible, because the economic performance of a cluster seems inevitably intertwined with other factors that are not easily replicable, such as the settlement of an industrial atmosphere, or *buzz*, peculiar to the milieu (Marshall, 1982; Santagata, 2014) and connections with distantly located actors, or *global pipelines* (Bathelt et al., 2004). In fact, academic research has not yet provided strong empirical evidence on why clusters develop in certain regions. Indeed, "social science does *not* have a satisfactory answer for why an industry might have a strong cluster in a *particular* place and not another" (Storper, 2009; p. 27). Even so, different theoretical approaches have emerged in the literature to find the cause of agglomeration economies. The classical argument advocates that cluster benefits be due to the specialisation of firms in one or more outputs of production (Porter 2000; Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). A second reasoning considers human

capital as the main cause of a cluster formation: the defendants of this position often suggest that "jobs follow people" and that the attraction of talented individuals is crucial for the creation of a creative atmosphere (Hall, 2000; Florida, 2004).

The present thesis takes none of these two positions exclusively, but rather agrees with Scott (2005) that a creative cluster's development is determined at the same time by the mutual influence of endogenous forces and several empirical attributes of a given place. Furthermore, following Storper's rationale in accounting for why certain cities develop more than others do, it considers a third factor to be crucial in the development of a cluster, i.e. institutions (Storper, 2010). In other words, it maintains that the emergence of formal and informal (alternatively, *de jure* and *de facto*) institutions is not merely a consequence of agglomeration economies, as maintained by most scholars, but rather a key determinant in stimulating the endogenous potential of a region. Convinced that "institutions matter" and that every market is embedded in its context (Polanyi, 1944), the argument of this thesis is in line with what is known as institutional economist perspective and bases its scope on Amin & Thrift's notion of *institutional thickness* (1995). The latter, as reported by Coulson and Ferrario (2007), refers to an ensemble of non-economic factors that nonetheless have an extremely positive impact on local economic development, i.e. institutional presence, interactions between local organisations, mutual awareness of being involved in a common enterprise, structures of domination and/or coalition (Amin & Thrift, 1995). Despite its relevance, though, the institutionalist argument is the least explored by empirical research and deserves further attention (Storper, 2010). In particular, investing in institutional thickness could represent a valuable asset in improving an industrial's district performance and adaptability in the long run. Indeed, by increasing the relational assets and interdependencies, formal and informal institutions are maintained to improve the buzz and learning-based competitiveness of creative clusters (Amin, 1999; Santagata, 2014).

The purpose of this thesis is to study the effects of an increase in institutional thickness on the creative cluster's economic performance according to four indicators developed throughout to the literature review, i.e. buzz and internal interactions, knowledge creation: spillovers and innovation, labour market, and openness and external interactions. Since this research is one of the first empirical attempts to study institutional thickness as a determinant of agglomeration economies, it is interesting to go back where it all started and consider the case of Italian industrial districts, as already suggested by Amin & Thrift (1995). Indeed, despite the high levels of specialisation and human capital that made Made in Italy manufacturing famous in the world, many creative clusters, especially in the fashion industry, have been suffering from increased competition on the global market and losing their economic competitiveness. These conditions appear even harsher in the South of Italy, a region

often forgotten by the literature about clusters and considered weak in terms of economic performance and social capital (Putnam, 1993; Colombo & Regini, 2016). On the contrary, the current research suggests that an increment in local institutional thickness might be crucial in avoiding lock-in situations and stimulating a renewed endogenous growth in the long run. The research question goes as follows:

RQ: How does an increase in institutional thickness enhance the economic performance of a creative cluster?

This thesis tries to answer the research question by investigating with a mixed methods approach the case of Apulia Fashion Makers (AFM), an informal institution that coordinates the activities of a group of Made in Italy fashion manufacturers in the South of Italy. Results are then triangulated with the investigation of a more established informal institution in the Northeast, i.e. Consorzio della Moda (CM), considered as a best practice by AFM members. AFM connects firms in different micro-clusters in the Apulia region, but all with the same geographical identity: in such a sense, it enlarges the borders of the industrial districts in one big agglomeration of firms. The association emerged spontaneously as a joint, coordinated effort to respond to the increasing competition faced at the global level, which threatens the survival itself of the creative district. The hypothesis of this thesis is that increasing contacts internally and externally and therefore affecting the cluster's buzz both locally and globally (Storper & Venables, 2004; Bathelt & Turi, 2013), AFM has positively influenced not only the whole set of agglomeration economies, but also the evolution of the entire creative cluster.

The theoretical concepts relevant to the current research question are first analysed in the literature review, where the notions of creative cluster and agglomeration economies are thoroughly scrutinised; Italian fashion clusters and their current issues are presented to the reader; and the main theoretical approaches to the development of a cluster are analysed, with particular attention to the institutionalist perspective. In the methods section, the research is illustrated in all its steps, i.e. from design and operationalisation to data sampling, collection and analysis. Thereafter, results are discussed according to the four indicators developed from the literature review and related to the theoretical framework. Finally, the closing chapter offers conclusive remarks and implications for future research and policymaking.

2. Literature Review

This chapter guides the reader through the theoretical concepts that are necessary to answer to the research question. In the first section, the notions of *cluster* and *creative cluster* are briefly presented as described in the major literature contributions. Second, the benefits of clustering or agglomeration economies for creative industries are illustrated as analysed by Lorenzen & Frederiksen (2008). Particular attention is paid to the concept of *buzz*, the "information and communication ecology" that fosters the development of a creative atmosphere (Bathelt et al., 2004). The buzz is a key factor in the economic success of a cluster and is cultivated internally via *face-to-face interactions* (Storper & Venables, 2004), and influenced externally through the construction of *global pipelines* (Bathelt et al., 2004). Next, a digression is made around the general characteristics of fashion clusters in Italy and on the issues that they currently face. The final section discusses the question of how creative clusters develop: possible answers are built around specialisation, human capital or, alternatively, institutions (Storper, 2010). Unlike most empirical research, the present thesis considers the three of them as concurrent and mutually influential phenomena, but puts its emphasis on the concept of *institutional thickness* (Amin & Thrift, 1995) as a drive of a creative cluster's development that positively affects its economic performance in the long run.

2.1 Industrial districts and clusters

2.1.1 Definition

The concept of *cluster* is not new in economic literature: already Adam Smith in his notable *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) argued for the economic benefits deriving from the colocation of specialised firms in the same geographic area. These benefits, usually known as agglomeration economies, were officially introduced in the economic discourse as early as the end of the 19th century, when in his *Principles of Economics*, Marshall (1982) pointed at technological spillovers, labour force availability, and firms' specialisation as the main benefits of what he named *industrial districts*. This innovative concept was given less importance in the following years and was rediscovered only at the end of the 20th century by the Italian scholar Becattini (1990). In a chapter of his *Industrial districts and inter-firm co-operation in Italy*, Becattini (1990) reopened the

discussion on the Marshallian view of industrial districts, described as complex systems that needed to be investigated with an interdisciplinary approach and with the joint contribution of several scholars, such as economists, sociologists and geographers (Lazzeretti et al., 2014).

The contribution of Becattini (1990) became very popular and the concept of cluster received increased academic attention in the following years. Indeed, as shown by a study based on ISI–Thomson Reuters Web of Science database by Lazzeretti et al. (2014), the number of journals that published academic articles on clusters grew exponentially between 1989 and 2010. The father of cluster analysis is though recognised in Michael Porter, whose definition of cluster as a "critical mass of companies in a particular field in a particular location, whether it is a country, a state or region, or even a city" (Porter, 1998; p. 10) is probably the most quoted in the literature. The same definition was later on elaborated to incorporate all the agents and infrastructures that contribute to a district's success. Clusters were then defined as "geographical concentrations of interconnected companies, specialised suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries and associated institutions (e.g. universities, standards agencies, trade associations) in a particular field that compete but also co-operate. Clusters, or critical masses of unusual competitive success in particular business areas, are a striking feature of virtually every national, regional, state, and even metropolitan economy, especially in more advanced nations" (Porter, 2000, p. 15). This very last statement represents the reason why, in the recent years, clusters and agglomeration economies have received increased attention also from policymakers, who often tried to replicate the unusual economic success of certain regions in other places.

Nevertheless, despite the increasing academic popularity, the concept of cluster is still chaotic, as scholars have investigated it with significantly different approaches. Lazzeretti at al. (2014) attribute this theoretical vagueness to three intrinsic features of the cluster concept, namely multidisciplinarity, cross-disciplinarity, and global dimension. In their perspective though, the lack of clear boundaries does not constitute a threat to academic reliability, but an opportunity to carry out dynamic and evolutionary studies. For such a reason, it makes sense to keep investigating unexamined peculiar cases, as new interrogations will inevitably lead to new answers and add new shades to the multi-faceted understanding of clusters.

2.1.2 Creative clusters

There exists a large diversity of clusters, whose activities of specialisation usually range across different sectors, such as finance, pharmaceuticals and high-tech. However, when investigating

industrial districts, most academic literature has focused on *creative clusters*, dense concentrations of firms that operate in the creative industries and in the cultural economy. Creative clusters appear characterised by an intrinsic ambiguity, which represents the main reason of the objective of their analysis. Indeed, scholars usually agree that these clusters represent the most challenging domain of study for researchers, because they constitute a multi-faceted phenomenon subject to both the agglomeration economies typical of geographic concentration and to the intrinsic traits of cultural and creative goods (Branzanti, 2014). In particular, Santagata (2014) defines them as "economic and social experiences generated by two phenomena: the localisation of production activities [Marshall, 1920] and the idiosyncratic nature of culture and cultural goods" (Santagata, 2014; p. 61).

Creative clusters are embedded in the core of what Scott (2008) calls the upcoming *cognitive-cultural economy*, a Post-Fordist wave of capitalism emerging from the reconciliation and the surpassing of the tension between aesthetics and accumulation. However, writing the boundaries of creative industries is not an easy task, because they include all those firms that, by incorporating aesthetic and semiotic content, operate as the channels of the commodification of culture (Scott, 2008). Theoretically, they can be described as "an ensemble of sectors offering both manufactured products and services through which consumers construct distinctive forms of individuality, self-affirmation and social display, and from which they derive entertainment, edification, and information" (Scott, 2008; p. 84). Conversely, UNESCO defines them as "those industries that combine the creation, production and commercialisation of contents which are intangible and cultural in nature. These contents are typically protected by copyright and they can take the form of goods or services" (UNESCO, 2000; pp. 11-12).

Since scholars use no univocal classification of creative industries when conducting research, empirical typologies differ a lot from each other in including or excluding some industries. British studies usually draw upon the definition of creative industries provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in 1998 as in the case of the 2010 NESTA Report (Chapain et al., 2010). Other scholars distinguish between cultural and creative industries. However, given the close of substitutability of the products, this thesis follows the argument by Towse (2010) that the degree of arbitrariness in allocating an output to an industry or the other is sometimes so high that it does not make sense to make such a differentiation. Indeed, this thesis suggests adopting the comprehensive empirical definition of creative industries provided by UNESCO, which includes "printing, publishing, advertising and related services, architecture and engineering, arts and antique trade, crafts, design and specialised design services, designer fashion, film, music, performing and visual arts, photography, broadcasting, software, computer games and electronic publishing, and heritage"

(Boix et al., 2014). The latter can be paralleled with the institutional definition selected by the authorities responsible for the region where this empirical research is conducted and Apulia Fashion Makers is located, namely the Italian region of Apulia. Indeed, Symbola foundation (2015), official partner of the strategic plan I.C.E. (Innovation, Culture and Creativity for a new Economy) for the industrial district *Puglia Creativa* in Apulia, lists: architecture, advertising, design (& fashion); broadcasting (film, video, radio & TV), publishing industry, software & videogames, music, historic and artistic heritage, performing and visual arts, and creative driven industries such as craft (Symbola, 2015; p.15).

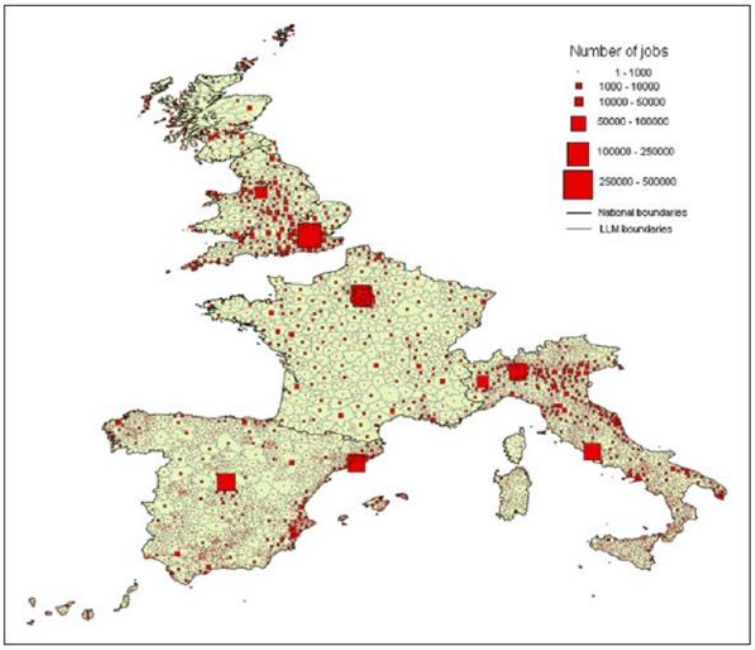
2.1.3 The concentration of creative industries: empirical evidence

Several empirical studies have now proven that creative industries tend to cluster. Lazzeretti et al. (2008) investigated creativity concentration in Local Production Systems (LPSs), social territorial entities facilitating the clustering of creative industries, by mapping the creative districts distribution in Italy and Spain. In their inquiry, Lazzeretti et al. (2008) consider both traditional cultural industries (i.e. publishing, architecture and engineer studios, music, film and performing arts) and non-traditional creative industries, such as research and development (including graphic design and fashion), software and computer services and advertising. In their results, these scholars find a lively creative sector in both countries: 5.6% of total employment in Italy and 4.1% in Spain, with a major development in traditional sectors (66% and 68% in Italy and Spain, respectively). After identifying 62 creative LPSs in Italy and 25 in Spain, the authors conclude with evidence that creative industries tend to cluster in the majority of cases close to big cities –as confirmed by the literature (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008), but with some relevant rural exceptions in Italy. In addition, the Italian creative sector results much more diverse than its Spanish counterpart. Indeed, "The number and variety of Creative LPSs is greater in Italy (42 specialized in traditional creative industries, 11 specialized in non-traditional and 9 diversified) than in Spain (17 specialized in traditional creative industries, 9 diversified and none of them is exclusively non-traditional)" (Lazzeretti et al., 2008; p. 564).

Another interesting study comes from Boix et al. (2014), who conduct a cross-country empirical analysis on cultural and creative industries distribution based on employment data and local labour markets (LLMs) in Great Britain, France, Italy and Spain. Particularly, they consider LLMs with more than 1,000 employees to capture only highly concentrated areas. In their findings, "The largest is found in Italy with 8.8%, followed by Great Britain with more than 6%. In contrast, creative

employment accounted for just above 5% in France and 5.8% in Spain" (Boix et al., 2014; p.3), as shown in Fig. 1. However, although creative industries appear highly concentrated in each of the countries analysed for almost two thirds of creative employments, there exist some significant differences in distribution (Boix et al., 2014). France and Spain show concentration mainly around big creative cities, i.e. Paris, Madrid and Barcelona. The main pole of attraction in Great Britain is represented by London, but there are still some considerable secondary hotspots, such as Edinburgh or Manchester. The most particular diffusion is nonetheless shown by Italy, with three big hotspots, namely Rome, Milan and Turin, but with a peculiar polycentric pattern of diffusion around medium sized towns.

Fig. 1: Absolute employment in creative industries by LLM



Source: Boix et al., 2014; p.4

2.2 The economic performance of a cluster

2.2.1 Localisation and Urbanisation economies

Given their intrinsic tendency to cluster, academic literature has investigated the reasons why creative industries tend to concentrate in the same place. The positive externalities deriving from the spatial proximity of similar firms are usually known as *agglomeration economies* and represent the competitive advantage of the clustering process (Branzanti, 2014). Lorenzen & Frederiksen (2008) classify agglomeration economies according to different types of clusters, as they maintain there exist

systematic differences between the benefits enjoyed by clusters arising in rural areas and in urban or metropolitan regions. Indeed, they distinguish between *localisation* economies, i.e. the positive externalities arising from the specialisation of firms in the same geographic region; and *urbanisation economies*, namely the positive externalities enjoyed by the diversity of firms clustered in an urban area (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). The two economies are not mutually excludable, as there exist numerous cases of overlapping. In particular, localisation and urbanisation economies are classified according to three big areas of benefits: externalities coming from the industry, from the labour market and from institutions and infrastructures, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Localisation and Urbanisation Economies

	LOCALISATION ECONOMIES: Externalities from specialisation	**URBANISATION ECONOMIES: Externalities from diversity**
… of industry	• Static externalities: Coordination between related knowledge bases (flexible specialisation) → Product flexibility and variety • Dynamic externalities: spillovers between related knowledge bases → Incremental Innovation • Competition → Efficiency	• Static externalities: coordination between unrelated knowledge bases (temporary collaborations) → Product novelty • Dynamic externalities: spillovers between unrelated knowledge bases → Radical Innovation • Venture capital flows between industries → Start-ups and expansions • Vacant facilities abandoned by other industries → Start-ups and expansions
… of labour market	• Abundant deep skills → Quality	• Broad and varied skills → Spread of ideas, entrepreneurship
… of institutions and infrastructures	• Tecnhical specialised (secondary) education, technical services, industry services → Deepening of knowledge and skills • Focal points, conventions → Low transaction costs and delivery times; efficient communications	• University education, public research → Deepening and broadening of knowledge and skills • Pipelines: MCNs, airports → Global knowledge and ideas • Diverse housing, cultural offer, tolerance → Attraction of global talent • Built environment → Buzz

Source: Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008; p. 3

In the first group of benefits, firms that enjoy localisation economies are able to use each other's knowledge and specialisation by collaborating in the supply chain, establishing networks and constructing temporary projects. This coordination leads to the generation of static externalities, resulting in product flexibility and variety (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Secondly, dynamic

externalities arising from knowledge and technological spillovers lead to incremental innovation, through small changes that improve production by adding and combining existing knowledge. In particular, innovation for creative goods appears strictly correlated with flexible interactions across firms, such as joint projects. However, only in an urban setting, the co-location of different firms and clusters creates the pre-conditions for spillovers with unrelated knowledge bases that lead to creative destruction (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Indeed, only urbanisation economies are able to ensure the diversity of skills and expertise necessary to bring about product novelty and diversity. More importantly, only megacities, such as London, Los Angeles or New York, and small, but global cities, such as San Francisco, Milan or Amsterdam, have the potential to introduce in the market groundbreaking products that if also commercially successful, will revolutionise the cultural economy (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Thirdly, as also maintained by Porter (2000) and Branzanti (2014), concentrated competition leads to a major efficiency in regional clusters and attracts venture capital and investments in urban districts. Finally, in the case of urbanisation economies, particular benefits may also arise from the availability of empty facilities at cheap rents, facilitating industry expansions and start-ups.

The second class of externalities stems from the quality of the labour market. In localisation economies, the concentration of firms leads to a deep specialisation of relevant skills, but increases the risks of fierce job mobility and wage increases (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008; Branzanti, 2014). Indeed, the mobility of the labour force plays a fundamental role in creative clusters, as inter-firm turnover is usually maintained to be one of the main mechanisms for knowledge transmission and innovation, especially in industrial milieus characterised by small and medium enterprises as in the Italian context. Similarly, in the case of urbanisation economies, the existence of overlapping markets implies diversity of labours, where workers with different skills occupy positions in different clusters. This is also confirmed by the results of the study by Vinodrai (2006) conducted in the Toronto design districts, where high skilled designers alternate jobs in the fashion and industry design with temporary or free-lancing projects, internships and periods of self-employment. Concerning the labour market, it is important to mention that a significant part of empirical research has studied the relationship between the cluster dynamics and wages. Kemeny & Storper (2015) found a positive relation between specialisation and wages, whereas Pieroni & Pompei (2008) detected a strong correlation between innovation and wage levels, with jobs turnover being only an endogenous factor. In particular for the Made in Italy sector (including textiles, wood and furniture, non-metallic mineral products and metal products), the level of white collars wages results as the highest determinant of innovation (Pieroni & Pompei, 2008).

The third set of economies pertains the institutions and infrastructures of the cluster. Indeed, due to the co-location of firms, also institutions specialise to provide the firms in the cluster with the specific knowledge they need to sustain. In particular, education and research centres provide help in deepening skills and technologies used by the industries in the district. As also confirmed by Branzanti (2014), the cluster may develop thinner institutions and ecologies, such as norms, conventions and communication strategies that facilitate the propagation of the externalities. Indeed, "knowledge flows important to the innovation process are highly subject to influences by the medium of communication" (Bathelt & Turi, 2013). In terms of urbanisation economies, the city itself tends to enhance positive externalities. As stated by Lorenzen & Frederiksen (2008), universities are typically urban and therefore provide for the high-level knowledge these firms need to produce radical innovation. Secondly, especially if they have good connections with international flows, cities attract multinationals and facilitate the construction of channels of information with alternatively remote places. Furthermore, some urban areas also offer a huge variety of infrastructures, ranging from housing facilities to more intangible cultural configurations that attract highly educated and talented people. This conclusion is in line with Florida's finding of a correlation between economic growth and highly educated people, by which a recipe for economic development in a city is to attract the three T's, namely *Technology*, *Talent* and *Tolerance* (Florida, 2004). Finally yet importantly, with their diverse scenes and places to go out, cities offer better conditions of developing a more vibrant atmosphere, also referred to as buzz, which is analysed in the next section.

2.2.2 The buzz

In creative clusters, agglomeration economies take place in a virtuous circle that is influenced by a set of intangible factors defining the identity of the district. Indeed, creative clusters appear characterised by a special awareness that there is something in the air, an *industrial atmosphere* as Marshall had already defined it (1982). This productive vibe is often defined as *buzz*, a notion that hints at "the information and communication ecology created by face-to-face contacts, co-presence and co-location of people and firms within the same industry and place or region" (Bathelt et al., 2004; p. 38). Hinging upon the Marshallian definition, Santagata (2014) refers to it as *creative atmosphere*, when the relationships among agents take the form of a flat network, a structure of relationships that maximises horizontal social interactions and goes beyond the linear production chain, or *filiera*. Participating in the buzz does not require special costs, as it is a spontaneous and automatic phenomenon. Indeed, the buzz does not take place only in the working environment, but is

a constant phenomenon in the spatial and temporal dimension of the milieu, particularly in urban environments, where the available facilities encourage informal interactions and help workers and entrepreneurs develop a useful network (Nijkamp, 2013).

In creative clusters, the buzz can be described as a constant noise of knowledge and information exchange that all actors enjoy monitoring and interacting with competitors, *by just being there* (Gertler, 1995). In particular, knowledge exchange within clusters appears as a multi-layered phenomenon characterised by two different types of knowledge: *codified* knowledge, absorbed explicitly from the outside, and *tacit* knowledge, acquired by doing, in practical experience within the production process, and internally to the cluster's dynamics (Belussi & Pilotti, 2002). Given their intrinsic properties, face-to-face interactions appear as the most important determinants of a district's buzz for four main reasons.

First, they are the most effective communication technology to exchange tacit knowledge (Storper & Venables, 2004). Second, by uncovering non-verbal expressions, F2F contacts represent an incentive to minimise coordination problems and increase trust (Storper & Venables, 2004; Bianchi, 2015). Third, although they are time-consuming, F2F communications allow the screening and socialising processes that are necessary for building a relationship with a potential partner (Storper & Venables, 2004). Finally, F2F contacts are performed in a way that increases the quantity and quality of information exchange, but also creates positive dynamics of imitation and competition (Storper & Venables, 2004).

Storper & Venables (2004) developed two models to demonstrate why firms engage in F2F interactions. In the first one, based on game theory, the two scholars assert that F2F meetings allow players to coordinate on the equilibrium where they all have positive effort levels (Storper & Venables, 2004). Indeed, F2F meeting function as pre-play coordination and discourage free riding because they are very costly and time-consuming. In the second one, they illustrate how informal relations help clusters' actors overcome anonymity and enhance the possibilities of screening others and certifying their abilities. In particular, due to the significantly high entry costs, informal networks concentrate people that are more skilled and tend to join more collective projects than outsiders; that earn more than outsiders; and that work harder than outsiders (Storper & Venables, 2004). These results are in line with Putnam's argument on social capital, whereby informal networks are maintained to stimulate dynamics of reciprocity by facilitating communication and trustworthiness, but also by embodying successful past collaborations as a common history (Putnam, 1993).

At the same time, it would be wrong to believe that every cluster is characterised by a positive buzz that will unconditionally ensure its success. In fact, a cluster buzz is influenced by different

internal and external factors. First, not all firms play the same role within a cluster, but there are usually some that are more influential in the process of knowledge creation and dissemination because they are able –and willing, to explicit tacit knowledge (Morrison, 2008). Second, the development of a cluster is strictly dependent on the firms' awareness of being part of a larger network (Chapain et al., 2010). Third, it is necessary that a cluster does not focus only on its internal dynamics, but also keeps relationships with the external world, as explored in the next section. Indeed, rigid and inward-looking rules of practice may lead to a negative lock-in of the cluster, so that member firms rely only on established forms of problem solving and organisational structures, closing their doors to the outside world (Bathelt & Turi, 2013).

2.2.3 Openness of the cluster

Some scholars are now critical of attributing the merits of a cluster's success only to buzz and agglomeration economies and propose that the competitiveness of clusters can now only be ensured if they are open, i.e. they are able to build and maintain stable channels of communication at the international level, also known as *global pipelines* (Bathelt et al., 2004). Indeed, the process of knowledge creation appears significantly enhanced by the possibility of interacting and exchanging information with actors that are distantly located and can therefore help to go beyond routinized practices (Bathelt et al., 2004). At the same time though, global pipelines cannot substitute the positive effects of the buzz, but only offer a valid support to increase the competitiveness of the industrial district. Indeed, global pipelines are usually narrow and targeted interactions that do not allow the spontaneous spillovers typical of proximate contacts (Bathelt et al., 2004). Moreover, establishing a pipeline is usually costly, not only in terms of financial investments, but also of time spent in succeeding to build someone else's trust, a practice that usually requires the long process of rituals establishment (Borghini et al., 2006). Finally, CMC (computer-mediated communication) cannot guarantee the same level of trust and tacit knowledge exchange that is guaranteed by F2F contacts (Bathelt & Turi, 2013).

A possible strategy of combining the benefits of global pipelines with those of the buzz is represented by the participation to international fairs. Indeed, international trade events can foster knowledge exchange and networking on a global basis by combining F2F meetings on a temporary basis and CMC interactions in long distance communication (Bathelt & Turi, 2013). Participating to global fairs benefits firms *during* the event in reaching out to new markets, knowledge sharing and recruiting project or full-time workers; but also *after* the event in building one's customer base and

reputation (Power & Jansson, 2008). In other words, international fairs offer the chance to participate to the *global buzz*, defined as "a multidimensional concept that promotes unique processes of knowledge dissemination and creation through interactive learning and learning by observation" (Bathelt & Turi, 2013; p. 68). Therefore, temporary fairs can be considered as *cyclical clusters*, defined as "complexes of overlapping spaces that are timed and arranged in such a way that spaces can be reproduced, re-enacted, and renewed over time in global circuits" (Power & Jansson, 2008; p. 445).

2.3 Italian fashion clusters

2.3.1 General characteristics

In general, creative industries are characterised by a constant oversupply of labour and, more importantly, by a general unpredictability of future market fluctuations, also known as "nobody knows rule" (Caves, 2000; Peltoniemi, 2015). The literature often suggests that, for creative firms, clustering can represent a successful mechanism against the uncertainty about the future, especially in the case of *fashion clusters*, where a complex interdependence is constructed to intercept trends and guarantee financial security in the final market (Aage & Belussi, 2008). Indeed, the market for fashion goods is highly uncertain and emerges "from a chaotic environment as a bottom-up, recursive process, partially controlled by fashion firms that scan external information sources and build some interpretative and creative capabilities developed together with external-to-the-firm agents" (Aage & Belussi, 2008; pp. 480-81). Fashion firms and manufacturers tend therefore to cluster in order to maximise the absorbing capabilities of external information and knowledge creation within the cluster through cooperative production chains and human resource mobility (Aage & Belussi, 2008). These features seem to be the key of the success of many creative clusters, as manifested by many Italian industrial districts, which imposed themselves on the global market as the leading creative hubs in the fashion industry.

As discussed above, Italy is characterised by a diffused and dense concentration of creative industries in clusters, with particular historical roots in fashion manufacturing due to a long tradition of artisanal production that dates back to the Renaissance silk and wool trades in Florence and Venice (Rossi 2014). However, Italian industrial districts went through a particular period of renovation during the 1980s, when they evolved as a new economic engine and a tangible example of the

decentralised Post-Fordist production, as analysed by Becattini (1990). These particular conditions paved the way for what in the literature of economic sociology is often referred to as the *Third Italy*, a collection of several small and medium manufacturing enterprises clustered between the North and the South that were able to innovate creative goods and high technology products on the international market (Julier, 2014). Indeed, these small firms proved able to be at the same time highly specialised and flexible enough to keep pace with the fluctuations in the market demand (Julier, 2014) and contributed to consecrate Made in Italy as a synonym for the beauty of design and the quality of manufacture of Italian fashion production. Historically, the term *Made in Italy* was officially coined in the 1980s with a campaign of the Italian Trade Commission and the Ente Moda Italiana (Rossi, 2014). Now it represents the most evocative link for consumers to the aesthetics, beauty, luxury, wellbeing and passion of Italian manufacturing (Kpmg, 2011). In particular, from the report "Going Global" conducted by Kpmg, it results that Made in Italy is the third most known brand in the world, only after Visa and Coca Cola.

Fashion creative clusters are spread throughout Italy at all scales, from huge concentration of firms such as the silk area in Como or the Footwear district in the Marche region, to smaller and local realities. Even though the Third Italy has always been identified with a geographical expression in the centre of the Italian peninsula, particular excellences in fashion manufacturing can be found everywhere. Academic attention though has been paid only to the Northern and Central regions of Italy, disregarding the South. In fact, Southern Italy is usually identified as one of the most backward regions in Italy and Europe, whose labour market conditions have always been characterised by high levels of unemployment, internal migration, lesser education, and civil service jobs (Colombo & Regini, 2016), often attributed to low levels of social capital (Putnam, 1993). These conditions though favoured self-employment in the sectors known as *light industries*, especially in fashion manufacturing, to which Northern brands often outsourced the manufacturing process because of cheaper labour costs (Colombo & Regini, 2016).

An empirical research was conducted by Dunford (2006) who studied Italian Textile and Clothing Industries (TCI) in terms of "magic circles" centred around the fashion capital of Milan, mostly located in the regions of Lombardia and Veneto, where also Consorzio della Moda is geographically located. From this analysis, it emerges that the Italian fashion system is characterised by few large brands based in the metropolitan region of Milan, which yet externalise the production processes to highly specialised firms that are spread all over the peninsula. These firms are known in Italian as *contoterzisti*, or subcontractors, because they realise a final product –but most often only part of it, for someone else's brand, and are paid a commission exclusively for the manufacturing

process. Most often, *contoterzisti* make only one or two phases of the manufacturing process and therefore tend to agglomerate in *filiera*, a cluster where all the actors of the production chain are concentrated (Santagata, 2014).

Given this specific production system, Italian firms in fashion clusters tend to have more modest dimensions than their European counterparts and usually fit in the categories of small and micro enterprises, according to the classification provided by the European Commission, summarised in Table 2. Indeed, in 2000, an average Italian firm in the textile and clothing industry employed only 10 workers compared to 15 in the EU15 (Dunford, 2006). In particular, small firms appear prevalent in the South, with the exception of Apulia that shows a larger share of middle-sized enterprises. Indeed, Southern regions showing good performances in welfare, such as Apulia (Colombo & Regini, 2016), have been able to develop thriving industrial districts in the fashion industry, especially in the Salento area, where Apulia Fashion Makers was born. Indeed, the area between Bari and Taranto, Putignano and Martina Franca, is among the most important textile and clothing industrial districts in Italy, with €335 million of turnover, 745 enterprises, 8,000 employees (Dunford, 2006).

Table 2: European Commission's definition of SMEs

Company category	**Staff headcount**	**Turnover**	or	**Balance sheet total**
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m		≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m		≤ € 2 m

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition/index_en.htm

2.3.2 The current issues for Italian fashion clusters

Basing production on artisanship and hand-made, but being at the same time increasingly internationally requested, Made in Italy fashion has always been characterised by a tension between mass-scale demand and craft-based supply (Rossi, 2014). In the past, this feature represented an incentive to come up with technological advancements and cunning devices to scale up artisanal production (Rossi, 2014) and ensured the success of Italian fashion clusters thanks to the concomitant effects of colocation and global connections (Scott, 2008). However, at the end of the 20th century, with the opening of the global markets, many Italian brands started delocalising segments of their

manufacture abroad, especially in the Eastern countries, such as China or Pakistan, where the labour force was incomparably cheaper. This created a negative lock-in situation in many fashion clusters, especially in the South, where most *contoterzisti* were forced to shut down their activities. The situation was further exacerbated by the unfair competition of all those manufacturers that searching for lower prices, delocalised their production abroad, but still declared a full Made in Italy product. Indeed, cutting down the costs, these manufacturers were much more competitive than those who kept their production in Italy and were therefore able to buy out large segments of the market.

Globalisation also entailed the immigration in Italy of cheaper labour and some *contoterzisti* started illegally replacing their workforce with non-registered immigrants, willing to accept lower wages and working conditions. This was the case of the famous textile district of Prato in the 1990s, when many big Made in Italy brands, such as Prada or Max Mara, took advantage of this new production system to enlarge their profits (Rossi, 2014). Later on, the same immigrants acquired textile skills and officially entered the market as entrepreneurs of the *pronto moda*, slowly becoming final producers instead of mere subcontractors (Dei Ottati, 2014). This caused a qualitative change in the organisational structure of the industrial district and excited the resentment of the local community that started abandoning the field of textiles (Dei Ottati, 2014). As a result, the native textile cluster appears now severely weakened.

Despite its urgency, no concrete joint action at the political level has been taken to sustain Italian fashion clusters so far. In this respect, neither Italian nor European law offer a proper legal support. Indeed, law allows to label as Made in Italy any final product of which at least four production phases took place in Italy. This provision, though, sets a threshold that is too low for the extremely complex fashion manufacturing process.

With politics lagging behind, academic research could offer viable solutions to relaunch the competitiveness of Italian fashion clusters. Dei Ottati (2014) suggests investing in fashion product design and distribution, reduction of production costs, but also partial internationalisation of production. Interesting insights come also from Della Corte et al. (2013), who investigated Neapolitan traditional artisanal micro firms that do not have the financial resources to access innovation on the global markets. The authors conducted multiple case studies, from which they concluded that artisanship represents at the same time an opportunity and a threat for future innovation, together with the costs of skilled labour (Della Corte et al., 2013). A path of development could originate from the growing awareness that firms are not individually competitive on the global markets, suggesting the creation of collaborative forms such as consortia, associations and business fairs. However, inter-prise collaborations appear determined by the concurrence of internal factors, i.e. individual

characteristics of the entrepreneur, organizational characteristics of the enterprise, relational characteristics, and environmental characteristics; and external factors, i.e. strength, type of governance, degree of trust and common objectives (Della Corte et al., 2013).

The authors can then conclude that cooperation in a networking perspective is the only way to lock out these traditional Made in Italy clusters and develop specific capabilities to favour the exchange of knowledge and exploit market positions (Della Corte et al., 2013). The authors therefore call for a pivotal actor, be it private or public, to boost territorial network logics (Della Corte et al., 2013). In other words, they call for an increase in the institutional thickness of the locale.

2.4 How creative clusters develop

Despite a great attention from scholars on agglomeration economies, academic theory has not found yet a framework that is able to account for the development of a cluster. In other words, "social science does *not* have a satisfactory answer for why an industry might have a strong cluster in a *particular* place and not another" (*Italics in text*) (Storper, 2009; p. 27). Many factors have been found to determine the formation of a cluster, but directions of causation are usually very blurry and the question of how certain regions or cities develop more than others remain largely unanswered (Storper, 2010). In fact, clusters are usually maintained to emerge in a *chaotic* way as a joint result of different endogenous and exogenous forces operating at the same time (Santagata, 2014). Indeed, after investigating the rise of the film industry in Hollywood, Scott (2008) recommends avoiding explanations based on simple lines of cause-effect *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, but suggests considering *cumulative causation* of random events in relation to endogenous pre-existing conditions. In these sense, clusters may or may not randomly develop as outcomes of a likely structure (Scott, 2008). In this scenario, particular tipping points may be due to the actions of singular individuals, but they can be fully understood only on the assumption that actors are mutually interdependent with the structure they happen to find themselves in (Rantisi, 2004).

Even so, academic literature has offered hypotheses on the main reasons for a cluster's development. Indeed, three different schools of thoughts attribute the merits of the successful evolution of an industrial district respectively to specialisation, human capital and institutions. The argument of this thesis is that none of them captures the *only* cause for the development of a cluster, but all three factors are mutually influential and feed back to each other. Nevertheless, investing on institutions might represent the most sustainable strategy in the long run, as specialisation always

implies the risk of lock-ins and there is no guarantee of a constant creativity growth across generations (Santagata, 2014). In particular, it is here advanced that the quality of formal and informal institutions is crucial in allowing the cluster's actors to recognise paths of future development.

2.4.1 Three theoretical approaches to clusters' development

The first and most common line of research considers specialisation as the main cause of a cluster's development. This is for example the point of view of Porter (2000) and of Lorenzen & Frederiksen (2008), who ascribe the source of localisation economies to firms' specialisation. This is often referred to as "the history matters" approach, because it aims at accounting for why, once an industry is implanted in a region, it keeps growing (Storper, 2010). However, this model presents a limitation. Every highly specialised cluster risks failing to adjust to the external environment and falling in lock-in stalemates. Some clusters manage to innovate and adapt to the new market fluctuations, but it remains difficult to explain these evolutions only in terms of specialisation without considering other endogenous factors such as human capital and institutions (Storper, 2010).

The second framework sees the cause of a cluster's success in human capital and is known as the "jobs follow people" approach. These scholars consider the presence of talented people as the most important factor in a creative city (Hall, 2000). In other words, some cities develop better than others because they are able to recreate the right social and infrastructural conditions to attract artists and skilled workers (Florida, 2004; Currid, 2007). Once again, the limitations of this approach lie in the lines of causation, as in these arguments skilled workers are often assumed to precede the amenities that attract them (Storper, 2010). Indeed, it appears impossible to account for a cluster development in terms of human capital without assuming endogenous factors such as specialisation and institutions to affect *in situ* characteristics (Storper, 2010).

The third school of thought is known as the "institutions matter" approach because it maintains that institutions are the cause of a cluster long run growth. This is by far the least explored of the three approaches, as there exists little empirical evidence on the institutionalist perspective. The institutionalist approach does not maintain that institutions are the only cause of a cluster's development, but claim that they are as important as specialisation and human capital, and not simply their consequence. Indeed, institutions have a strong potential in explaining why certain areas develop more than others, because they are able to account for the microeconomic environment (or business climate), the labour force participation and problem-solving attitude of the locale (Storper, 2010).

Institutions can be either formal, *de jure* political bodies, or informal *de facto* governance actors, such as public agencies, private-sector groups or bottom-up organisations as AFM and CM (Storper, 2010). The former have been the object of analysis of political economists, whose attention is devoted to how the political agenda affects the economy. Conversely, Storper focuses his attention on *de facto* institutions. Indeed, regional and urban clusters usually differ a lot in terms of political cultures and levels of social capital (Putnam, 1993). For such a reason, Storper (2010) suggests adopting a wide institutionalist approach, which "emphasises complex, dispersed collective action problems such as how actor networks are formed, supported and eliminated, and how this affects policy" (Storper, 2010; p. 2039). In particular, these networks are interesting to study not only because they represent the political base of a region, but also its broader society and the coalitions that can foster, or alternatively block, economic development (Storper, 2010). Indeed, institutions appear to have a crucial role in shaping the evolution of a cluster, by setting the framework where actors operate. In other words, institutions influence the way opportunities for future specialisation, e.g. modernisation and sectoral succession, and human capital improvement, e.g. acquisition of skills, are spotted or not (Storper, 2010). To put it bluntly, they influence the buzz of a cluster, both internally and externally.

2.4.2 Institutional thickness

In order to test empirically the assumptions made by Storper (2010), it is necessary to come up with an indicator of the institutional presence within a given cluster. Many authors have hinted at the positive influences of institutions on the cluster dynamics. Becattini (1990) claimed that being complex systems, the performance of industrial districts was dependent on hard and soft infrastructures. Bathelt et al. (2004) asserted that the cluster's buzz is affected by the socio-institutional settings of a given place. Santagata (2014) advanced that the sustainability of the creative clusters was ensured by ancillary micro services to the firms, defined as *intermediary inputs* in the production process. At the same time though, no empirical indicator of the institutionalist phenomenon has ever been formulated, except for the notion of *institutional thickness* by Amin & Thrift (1995).

Given that neither Keynesian economics nor the market approach managed to find a universal recipe to stimulate the self-sustained growth and interdependencies that are typical of creative clusters, Amin & Thrift (1995) proposed a third way to unlock the *wealth of regions* by pursuing bottom-up and region-specific policy actions that leverage on the social components of economic

behaviour (Amin, 1999). Indeed, as every market is a socially embedded process (Polanyi, 1943), Amin (1999) stressed the economic importance of non-economic factors in determining rules, norms and codes of action. In particular, "Explanatory weight is given to the influence of formal and informal institutions, considered to be socially constructed and subject to slow evolutionary change; to values and rationalities of action ensconced in networks and institutions; to accumulated cultural and behavioural characteristics locked into collective institutional life; to the composition of networks of economic association, especially their role in disseminating information, knowledge, and learning for economic adaptability; and to intermediate institutions between market and state which are relatively purposeful and participatory forms of arrangement" (Amin, 1999; p. 5).

Amin & Thrift (1995) coined the notion of *institutional thickness* to refer to a set of conditions that could represent a crucial asset for local economies facing the threats posed by the globalised market. As reported by Coulson & Ferrario (2007), the concept of institutional thickness is composed of four non-economic factors, i.e. a strong local institutional presence, high levels of interactions among local organisations, a mutual awareness of being involved in a common enterprise, and structures of domination and/or patterns of coalition (Amin & Thrift, 1995). In order to foster the development of a cluster, several implications can be derived from the concept of institutional thickness, as accounted by Amin (1999). First, policy attention should be devoted to the creation and the sustainment of informal network to favour economies of association. Second, the institutional thickness of a cluster is directly proportional with its ability to adapt and innovate, also defined as *learning to learn*. Indeed, good quality institutions increase the coordination of the cluster, build relationships with educational institutes, and favour the circulation of ideas. Third, Amin (1999) calls for a government intervention, additional to the regional policy, which aims at broadening the local institutional base and the social capital performance (Putnam, 1993), and at establishing a socially inclusive form of entrepreneurship and employment.

Although the concept of institutional thickness has been present in the literature for long years, it has not received enough attention in empirical research, probably because Amin & Thrift (1995) offered no empirical methodology to test it (Coulson & Ferrario, 2007). Surprisingly, although Amin & Thrift (1995) already proposed to adopt an institutionalist approach in studying the highly specialised Italian creative clusters that since the 1990s started losing their competitiveness on the global market, no scholar has apparently followed their suggestion. The most relevant empirical applications came from UK: in particular, Coulson & Ferrario (2007) investigated the impact of an increase in institutional thickness in the Birmingham cluster. The two authors operationalise both quantitatively and qualitatively the four components of institutional thickness. However, they take

the local growth of Birmingham as an independent variable and try to trace back the causes by measuring an increment in institutional thickness. Conversely, this thesis starts from a given increase in institutional thickness, represented by the presence of AFM (and CM), and tries to measure the benefits on the clusters' dynamics, as clearly illustrated in the following chapter.

3. Methods

The present chapter introduces the reader to the different methodological steps that were undertaken to complete this empirical investigation. Indeed, every methodological choice has been taken to maximise the quality of the results in relation to the purpose of the research and its empirical constraints. To begin with, the first section discusses the research design of the study and illustrates how the research question was operationalised. Second, a description is made of the institutions chosen and of the criteria used in the data sampling process. Next, the third section accounts for the methods employed to collect the data, while the fourth one for how they were analysed and interpreted. For convenience, these two sections are divided in two different parts, dealing with the quantitative and the qualitative components of the research. Finally, the methodological limitations of the present research are discussed.

3.1 Research design and operationalisation

The literature review has revised the benefits of clustering for creative industries, usually known as agglomeration economies (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008; Branzanti, 2014). In particular, both localisation and urbanisation economies are related with an industrial and creative atmosphere that seems to characterise every successful creative cluster (Marshall, 1982; Santagata, 2014). The latter, also known as buzz, represents a tangible proof of the activity of the cluster and is cultivated internally by F2F interactions (Storper & Venables, 2004), but also externally by the construction of global pipelines and the participation to international trade events (Bathelt et al., 2004; Power & Jansson, 2008). These features determine the competitiveness and *economic performance* of a creative cluster, which is the object of inquiry of the present thesis.

Empirical research has not yet provided a model that accounts for how these dynamics develop (Storper, 2010). The endogenous determinants of a cluster's evolution are usually attributed to three factors, namely specialisation (Porter, 2000), human capital (Florida, 2004) and institutions (Storper, 2010). None of them ever represents the only cause for a cluster development, as they are mutually influential and feed back to each other. Even so, institutions are crucial in shaping the long run sustainability of a cluster because they set the framework where actors operate. Indeed, by shaping its learning-based competitiveness (Amin, 1999), institutions influence the receptiveness of a creative

cluster, averting the risks attached to routinized specialisation, i.e. lock-ins, and the unstable transmission of creativity across generations (Santagata, 2014).

This thesis refers to the presence and the quality of institutions within a given cluster as *institutional thickness*. The concept of institutional thickness has been already defined in terms of the four non-economic factors that are maintained to shape economic performance, i.e. a strong local institutional presence, high levels of interactions among local organisations, a mutual awareness of being involved in a common enterprise, and structures of domination and/or patterns of coalition (Amin & Thrift, 1995). However, this thesis does not try to measure the institutional thickness of a creative cluster to find a correlation with a given improvement in economic performance, as it was previously attempted (Coulson & Ferrario, 2007). Conversely, it aims at measuring the improvements in the economic performance of a creative district *given* an increase in its institutional thickness. The research question goes as follows:

RQ: How does an increase in institutional thickness enhance the economic performance of a creative cluster?

This research builds on the hypothesis that an increase in institutional thickness improves the economic performance of a creative cluster in accordance with four indicators derived from the theoretical framework, namely buzz and internal interactions, knowledge creation: spillovers and innovation, labour market, openness and external interactions. In order to test empirically its assumptions, this research focuses on two Italian fashion clusters and on the two informal institutions that coordinate their activities, i.e. Apulia Fashion Makers and Consorzio della Moda. To prove the influence of institutional thickness, Amin & Thrift (1995) had already suggested inquiring Italian industrial districts, especially fashion clusters, which in the beginning of the 1990s were suffering from the opening of the global market and started losing competitiveness despite their high levels of specialisation and human capital. No empirical research has so far followed their suggestion and this thesis has taken up the challenge.

In order to meet its objectives, this thesis is based on a mixed method approach, judged as most appropriate to capture both the quantifiable aspects of economic performance and the socially constructed components of institutional settings (Bryman, 2012). Indeed, the objective of this research was duplex. First, it aimed at coming up with direct links of causality between institutional thickness and the cluster's economic performance, and derive generalizable conclusions via the administration of an online questionnaire (Bryman, 2012). Second, the understanding of the quantitative results would be completed and deepened by conducting semi-structured interviews.

However, due to some difficulties in the data collection process that are described below, the present thesis adapted to a mainly qualitative approach. This did not affect the quality of the research, even though some methodological considerations must be made. To begin with, the relationship between theory and empirical data is usually ambiguous in qualitative research, as it forms a cyclical structure whereby theory influences the research analysis, but data feed back into the relevant theory by constantly adjusting and adapting theoretical propositions (Bryman, 2012). Consequently, the objective was no longer merely to confirm or reject the theoretical framework, but also to use data results to build new theory or adjust the current one. Secondly, more focus was paid to the perception of the benefits by each member of the network. Indeed, qualitative research is interpretivist and considers reality as a social experience that results from the sum of individual perceptions and interactions (Bryman, 2012).

3.2 Data sampling

This thesis tries to answer to the research question by investigating the cases of Apulia Fashion Makers (AFM) and Consorzio della Moda (CM), two examples of institutions that manage and coordinate the activities of a fashion cluster and therefore add up to the institutional thickness of the locale. The two organisations were not chosen randomly, but were accurately selected to maximise the quality of the research. To begin with, this study decided to inquire Italian fashion clusters. Indeed, as stated above, Amin & Thrift (1995) had already suggested considering the highly specialised and dense of human capital Italian industrial districts to test their concept of institutional thickness. In particular, no effective political action has been taken so far to contrast the severe economic problems experienced since the 1990s and academic research can today contribute by offering a set of solutions for the future. Second, this thesis followed Storper's suggestion to focus on a wide institutionalist approach and concentrate on informal or de facto institutions, usually more specific to the locale and based on a major bottom-up involvement of all relevant stakeholders (Storper, 2010). Third, since this thesis investigates the benefits of institutional thickness on a creative cluster, it was necessary to choose an institution that was geographically localised in only one fashion district. For such a reason, all the organisations that connected actors located in different regions were purposely excluded.

Given these premises, there remained only a small group of organisations as possible candidates, as few Italian fashion clusters were found to be united in such forms of association.

Together with the supervisor of this thesis, Mariangela Lavanga, Apulia Fashion Makers[1] was identified as an interesting case to study for two main reasons. First, AFM was born in 2010 as a bottom-up attempt to connect all the regional micro-clusters on the territory and take a collective action against unfair competition in Made in Italy fashion production. Second, all its members are physically concentrated in the region of Apulia, in the South of Italy, often disregarded by academic literature when studying creative clusters. In particular, scholars have sometimes attributed the reasons for the economic disadvantages of the South to a lack of social capital, a form of economic and cultural capital related to the capacity of forming bonds and engaging in transactions marked by reciprocity, trust and cooperation (Putnam, 1993). An increase in institutional thickness determining better economic performance could in fact support the institutionalist approach, but reject any determinist claim.

AFM was officially approached to ask permission to conduct an empirical research on their association. Contacts were held with a member of the Advisory Board, Daniele del Genio, who offered his help during the data collection process. Moreover, he directly suggested considering two other organisations, i.e. Promindustria[2] and Consorzio della Moda[3], respectively located in the centre and in the North of the country, which AFM considers as best practices. In particular, CM has been officially granted the governance of one of the 100 industrial districts institutionally recognised by the Osservatorio Nazionale dei Distretti Italiani (the National Observatory of Italian Districts)[4] and is therefore characterised by an even higher level of institutional thickness. Since CM was also willing to cooperate with the present research, this second organisation was chosen as a benchmark to compare and triangulate data from AFM.

For its quantitative part, this thesis selected as units of analysis the population of firms that are members of the two organisations: 100 from AFM and 40 from CM, for a total 140 units (N=n=140). On the other hand, the sample of the qualitative part is made up of 15 interviewees (n=15) that are relevant actors in both networks. An overview of the respondents' profiles can be found in Appendix A. Such a list includes all the survey respondents that made themselves available to an interview plus a strategic selection of the organisation's stakeholders, e.g. director or counsellor, a practice that in the literature of social sciences is often referred to as purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012). For instance, the president of Apulia Fashion Makers and the director of Consorzio della Moda were directly approached and interviewed. In addition, local branches of institutions and

[1] http://www.apuliafashionmakers.com/
[2] http://promindustria.com/
[3] http://www.veronamoda.it/
[4] http://www.osservatoriodistretti.org/

institutionalised interest groups and associations (in Italian *associazioni di categoria*), such as UnionCamere and Confesercenti, were also contacted more than once for interviews, but the answers were generally negative, proving already low levels of involvement.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Quantitative research

The quantitative data of the present research were collected via the administration of an online survey made available to respondents between the 9th and the 29th of April 2016. The questionnaire was submitted only in Italian and prepared with the software Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) in license to EUR students. A copy of it (in both Italian and English) can be found in Appendix B. As anticipated, the rate of response to the questionnaire was very low. Indeed, out of a sample of 140 units, the total number of replies was only 39, with 15 of them too incomplete to be used. In the case of Apulia Fashion Makers, the survey distribution was administrated directly by the network, with their coordinator sending all the members the link to the online survey. Despite weekly reminders, only 15 firms (15%) filled in correctly the survey. On the other hand, the firms composing Consorzio della Moda were approached directly via phone and kindly asked to fill in a questionnaire, later on sent via email in the form of a link to the online survey. The list of the firms was retrieved on the official website of the network (www.veronamoda.it). Despite reminders via emails, only 9 firms (22.5 %), if not 8 for certain segments (20%), completed correctly the survey.

The survey was structured in two parts. The first section was composed of questions about the firm, such as years of membership in the association, the main product, customers, and general information to classify the firm in terms of number of employees and turnover, in accordance with the definition of the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as provided by the European Commission (Table 2). Conversely, the second section was composed of smaller segments that in the end add up to the indicators of the economic performance of a creative cluster as identified in the operationalisation section. The survey was based on the multiple-item measure of attitudes developed by Likert (Bryman, 2012). Indeed, in each segment, respondents were asked to express their intensity of agreement towards a series of statements indicating whether they: strongly agreed (1), agreed (2), were undecided (3), disagreed (4) or strongly disagreed (5). The Likert scale is one of the most used techniques in quantitative research and its benefits for the present thesis was duplex. First, providing closed statements that can be easily pre-coded, the Likert scale allows following a structured

methodology based on a given set of indicators (Bryman, 2012). Second, it represents a good tool to collect quantitative data on respondents' perception of utilities (Bryman, 2012).

All the segments of the survey contained a limited number of statements (from 3 to 13) and were grouped in the following pre-codes:

- General characteristics: respondents' opinion on whether joining the network was overall beneficial for their business;
- Perception of the organisation: paralleling the findings by Chapain et al. (2010) that the development of a cluster is strictly dependent on the firms' awareness of being part of a larger entity;
- Internal Relationships: based on the internal dynamics of the cluster and its buzz (Bathelt et al., 2004; Storper & Venables, 2004);
- Knowledge Exchange & Creation: opportunities for knowledge exchange, spillovers and creation (Storper & Venables, 2004; Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008);
- Innovation: changes in production chain, quality and production by means of incremental and radical innovation (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008);
- Labour Market: beneficial impacts on the labour market such as benefits for employees and start-ups (Vinodrai, 2006; Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008; Nijkamp, 2013; Branzanti, 2014);
- Openness: inquiring the contribution of the network in keeping the cluster open to the outside world by investigating attendance to fairs and trade shows, interaction with institutions, reputation and visibility (Bathelt & Turi, 2013).

3.3.2 Qualitative research

The qualitative data collection is based on 14 semi-structured interviews and 1 structured interview[5] all performed in Italian (Appendix A). The length of the conversations is highly variable: the interviews range between a short informal talk (as in the case of a representative of a local branch of Confesercenti) to a maximum of around 1 hour, for a total of 586 minutes. As already stated, most importance was given to AFM (12 interviews and 433 minutes) with CM used as a benchmark to

[5] Due to the impossibility of the subject to be interviewed, the interview was performed by responding via email to a more detailed interview guideline, as it can be found in both Italian and English in Appendix C

compare and triangulate data. All interviews correspond to a direct conversation with only one individual. Every respondent was interviewed only once, with the notable exception of one person whose contribution had to be divided in more instalments due to his working obligations. Interview guidelines were developed specifically for each group of relevant actors to the network i.e. firms/network representatives, educational institutes that are part to the network and institutions/associations. Most interviews were performed with individuals from the former two groups, given a considerable difficulty of getting through to the third group and a general ignorance of the network's activity. This reluctance can nonetheless already be considered as a datum and a proof of a lack of involvement of these organisations in the daily lives of the organisations investigated. A sketch of the interview guidelines can be found below in Table 3, whereas the original Italian version can be found in Appendix C.

Table 3: Interview Guidelines

Structure	Topics			
		Firms / Organisation Representatives	Educational Institutes	Institutions / Associations
Introduction	*Bloc 1*	Introduction of the researcher Introduction of the research Comfort of respondent Permission of recording		
	Bloc 2	Wide open questions about the background of the respondent Presentation of the firm (activity, product, brand etc.)	Presentation of the organisation (courses, n. of students etc.)	Presentation of the institutions / association
Main Part	*Bloc 1*	General Information on organisation's involvement / membership		Examples of involvement
	Bloc 2	General benefits of membership Feeling of belonging		
	Bloc 3	Relations within the organisation Contacts within the organisation Collaborations Competition		
	Bloc 4	Knowledge Exchange & Creation Education within the firm, the organisation, courses, learning by doing and need for education		
	Bloc 5	Innovation		
	Bloc 6	Labour Market		

	From education to work Benefits for employees	
	Bloc 7	Openness of the cluster: Trade events & global pipelines Relations with other institutions Visibility
	Bloc 8	External environment & Market conditions
	Bloc 9	"Made in" products: quality & future
Conclusion	Future expectations or projects of the organisation Check for missing questions Final remarks from the interviewee Greeting and thanks	

Source: Own source

The structures of interviews revolve around the indicators that were built for the quantitative research, but a considerable amount of freedom was left to respondents to bring up new topics when related to the research question –even though under the leeway of the interviewer. Indeed, semi-structured interviews are by definition flexible, as emphasis is put on understanding in depth how individuals frame the reality around them (Bryman, 2012). For such a reason, questions were slightly adapted after each interview and integrated with new findings, which were though adequately verified by means of research strategies such as respondent validation or triangulation as suggested by Bryman (2012). In particular, respondent validation allowed getting positive or negative feedback by sharing previous findings with later interviewees. On the other hand, triangulation was used to confirm results by comparing AFM with CM, but also internally by interviewing actors with a more negative attitude towards the association. In the case of AFM, one interviewee was randomly chosen among a list provided by UnionCamere containing the names of firms in the fashion manufacturing sector in Apulia that were not part of the network. Conversely, since all firms in the Verona fashion district have had direct or indirect relations with CM, a respondent was chosen that was considering not renovating membership in the next year.

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Quantitative research

Given the low rate of responses, the results of the quantitative part of the research were analysed only in terms of descriptive statistics to provide insights of what is the general feeling of the

associates around the organisation they are partner to. In order to perform this analysis, it was sufficient to employ the tools already available on Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com), which automatically compute the basic measures of descriptive statistics that were used for data analysis. In other words, for the present thesis it was judged sufficient to consider the average scores in the Likert scale of each single item plus the standard deviation (Appendix F), in order to give the reader a clearer picture of the distribution of benefits across the units of analysis.

It is true that the total number of responses, i.e. 15% from AFM and 22.5% from CM, was not significant enough from a statistical point of view to visualise correlations and calculate causal relationships (Bryman, 2012). However, the quantitative data collected were still relevant for the present research. Indeed, they allowed collecting the opinions of firms who would otherwise not be interviewed and therefore have a better idea of the average benefits for firms, and their variation, for joining the network. Moreover, it was possible to compare qualitative data with results obtained with no influence of the interviewer, which, however limited, is always a risk of conducting semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2012).

3.4.2 Qualitative research

For the qualitative data analysis of this research, all the interviews were first recorded and then subsequently transcribed. In particular, the transcribing process began before completing the interviews cycle so as to start reflecting on preliminary results before the end of the data collection process and thus slightly adjust the interview guidelines to the context that was slowly emerging. In this way, the theory and the empirical data were interrelated and mutually influential (Bryman, 2012). The proper data analysis started with the coding of the transcriptions of the interviews once the data collection was complete. Coding can be defined as a process of attributing to words, sentences or passages of the text "a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2009; p.3). No software was employed for this phase, as the coding was carried out manually by hand writing.

The coding process followed the four stages coding process proposed by Bryman (2012). In the first phase, the transcriptions were printed in hard copy to go through the data in a systematic manner before starting labelling sentences and sections of the text in the following stage. In the next step, seventy different codes were applied as marginal notes to the text. In phase three, after reading

the transcripts once more, patterns were recognised, and codes reviewed and condensed in eleven categories. In particular, patterns were identified by searching for similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence and causation relations across the text, as suggested by Saldaña (2009). The categories were elicited by means of hybrid coding, resulting from a mixture of theory-driven and data-driven categorising process (Bryman, 2012). Indeed, seven categories came from the segments of the quantitative survey with some small adaptations, while the additional four emerged as equally important components of interviewees' accounts. An overview of the different codes and categories employed can be found in Appendix D and a diagram of their relations in Appendix E. In the last phase, connections were traced across categories, but also between categories and theory and, most importantly, the research question, and were then elaborated in the four indicators developed to measure the economic performance of a cluster.

3.5 Limitations

No research design is perfect, but there only exist methodologies that are more or less suited to a given research question. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge the drawbacks of adopting a certain research strategy instead of another to make improvements in the future. First, as already stated, the academic literature on cluster economies is rich and diverse; however, no methodology had been developed before to measure the impact of institutional thickness on the economic performance of an industrial district. In such a sense, there were no previous empirical studies to get inspiration from and no results to compare. Scholars are therefore invited to investigate more deeply the current research problems in the future, to either validate or reject the present results. Next studies could for example dig more into the problem by investigating differences *ceteris paribus* in a case-control study, by choosing two strictly comparable clusters that only differ in terms of the level of institutional thickness. Moreover, this research was based on the assumption that there had been an evident increase in institutional thickness with the creation of AFM and CM, but it did not specify any measurement of it or a starting point referring to the background of the locale.

Second, this thesis was initially conceived as a quantitative research to be completed and deepened with some qualitative understanding. Despite considerable effort, the research design had to be changed into a mainly qualitative approach. In particular, since it was not possible to calculate reliable measures of correlation and causal relationship across scores in different items, the objective of generalization had to be tempered, as the qualitative data are less replicable and generalizable (Bryman, 2012). However, actions have been taken during the qualitative data collection to make the

research as much valid and reliable as possible, both internally and externally, by means of triangulation and respondent validation (Bryman, 2012). Indeed, there is still the hope that the survey available in the Appendix B and the results attained in this thesis will prove useful for future research.

Third, the objective of this thesis was ambitious as it aimed at investigating the benefits of institutional thickness according to four indicators that measured the economic performance of a creative cluster *overall*. Moreover, interviewees belonged to diverse groups of people and multiple spreads of benefits had to be considered when analysing results. Given the time and resources constraints, a general perspective had to be maintained throughout the data collection and analysis processes. For future research, it could be interesting to focus singularly on one or two of the indicators developed and analyse the influence of institutional thickness more in detail, or to dedicate more time to a comprehensive perspective.

4. Results and Discussion

The present chapter presents the reader with the data obtained through the empirical research employed to answer the research question:

RQ: How does an increase in institutional thickness enhance the economic performance of a creative cluster?

The results are systematically analysed and commented with the academic concepts illustrated in the literature review, leading to important insights in the relationship between the institutional thickness of a cluster and its economic performance. First, Apulia Fashion Makers and Consorzio della Moda are introduced to the reader in relationship to the context where they operate. Next, in the third section, the influence of an increase in institutional thickness is analysed by discussing one by one the four indicators of a cluster's economic performance developed from the literature review, i.e. buzz and internal interactions, knowledge creation: spillovers and innovation, labour market, and openness and external interactions.

4.1 Apulia Fashion Makers

Apulia Fashion Makers is an independent association that informally coordinates the activities of a group of fashion manufacturers in the Italian Southern region of Apulia, among which it functions as a *de facto* institution (Storper, 2010). AFM was born in 2010 to take a collective action against the unfair competition experienced by Made in Italy fashion manufacturers since the opening of the global market (Dei Ottati, 2014). In such a sense, it represents one of the first tangible examples of the solution advanced by Chapain et al. (2010) to resist global competition and counterfeiting by creating associations and consortia of producers. In particular, since the 1990s, the number of fashion manufacturers in Apulia has severely decreased and those few who managed to survive had to reduce significantly their production outputs: "We used to make 50.000 pieces per season; we now do 20.000 per year, 10.000 per season... From 100.000 pieces to 20.000: we lost 80% of our output" denounces an AFM member (#09).

Guided by the president and by the members of the board, these firms found a common ground to dialogue and cooperate based on an ethical proposition. Indeed, joining AFM is relatively cheap

(€200 per year), but requires a considerable ethical commitment to become a member. As put by one of the members of the association Board, the association is based on the idea to "unite the local firms that are characterised by Made in Italy production, with an Italian workforce, and that respect legal and ethical conditions" (#01). Such a commitment represents the *raison d'être* of the whole organisation and signing up an ethical charter is a precondition for membership, no matter the difficulty of respecting standards nor how many possible candidates cannot be allowed in.

AFM connects around 100 firms located in different geographical clusters all over the region, with a prevalence in the nodal points in the Salento area in the provinces of Brindisi, Taranto and Lecce, such as Putignano or Martina Franca. As reported by a member of the board (#01), 90% of the associates are micro or small enterprises with an average annual turnover between €2 and €3 million of euros and a maximum of 30 employees; moreover, 80% of them produce *conto terzi*, confirming what was expected from the literature review (Dunford, 2006; Colombo & Regini, 2016). Among survey respondents (n=15), 12 have been members of AFM for more than 4 years, 12 have a maximum of 10 employees, and 13 have a yearly turnover of less than €2 million.

AFM presents itself as a *filiera* (Santagata, 2013), as there are members for all the phases of the production chain in high or medium-high quality fashion manufacturing that work for the big names of the fashion industry, mostly in Italy and Europe. However, based on interviewees' responses, it is possible to detect a tendency to abandon *conto terzi* manufacturing and move towards tailoring and creating an independent brand. This occurs for several reasons. To begin with, being independent from larger brands is increasingly more valuable for the firms, which by their own admission would rather be "the masters of their own destiny" and avoid being dependent on other profit maximizing agents (#08). Second, by allowing cutting the wholesale costs, it can be more fruitful than working *conto terzi*: "I'm slowly changing my strategy and turning towards tailoring;" says an AFM member "revenues are better and you are not conditioned by anyone" (#03).

From an organisational point of view, AFM appears like a participated network that is though still in its developing stage. Resources are scarce, both in terms of money and time, as the association presents itself as an auto financed after-work activity: "in the end we do not push it so much: actually, we are only after workers" (#08). Indeed, given the number of fashion manufacturers in the region, the AFM Board recognises that the membership base could be enlarged and that many potential candidates do not join, either because they snob an after-work association that lets in smaller realities or, allegedly, because they are scared of ethical standards. Even so, some necessary steps are being taken, as the hiring of a coordinator for the organisation's activities. Indeed, all respondents recognise the commitment and hard work of coordination carried out by the president and the members of

Board, who look at more established organisations in other fashion clusters as best practices to imitate, such as, for instance, Consorzio della Moda.

4.2 Consorzio della Moda

Consorzio della Moda was born in 2000 when a group of entrepreneurs that were previously part of a consortium located in the municipality of Villafranca, in the region of Veneto in the Northeast of Italy, decided to found an association specifically targeted to fashion manufacturers. The purpose was to create a group of firms who could have a voice with relevant institutions because, as put by one of the founders, "as individual firms, they don't even take you in consideration; whereas, if you are in a consortium or in an association, you can have your voice heard in the public realm" (#15). Fashion manufacturing has a long tradition in the area and many firms have suffered from the increased competition on the global market: "We have seen firms with 50 to 100 employees close continuously. At the same time, we assisted to the failure of enterprises in the ready to wear industry, whose product clashed with the new Chinese competitors", claims the director of CM (#14).

Coherently with what expected from the literature review, the director of the organisation (#14) reported that the big majority of the members produce *conto terzi*, are specialised in womenswear and are small enterprises with an average turnover of between €2 and €10 million of euros and between 10 and 30 employees (Dunford, 2006; Colombo & Regini, 2014). Among survey respondents (n=9), 5 have a turnover of less than €2 million and 3 between €2 and €10 million. Moreover, 8 have less than 10 employees, 7 have their own brand next to *conto terzi* manufacturing and 7 have been members of CM for more than 5 years. Unlike AFM, though, Made in Italy production is not a requirement for membership, even if some projects are targeted specifically to fully domestic manufacturers.

As anticipated, Consorzio della Moda is a more established *de facto* institution (Storper, 2010) because it has been recognised the official governance of the industrial district since 2003. This means that the network proposes and coordinates activities not only for its 40 associates, but also to the entire collection of around 400 enterprises composing the local clusters. Participation is open to all of them, even though if one decides to take part to a specific project, membership becomes mandatory. Despite such an institutional recognition, CM is proud to maintain its identity as a private entity. As put by the director of the network, CM has an entrepreneurial approach: "If the initiatives we propose bring results, we keep on working; otherwise, we do not receive any kind of public support" (#14).

Indeed, the organisation of the network is set as that of a firm whose final outputs are the activities "sold" to its members. Since the annual membership fee (recently lowered from €2.500 to €300 to increase the base of fixed associates) is not sufficient to sustain an organisation of three people, CM has a direct interest in knowing the needs of its members and in adapting strategically its offer by creating tailored projects on a B2B, transactional basis. "We know very well the strategic necessities of the industries: for instance, this year, we chose the US and not the Balkans because we understood there were among our firms some requests and needs in that direction" says the CM director (#14).

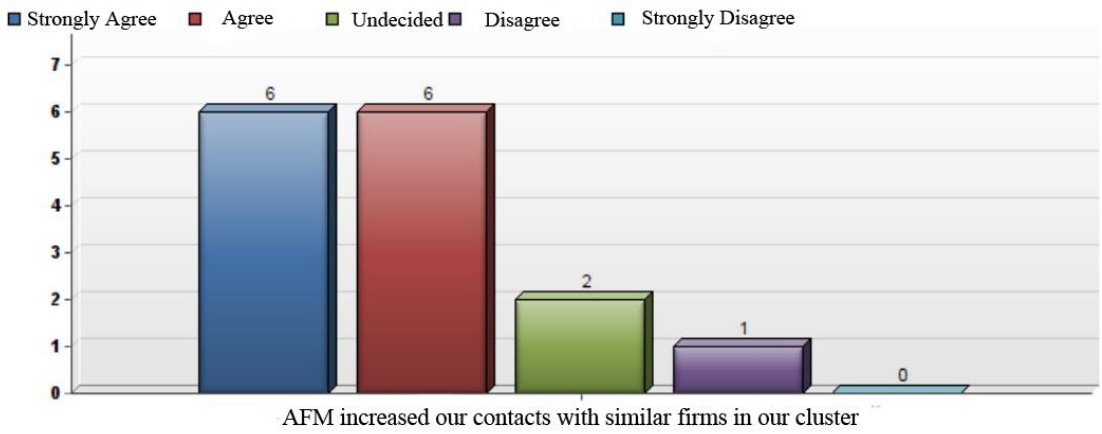
4.3 How institutional thickness affects the economic performance of a cluster

Both Apulia Fashion Makers and Consorzio della Moda have increased the institutional thickness of their industrial district. The present thesis has investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively how this increment has affected the economic performance of these two fashion clusters according to four indicators developed from the theoretical framework, which are now analysed one by one in more detail.

4.3.1 Buzz and internal interactions

The first indicator developed to measure the economic performance of a cluster examines how an increase in institutional thickness affects its buzz and internal interactions (Bathelt et al. 2004; Storper & Venables, 2004). In this regard, the contribution of AFM appears particularly significant. Indeed, quite surprisingly, some fashion manufacturers in the district had had no contact with each other before the creation of the association. "The principal result is that we have a group of firms who talk to each other (…). I am based in Alberobello: here are two entrepreneurs who used not to talk to each other: now they do. They were at 6 km of distance from each other and they did not know who the other was and what he was doing" brings up the AFM president (#05). The same results can be drawn from the answers to the questionnaire, where 12 out of 15 respondents either agree or strongly agree that AFM has increased contacts with other manufacturers in the district (M=1.87, s=0.92), as shown in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2: AFM has increased our contacts with similar firms in our cluster (survey results)



Source: Own source

In particular, AFM keeps its network alive by scheduling regularly both F2F and CMC interactions (Storper & Venables, 2004; Bathelt & Turi, 2013). Digital contacts take place via newsletters, social networks and, most importantly, via the website of the network. Specifically, AFM has developed a user-friendly search engine that allows members to look for other associates according to specific criteria, such as type and quality of production. Conversely, physical meetings are organised two or three times a year for general assemblies, while additional joint sessions are scheduled *ad hoc* for special conferences or courses. In these crucial moments, members can network, debate and share sensible issues, paving the way to the creation of bonds of reciprocity and partnerships.

Increased F2F interactions are found to benefit fashion manufacturers in several ways. First, they increase the learning base capacity of the cluster (Amin, 1999). Indeed, all interviewees recognise the general benefits of having enlarged their network in learning something new from each other. "If you find people that are more prepared, you acquire better notions; whereas if you talk with people who are not as good as you, you anyhow understand what your level is," claims a member (#03). Second, *conto terzi* producers find partners with which to share big commissions when the terms of delivery are tight: "I had a commission for 500 garments and in order to respect the terms, I asked a colleague of mine to help me. He was someone I met thanks to AFM; now, likewise, if he needs me, he contacts me. (…) But to have this you must be in a position of knowing and trusting each other very much" (#03). In such a sense, by guaranteeing quality and ethics of production, AFM increases the screening and socialising processes that are necessary for building a relationship with a potential partner (Storper & Venables, 2004; Bianchi, 2015). Third, manufacturers who have their own brand require collaborations with other industries, which are cultivated directly by AFM, as it lists among its associates not only different kinds of fashion manufacturers, but also designers,

education institutes and firms offering services for the manufacturing process, and indirectly by word of mouth with other members. In particular, firms often necessitate cooperating with laboratories and different manufacturers when they want to create a total look to internationalise their products and sell them on foreign markets.

On the other hand, although it has a crucial role in networking between firms, Consorzio della Moda appears less effective in affecting the cluster's buzz and in stimulating reciprocity. CM acts as an intermediary and matches potential partners when a firm makes a request, but there seems to be no horizontal, creative atmosphere between members. This result is reflected by the average scores in the questionnaire, where CM performs lower than AFM in all statements of segment 3 (Internal relationships), as shown in Appendix F. In addition, CM manufacturers share less belonging to the network (M=1.40, s=0.63 of AFM, vs. M=2.33, s=1.22 of CM in the survey) and interest in other members' activities (#13). Indeed, although CM does a great job in organising F2F meetings, sending newsletters and networking among associates, in general, interviewees reported that members show a low willingness to actively participate to joint sessions (#09).

Several hypothesis could be advanced to account for this phenomenon. First, as already stated, CM is a more established institution that entertains relationships with its partners on a B2B basis. Indeed, it could be that members participate only if they have a direct interest, and feel less attached to the organisation because they do not share an ethical mission as in the case of AFM, where the defence of Made in Italy fashion manufacture functions as a *trait d'union* for the associates. Second, CM administers the network in a centralised, hierarchical way that does not facilitate the flatness of relationships found to increase the creative atmosphere of a district (Santagata, 2014). Third, this thesis does not consider intervals of institutional thickness in the cluster and it may well be that AFM represents the first institution favouring these kinds of contacts in the district; whereas in the CM district there exist already many other channels to cultivate the buzz. In any case, it would be necessary to further research the two organisations to come up with more accurate results.

However, in both associations, the nature of relationships among members appears determined by a collaborative and a competitive attitude at the same time. Indeed, competition is judged as inevitable by the respondents in both associations. In both networks, some associates are still hesitant to share with others and participate fully to the network. Some respondents link this to the local entrepreneurship culture, especially the members of AFM, who often refer to negative values such as jealousy and distrust as typical of the "Southern mind-set". In fact, AFM associates appear generally more willing to entertain relationships based on reciprocity, as accounted above. The purpose of this thesis was too modest to carry out a deep analysis of the North-South cleavage that is

typical of the Italian cultural and social capital (Putnam, 1993). Nevertheless, since the lack of interest in the network's activities and other associates is found in equal – if not larger amount, also in CM, it is possible to conclude that for the present cases geographical location appears mainly as contingent and that any North-South pre-determinist account should be rejected. Indeed, a CM interviewee considers this a general attitude of all Italians: "We are Italians: we are solo players" (#15). Even so, thanks to the efforts of both organisations, the spirit of competition is now moving to a different attitude. Indeed, competition is increasingly being seen as a stimulus to do better and raise one's own standards, confirming what expected from the literature review (Porter, 2000; Branzanti, 2014). "Our blessing is that we have a group of 10-12 successful members that are an example for the others. (...) We feel competition to improve!" says an AFM associate (#03).

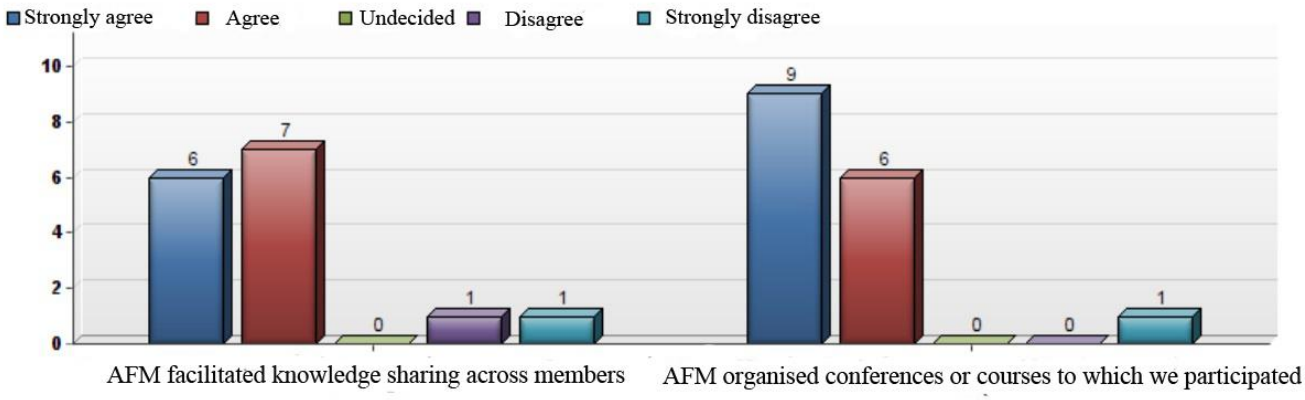
4.3.2 Knowledge creation: spillovers and innovation

The second indicator of a cluster's economic performance measures how knowledge is transmitted and generated within the district. In such a sense, it is important to distinguish between *tacit* and *codified* knowledge (Belussi & Pilotti, 2002). Tacit knowledge is an important component of both industrial districts, as most firms are family businesses that inherit expertise as a form of tradition from their parents and by simply *being there* (Gertler, 1995). This transmission takes place smoothly and naturally within firms in both AFM and CM. For instance, an AFM member explains that he usually hires temporarily local workers in coincidence with the large commissions before each season. New employees are expected to know already how to work, because this is "what they have always been doing since they were 14" (#09). If there are new techniques to be applied, there is no need to organise training sessions, as "the know-how is acquired by doing" (#02). Indeed, "new employees are usually placed next to the one of the 9 or 10 experienced workers that are fixed: within a couple of days, they learn all they need to know" (#09).

However, the sharing of tacit knowledge across these firms is not a process that happens by itself as it is sometimes assumed in the literature (Porter, 2000). On the contrary, it appears dependent not only on firms' willingness to codify tacit knowledge, as advanced by Morrison (2008), but also on the right opportunities to do so. In particular, by positively affecting the cluster's buzz and setting a cooperative framework, institutional thickness is found to increase the firms' willingness to codify tacit knowledge and exchange it with each other. Indeed, most AFM members report frequent if not daily phone calls to share information and know-how with other manufactures and firms: "We received suggestions, even technical suggestions, from other associates who helped us to solve a

manufacturing issue (…), but also to deal with a process, which was new for us" (#02). In this sense, institutional thickness is found to contribute to the localisation economies of a cluster by favouring both static and dynamic externalities, leading to product flexibility and incremental innovation (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). However, given its lower performance in buzz, knowledge exchange within CM is less direct than in AFM and only occurs when a collaboration has already been settled, usually thanks to the organisation's coordination. This is reflected by the results of the questionnaire where 13 people out of 15 in AFM either agree or strongly agree that the organisation facilitated knowledge sharing across members (M=1.93, s=1.16) as shown in Fig. 3, whereas scores for CM are higher for each statement of segment 4 (Appendix F).

Fig. 3: AFM's contribution to knowledge creation (survey results)



Source: Own source

Concerning the exchange and creation of codified knowledge, AFM and CM regularly organise training events with experts, courses, workshops, and conferences for their associates. The topics of the courses are usually very diverse and range from practical workshops in how to deal with production phases to more general trainings in fashion manufacturing new technologies. Indeed, both organisations list in their networks one or more schools or fashion academies and appear very concerned with enhancing the training of their associates with research and development. In such a sense, once more, institutional thickness is found to contribute to product flexibility and incremental innovation (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Indeed, it is important to mention that these initiatives are accessible to most firms in the network only because the high costs are shared among all participants through the payment of a modest fee. In other words, these firms would not enjoy these benefits if it were not for an increase in the institutional thickness of the locale.

Survey respondents confirm these results in the case of AFM (Fig. 3), but have a more negative attitude in the case of CM (M=2.40, s=0.84). In fact, this appears in contrast with qualitative results, where CM proves to have a more established cycle of courses that provide not only practical workshops, but also solid training in all the aspects of running a business, such as consultancy services in how to increase one's competitiveness on both domestic and foreign markets. Moreover, CM is now developing an innovative collaboration with a fashion designer to connect traditional fashion manufacturers with alternative modes of production based on sustainability. These kinds of initiatives increase spillovers between unrelated knowledge bases and may have the potential to facilitate product novelty as well, therefore leading to the benefits usually attributed to urbanisation economies (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). However, despite the good expectations, further research is necessary once the project is over to validate this statement.

4.3.3 Labour market

The third indicator developed for the present research measures the impact of institutional thickness on the labour market within the industrial district. In particular, it focuses on how institutional thickness affects workers, labour mobility and the creation of start-ups in a cluster (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008; Branzanti, 2014). To begin with, it is important to specify that both AFM and CM offer their services to firms and not specifically to employees and therefore the benefits of institutional thickness for workers are found lower than for the other indicators. This results from the written questionnaire, where both organisations score high in the section dedicated to the labour market (Appendix F), and from qualitative research, as all interviewees report that benefits are mostly enjoyed by the enterprises and its owners, and are only indirectly reflected to their employees, unless they are individually involved. "The benefits for employees are always indirect. (…) It is possible to talk about direct benefits only when workers take part to training and educational activities," says a member of AFM (#01). For such a reason, workers are only indirectly affected by institutional thickness, as they are not always allowed to participate to the cluster's buzz or create their own network (Nijkamp, 2013).

However, both AFM and CM appear to have a positive impact on labour mobility in several ways. First, as accounted in the previous section, they allow workers to deepen and specialise their skills, as expected from the literature review on localisation economies (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Second, the networking capacity of the two organisations facilitates the placement of job-seeking people. Within AFM, this occurs largely on an informal, personal basis, as some interviewees

report having suggested other members to consider hiring new employees, due to their specific skills and aspirations. Indeed, as an AFM member puts it, "In the last days a young woman came to me for an internship. She was here for 2 or 3 days, but then I realised that doing only menswear I could not offer her a lot from a professional point of view. I therefore called my friend D. and told him: 'D. here is a girl who will suit your firm'. I thought she could learn more there, but also represent a resource for him" (#03). Conversely, CM has a more established placement service and allows job seekers to leave their CVs to the organisation, which will directly check whether the firms in the network have any vacancy that suits them. In particular, finding a job within CM seems not very hard, especially for all those professional profiles that are now highly requested on the market, such as white collars (Pieroni & Pompei, 2008), e.g. commercial consultants, and deeply specialised workers, e.g. CAD designers (#14).

Third, besides these informal placement services, both AFM and CM influence labour mobility by facilitating the transition from the school system to the job market. Indeed, interviewees in both institutions often lament an incompatibility between the education system and what they require from their employees. "There is a huge gap between production, firms and education," denounces the director of a fashion academy that is member to CM (#10). Most complaints concern the graduates from fashion or design academies, depicted as talented, but unrealistic and narcissistic workers; and from professional institutes, who often lack the technical know-how that is necessary to work for a firm. In particular, professional institutes are strongly limited by fixed educational planning and their students often need further specialisation before entering the labour market (#12). In such a sense, both AFM and CM help local professional institutes to find the right partners to organise periods of apprenticeship for their students. In general, this is not an easy task, because even though the EU finances these projects, firms are usually reluctant to dedicate time to schools and consequently slow down their production processes. In particular, in AFM this takes place spontaneously via F2F interactions and bonds of reciprocity (#11), whereas in CM it is systematically administered by the institution that matches professional institutes with the right "enlightened" entrepreneurs (#14).

Finally, the hard times for the market of fashion manufacturing have already been described and neither the Veneto nor Apulia regions constitute thriving environments for starting up in this sector. For what concerns the Apulia region, although firms are now experiencing a small positive variation, no new enterprises seem to start up, with the exception of small local laboratories. Even though more brands want to produce in Italy compared to few years ago, interviewees do not report any start-up in the sector. Indeed, "Some of the brands that had delocalised production are now

coming back, but this little increase is being redistributed among the firms that have always been here" (#03). On the other hand, CM does not envisage special assistance to young entrepreneurs, but occasionally witnesses the opening of new firms and supports them in the early stages. The CM director reports "numerous start-ups, especially in the digital sector: these are firms that are not manufacturers, but more likely businesses that design a style, develop ideas, but then produce abroad" (#17). However, there seems to be no direct relationship between the institutional thickness of these two fashion districts and the spread of ideas and entrepreneurship that are typical of urbanisation economies (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008), or at least, there are too many external variables that must be considered beyond institutional thickness.

4.3.4 Openness and external interactions

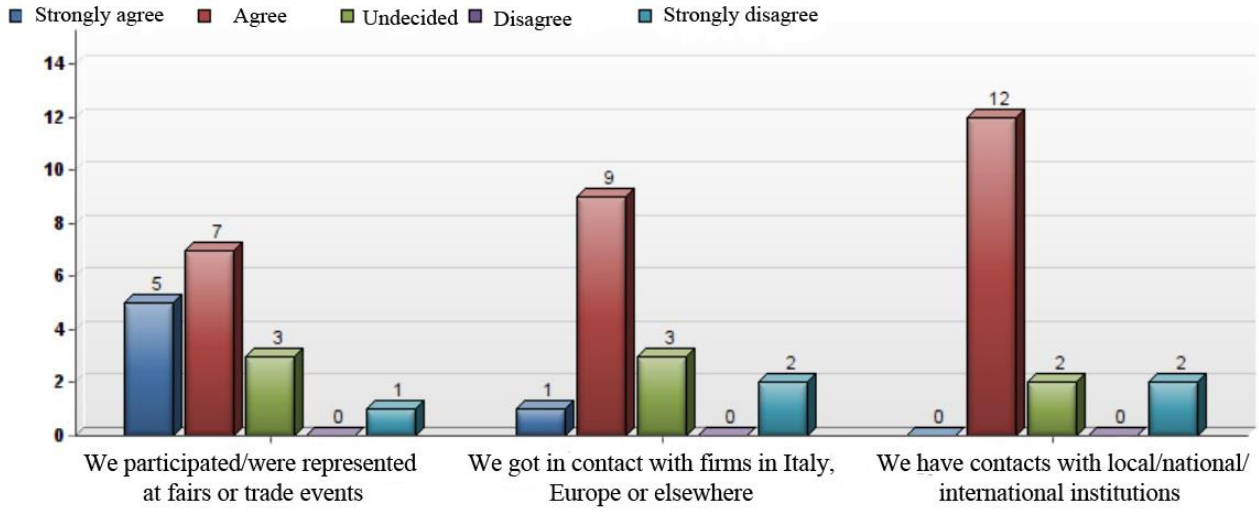
The fourth and last indicator of the economic performance of a cluster measures how institutional thickness is able to influence the cluster ability to entertain relationships with the external world. By the latter, the present research means relationships with other actors that are external to the inner dynamics of the cluster, but are at the same time crucial for its successful development. In particular, this indicator measures the impact of institutional thickness in helping the cluster to participate to international trade events, build pipelines and relate to local and national institutions.

To begin with, AFM is found to have increased members' possibilities to participate to international fairs and their visibility in the external world. Trade events are usually very expensive and most manufactures are able to take part only because the high costs are shared among all participants. Indeed, interviewees report that most of them would unlikely participate to a fashion fair independently, as it is also confirmed by the quantitative survey, where 3 out 4 respondents (M= 2.06, s=1.06) either agree or strongly agree that they participated or were represented at a fair thanks to AFM (Fig. 4).

In particular, most respondents refer to the latest fair in which the association participated, i.e. Origin & Passion in Vicenza, in the Northeastearn region of Veneto, where they could also meet the representatives of CM. The majority of interviewees lament no economic returns from the fair; the main benefits are postponed in the long run and perceived only in terms of major visibility. "No one got anything. No one had an economic return, but we started to have visibility now," claims an AFM member (#09). Indeed, for a small organisation representing a cluster detached from the *magic circles* of the Italian fashion system, this is already a significant result (Dunford, 2006). In addition, AFM is also found to positively influence the general visibility of the cluster, independently from fashion

fairs. Indeed, several interviewees report being noticed by new clients and big fashion brands, both nationally and internationally, thanks to AFM. This appears also confirmed by quantitative results, as 10 out 15 respondents (M=2.53, s=1.13) either agree or strongly agree that they got in contact with firms in Italy, Europe or elsewhere thanks to AFM (Fig. 4). To sum up, institutional thickness is found to contribute to the openness of the cluster, not only in terms of participation in fairs, but also in the creation of bonds with distantly located firms, i.e. global pipelines (Bathelt et al., 2004).

Fig. 4: AFM's influence on the cluster's openness and external relations (survey results)



Source: Own source

The same results on institutional thickness can be paralleled to the case of CM, whose contribution to the openness of the cluster appears even more consolidated than that of AFM. Throughout the years, CM has often changed its strategy to promote its associates internationally. Indeed, as already stated, CM regularly formulates projects that are specifically targeted to the needs of its members and to the relevant market segments. In particular, CM took part to numerous fairs around the globe in the past, but now prefers being present on showrooms abroad, such as in Shanghai or Moscow, which facilitate the creation of stable pipelines with distant actors. This change of strategy derives from the fact that they found it "increasingly harder to find the fairs that concentrate the interests of the associates" (#14). Secondly, CM noticed that fairs are interesting only for few firms and that once they start being successful, they would rather have their own stand, instead of sharing it with other partners. In addition, CM is now envisaging a different internationalisation project: in the coming months, they are organising a fixed showroom in their local territory where firms will directly receive clients and entertain both B2B and B2C relations. The same idea is now appealing also to AFM, whose president is thinking of trying the same strategy in the future.

Concerning relations with external institutions, the study of AFM and CM confirms a positive impact of institutional thickness. Indeed, interviewees from both organisations report increased interactions with other *de jure* and *de facto* institutions, both at the local and at the national level. However, the two associations differ significantly in this regard. AFM has increased the relationships with institutions of its members, who all recognise its positive impact in both qualitative and quantitative data (Fig. 4). Nonetheless, AFM still has loose institutional connections, as exemplified by the ignorance around the network of the local branches of professional associations (#11). Moreover, even though AFM was founded to fight the battle for a better recognition of Made in Italy fashion manufacturing at an institutional level, its members still show levels of distrust towards *de jure* institutions, perceived as caring uniquely about the interests of big groups and brands. "The Seven Samurai come and conquer the city: this is what happens with institutions. There will always come the Magnificent Seven, the big industries, the big brands and they will shadow all the small," laments an associate (#09). Bigger interest groups are also seen with suspect: "I've been a member of Confindustria: there are a lot of handshakes, big hugs, big smiles, but I don't feel like I was in an association. (…) It totally lacks the territoriality component; it's more a platform for personal prestige" (#01). In addition, all AFM members that were interviewed stressed the independence of the association from political entities: "If you want to play with politics than you will have to give something back, (…) we are not ready for that," claims an interviewee (#05). However, this does not mean that no progress was made. A collaboration – to be soon implemented, with an IT firm to ensure full traceability of garments should receive support from regional authorities in the coming future. However, no decisive agreement has been reached yet and AFM is still on its way of becoming a powerful lobbying group in its region.

The situation is different for Consorzio della Moda. Indeed, existing for more than 15 years and having being granted the governance of the district since 2003, CM has a much more solid relationship with all the local and national institutions. "We seat at all the regional tables and we have relationships with all professional associations", declares the director of the network (#14). As already stated, CM was born exactly to have a voice with relevant institutions and it can be claimed it successfully attained its objectives. Indeed, even if they show a general distrust towards other members, also the most negative CM associates recognise the benefits they got by participating in open calls at the national or international level as a joint interest group (#13). Even so, also CM experiences friction with the other relevant institutions in the region, who look at them as competitors and show low levels of openness and friendliness towards them: "They don't want to participate, to be together," bemoans a member (#15).

5. Conclusion

The aim of the present research was to offer an account of how an increase in institutional thickness affects the economic performance of a creative cluster. Scholars most often attribute the causes of the development of a cluster to two factors, namely specialisation (Porter, 2000; Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008) and human capital (Florida, 2004). However, a third, less explored approach considers institutions as an equally important determinant of a cluster's development (Storper, 2010) and maintains that by increasing its learning-base competitiveness, institutional thickness is able to shape the long run sustainability of an industrial district (Amin, 1999). Many scholars hinted at the influence of institutions on a cluster's economic performance before (Becattini, 1990; Santagata, 2014), but only few empirical studies have inquired its real impacts so far. Indeed, this thesis tried to test the institutionalist argument by offering an answer to the following research question:

RQ: How does an increase in institutional thickness enhance the economic performance of a creative cluster?

The research question has been answered by adopting a mixed methods approach to the study of fashion clusters in Italy by conducting an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Already Amin & Thrift (1995) had proposed investigating Made in Italy fashion clusters, which in the beginning of the 1990s started experiencing severe economic problems and losing competitiveness on the global markets, despite their high levels of specialisation and human capital (Rossi, 2014; Dei Ottati, 2014). Unfortunately, no empirical research has ever confirmed or rejected their hypothesis that an increase in institutional thickness could stimulate a new wave of endogenous growth in the Italian fashion clusters by setting a framework where both specialisation and human capital could better adapt and innovate. Conversely, this thesis offered a possibility to test empirically their theory. In particular, this research focused on the economic impacts of Apulia Fashion Makers, a *de facto* institution that coordinates the activities of a fashion industrial district in the South of Italy, a region often disregarded by academic literature in the field and considered backward in terms of both economic performance and social capital (Putnam, 1993; Colombo & Regini, 2016). The analysis was then completed by comparing Apulia Fashion Makers with Consorzio della Moda, a similar, but more established *de facto* institution that is located in the Northeast of the country and that is considered as a best practice by AFM members.

The impact of institutional thickness was measured according to four economic indicators developed from the theoretical framework on creative clusters and agglomeration economies, whose results are now briefly summarised. To begin with, institutional thickness was found to have a positive influence on the cluster's buzz and internal interactions. In particular, by increasing the network capacity of the associates, AFM and CM enhance F2F meetings and consequently foster dynamics of mutual reciprocity and partnerships. This appeared particularly true in the case of AFM, where increased contacts lead to major productive capabilities, joint projects and new collaborations. These results confirm that by stimulating social capital and individual engagement, institutional thickness has positive economic effects on clusters, proving that virtuous examples are also possible in the South of Italy, when properly stimulated. However, further research should focus on the differences found in the two institutions and explore whether they are simply dependent on individuals' dispositions, or instead, other incentives influence the willingness to participate of the firms, such as the ethical commitment that characterises AFM membership or the level of institutional thickness prior to the organisation in question.

Second, institutional thickness was found to positively affect the exchange and creation of knowledge and, consequently, to favour product flexibility and incremental innovation (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Indeed, by encouraging the clusters' buzz and inter-firms collaborations, AFM and CM enhance the spillovers of both tacit and codified knowledge. At the same time, both associations have an active role in introducing new knowledge within the cluster by organising regular training activities and courses with external experts. In this way, the micro and small enterprises that compose Italian fashion clusters are able to access innovation, research and development by sharing the high costs with their peers. When this activity becomes established, as in the case of CM, it may be the case that thanks to special projects firms are able to experience spillovers between different knowledge bases and therefore generate product novelty as well (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). However, this assumption requires further examination once these projects have been under way for a longer period.

Third, the quality of institutional thickness was found to have evident impacts also on the labour market of the cluster. Even though benefits for firms' employees are usually indirect, both AFM and CM offer informal placement services to job seekers and organise courses and trainings that provide workers with the possibility of improving and deepening their skills. In addition, they help local professional institutes find entrepreneurs that are willing to give their students a period of apprenticeship, favouring the transition from the school system to the job market and granting firms a major certainty of continuity of skills in generational turnover. However, no positive correlation

was found with the emergence of new enterprises as it could have been expected from the literature (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Further research could focus on whether this is because the current unfavourable market conditions discourage starting up or, alternatively, because informal institutions could do better in fostering and supporting entrepreneurial aspirations.

Fourth, by coordinating the needs of the entire clusters, institutional thickness was found to enhance the openness and the visibility of the industrial district with the external world and therefore contribute to ensuring its future success and competitiveness (Bathelt & Turi, 2013). Indeed, both AFM and CM enable their members to participate to international trade events or showrooms and give them the possibility of building pipelines with potential partners and buyers that are distantly located. In addition, both organisations offer their associates the possibility of having their voice heard with relevant institutions, at the local and national level. In particular, CM's activity appears much more established than AFM's in its relationships with external actors, as their experience on foreign markets and with other institutions is the result of more than 15 years of negotiations and lobbying. Taking CM as an example, it is definitely suggested to AFM to keep on approaching and involving regional and national institutions, especially if they want to accomplish their mission of defending and promoting Made in Italy fashion manufacturing.

To sum up, the results of this thesis have confirmed that institutional thickness positively affects not only the whole set of agglomeration economies, but also the evolution of the entire creative cluster by revitalising its buzz, stimulating knowledge creation and innovation, improving the labour market and increasing its openness with the outside world. In fact, this study was not free of limitations, as accounted in section 3.5: no scientific measurement of institutional thickness was proposed, results are not highly generalizable and perhaps a too broad perspective of the economic performance of a cluster was adopted, given the research constraints. At the same time though, it is now possible to confirm the hypothesis that institutional thickness increases a cluster's receptiveness of future paths of development by minimising the risks attached to routinized specialisation and lock-ins, and to the unstable transmission of creativity across generations.

This research was one of the first empirical attempts to prove the institutionalist argument advanced by Amin & Thrift (1995) and Storper (2010). It is now up to future research to further reject or validate what this thesis demonstrated, but also to policy makers to take consequent actions. Indeed, the significantly positive impact of *de facto* institutions on a cluster's economic performance should not make the reader think that *de jure* institutions have no responsibility but letting these organisations operate, if they want to favour regional development. On the contrary, formal institutions must also contribute and devise strategies that facilitate the emergence of local informal

institutions in developing regions, such as the South of Italy, and offer them more accessibility and cooperative support than what was found in the present research. For instance, the responsibility of defending Made in Italy fashion production cannot pertain only to small associations such as Apulia Fashion Makers, but lies inevitably also in the hands of more centralised institutions, be it at the regional, national or supranational level. Indeed, battles such as those for a major traceability of garments or for the respect of legal (and ethical) standards cannot but be fought also in the political realm.

In conclusion, institutions are often maintained to evolve slowly, especially when aiming at establishing dynamics of reciprocity and cooperation over distrust and competition (Putnam, 1993). However, the present research has proved that in a relatively short span of time great results can be achieved, on the condition that all actors who are involved are willing to coordinate their objectives in reaching a common goal. It is exactly the purpose of institutions to create the right incentives for this to happen.

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Appendix

A. Interviewees Overview

Interviewee	Organisation	Description of Interviewee	Performed via	Min.
1	AFM	Associate & Member of the Board	Skype	134
2	AFM	Associate	Phone	22
3	AFM	Associate & Member of the Board	Phone	42
4	AFM	Education Institute, Associate & Member of the Board	Skype	47
5	AFM	Associate & President	Phone	31
6	AFM	Education Institute & Associate	Structured Interview	/
7	AFM	Non-member	Phone	16
8	AFM	Associate & Member of the Board	Phone	52
9	AFM	Associate & Member of the Board	Phone	61
10	CM	Education Institute & Associate	Skype	61
11	AFM	Professional Association	Phone	I.F.
12	AFM	Education Institute & Associate	Phone	28
13	CM	Associate	Phone	I.F.
14	CM	Director of the Network	Skype	52
15	CM	Associate & Member of the Board	Phone	40
				586

B. Survey

B.1 Italian version

Mi chiamo Leonardo Fuligni e sono uno studente magistrale del corso di laurea in Economia e Impresa della Cultura presso l'Università Erasmus di Rotterdam, nei Paesi Bassi.

L'obiettivo della mia ricerca è studiare i benefici di un network virtuale come Apulia Fashion Makers o Consorzio della Moda per le imprese che ne fanno parte.

Prima di iniziare il questionario, sarà necessario rispondere a brevi domande informative sulla Vostra impresa. In tal modo, potrò contestualizzare l'area geografica, il settore e le caratteristiche generali dell'unità d'analisi e generalizzare i dati. Tenete tuttavia a mente che le riposte rimarranno anonime e slegate dal nome dell'azienda: nulla che possa danneggiare la Vostra privacy sarà pubblicato sulla mia tesi.

Alla fine del questionario, troverete l'opzione di renderVi disponibili per un'ulteriore intervista. Se accetterete, potrò andare più a fondo nella ricerca e farvi elaborare le risposte che avete dato nel questionario. Si tratta di una breve intervista informale per telefono o Skype (all'incirca 15/20 minuti), che sarebbe tuttavia molto preziosa ai fini della mia ricerca. Anche in questo caso, i dati raccolti rimarranno anonimi nella versione pubblicata della tesi, a meno che non diate consenso esplicito alla pubblicazione.

Di seguito trovate le istruzioni per rispondere alle domande. Ci vogliono massimo 10 minuti per completare il questionario. Vi prego di dare risposte oneste e sincere: i risultati della mia ricerca dipendono anche da Voi.

Grazie del Vostro aiuto!

Nella sezione 2, troverete una serie di affermazioni su cui dovrete esprimere il Vostro giudizio: Vi sarà chiesto di indicare quanto Vi trovate d'accordo con quanto enunciato usando la seguente scala:

Molto d'accordo
D'accordo
Indeciso
In disaccordo
Molto in disaccordo

Tutte le affermazioni sono formulate in prima persona plurale, dunque cercate di rispondere dal punto di vista dell'azienda in generale.

Sezione numero 1: Caratteristiche Generali

Di quale network fate parte?
- ❍ Apulia Fashion Makers
- ❍ Promindustria

Qual è il nome dell'azienda? _____
Dove si trova? _____

Da quanti anni siete parte del network?
- ❍ Da quest'anno
- ❍ 1-3 anni
- ❍ 4-5 anni
- ❍ Più di 5 anni

Quando è nata la Vostra azienda? _____

Numero impiegati
- ❍ Meno di 5
- ❍ Tra i 5 e i 10
- ❍ Tra i 10 e i 25
- ❍ Tra i 25 e i 50
- ❍ Più di 50

Età media impiegati
- ❍ Tra i 18 e i 35 anni
- ❍ Tra i 18 e i 50 anni
- ❍ Più di 50 anni

Zona di provenienza della maggior parte dei Vostri impiegati
- ❍ Dintorni dell'azienda
- ❍ Italia
- ❍ Estero

La maggior parte dei Vostri impiegati ha appreso le abilità necessarie al mestiere ...
- ❍ In un'accademia di moda
- ❍ In un Istituto Professionale
- ❍ Dentro l'azienda
- ❍ In un'altra azienda

Qual è il fatturato annuale medio dell'azienda?
- ❍ Inferiore ai 2 milioni di €
- ❍ Inferiore ai 10 milioni di €
- ❍ Inferiore ai 50 milioni di €

La maggior parte della Vostra Produzione consiste in...
- ❍ Abb Uomo
- ❍ Abb Donna
- ❍ Abb Bambino
- ❍ Maglieria
- ❍ Seta
- ❍ Gioielli e Accessori
- ❍ Scarpe e prodotti in pelle
- ❍ Sportivo
- ❍ Intimo
- ❍ Cerimonia
- ❍ Altro _____

Qualità
- ❍ Alta
- ❍ Medio-alta
- ❍ Media

Realizzate anche collezioni che vendete con il Vostro marchio?
- ❍ Sì
- ❍ No

Chi sono i Vostri principali clienti?
- ❍ Marchi di moda
- ❍ Designer indipendenti
- ❍ Consumatori finali

Da dove proviene la maggior parte dei Vostri clienti?
- ❍ La Vostra area geografica
- ❍ Italia
- ❍ Europa
- ❍ Altro _____

Sezione numero 2: Benefici dell'associazione

Entrando a far parte dell'associazione…	Molto d'accordo	D'accordo	Indeciso	In disaccordo	Molto in disaccordo
Abbiamo aumentato le nostre entrate					
Abbiamo aumentato la nostra offerta					
Abbiamo fatto la cosa giusta per l'azienda					

Come azienda…	Molto d'accordo	D'accordo	Indeciso	In disaccordo	Molto in disaccordo
Sappiamo esattamente in cosa consiste l'associazione					
Riteniamo che sia benefica per il nostro business					
Riteniamo che sia benefica per tutti i membri					
Ce ne sentiamo parte					

L'organizzazione…	Molto d'accordo	D'accordo	Indeciso	In disaccordo	Molto in disaccordo
Ha aumentato i nostri contatti con aziende simili nel nostro distretto					
Ci ha aiutato a iniziare una collaborazione con aziende simili nel nostro distretto					
Ha aumentato I nostri contatti con aziende simili nella nostra regione					
Ci ha aiutato a iniziare una collaborazione con aziende simili nella nostra regione					
Ci ha dato la possibilità di entrare in contatto con produttori diversi da noi					
Ci ha aiutato a iniziare una collaborazione con produttori diversi da noi					
Organizza regolarmente incontri faccia a faccia con gli altri membri					
Organizza e facilita relazioni virtuali (email, mailing list, social networks, Skype, ecc.) con gli altri membri					
Ha aumentato il livello di cooperazione fra i membri					
Ha aumentato il livello di competizione fra i membri					

L'organizzazione…	Molto d'accordo	D'accordo	Indeciso	In disaccordo	Molto in disaccordo
Ha creato opportunità di scambio di sapere con altre aziende membri					
Ha organizzato conferenze e corsi a cui abbiamo partecipato					
Ci ha aiutato a migliorare le nostre capacità e abilità produttive					
Ha fatto sì che condividessimo il nostro sapere e know-how con altri membri del network					
Ha fatto sì che altri membri del network condividessero il loro sapere e know-how con noi					
Ha aumentato le nostre relazioni con istituti di formazione					

Grazie all'organizzazione…	Molto d'accordo	D'accordo	Indeciso	In disaccordo	Molto in disaccordo
Abbiamo migliorato il nostro sistema produttivo					
Abbiamo incominciato a realizzare nuovi prodotti					
La qualità della nostra produzione è aumentata					
La qualità del nostro distretto e della regione è aumentata					
Ci siamo espansi su nuovi segmenti di mercato					

Grazie all'organizzazione…	Molto d'accordo	D'accordo	Indeciso	In disaccordo	Molto in disaccordo
I nostri dipendenti hanno potuto allargare il loro network personale					
Sono nate nuove aziende e imprese					
Più persone sono riuscite a trovare un nuovo impiego					
Più persone hanno trovato un impiego migliore					
Abbiamo lavoratori freelance che curano un particolare progetto					

Entrando a far parte dell'organizzazione…	Molto d'accordo	D'accordo	Indeciso	In disaccordo	Molto in disaccordo
Abbiamo partecipato o siamo stati rappresentati a fiere e eventi commerciali					
Abbiamo raggiunto nuovi clienti e potuto espandere il nostro mercato					
abbiamo iniziato una collaborazione con aziende esterne all'organizzazione					
Siamo entrati in contatto con altre aziende in Italia, Europa o altrove					
Abbiamo maggiore visibilità internazionale					
I clienti si fidano di più dei prodotti "Made in" della nostra regione					
La qualità della nostra produzione è più riconosciuta					
Abbiamo più contatti con le istituzioni locali/nazionali/europee					

Siete disponibili ad una breve intervista?

❍ Si
❍ No
Indirizzo mail _____
Numero di telefono _____

B.2 English version

My name is Leonardo Fuligni and I am a student of the Master course in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship at Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

The purpose of my research is to measure the benefits of an organisation such as Apulia Fashion Makers or Consorzio della Moda for the firms that are members to them.

Before starting the survey, i twill be necessary to answer to quick informative questions on your firm. In this way, I will be able to contextualise the geographic area, the sector and the general characteristics of my units of analysis and generalise the data. Bear in mind though that the answers will stay anonymous and independent from the name of the firm: nothing that could damage your privacy will be published on my thesis.

At the end of the survey, you will find the option of making yourself available for a further interview. If you accept, I will be able to deepen my research and have you elaborate the answers you gave on the questionnaire. It is just a brief informal interview via phone or Skype (around 15/20 minutes), which would nonetheless be very useful for my research. Even in this case, the data collected will stay anonymous in the published version of my thesis, unless you give explicit consent to it.

Below, you will find the instructions to answer to the questionnaire. It takes maximum 10 minnutes to fill in the survey. Please give honest and sincere answers: the results of my thesis depend on you;

Thanks for your help!

In section 2, you will find a series of statements for which you will have to express your intensity of agreement, according to the following scale:

Strongly agree
Agree
Undecided
Disagree
Strongly disagree

All statements are formulated with “We” as a subject, so please try to answer from the point of view of the whole firm.

Section number 1: General Characteristics

To which organisation do you belong?
- ❍ Apulia Fashion Makers
- ❍ Promindustria

What is the name of the firm? _____
Where is it located? _____

How long have you been member of the organisation?
- ❍ Since this year
- ❍ 1-3 years
- ❍ 4-5 years
- ❍ More than 5 years

When was your firm born? _____

Number of employees
- ❍ Less than 5
- ❍ Between 5 and 10
- ❍ Between 10 and 25
- ❍ Between 25 and 50
- ❍ More than 50

Average age of employees
- ❍ Between 18 and 35 years old
- ❍ Between 18 and 50 years old
- ❍ More than 50 years old

Where do they mostly come from?
- ❍ Nearby the firm
- ❍ Italy
- ❍ Abroad

Where do most of them learn the skills necessary for their work?
- ❍ In a fashion accademy
- ❍ In a professional institute
- ❍ Within the firm
- ❍ In another firm

What is the average firm's yearly turnover?
- ❍ Less than €2 million
- ❍ Less than €10 million
- ❍ Less than €50 million

The majority of your production is…
- ❍ Menswear
- ❍ Womenswear
- ❍ Childrenswear
- ❍ Jersey
- ❍ Silk
- ❍ Jewels and Accessories
- ❍ Shoes and leather manufactures
- ❍ Sportswear
- ❍ Underwear
- ❍ Ceremony
- ❍ Other _____

Quality
- ❍ High
- ❍ Medium-high
- ❍ Medium

Do you realise products with your own brand?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Who are your biggest customers?
- ❍ Fashion brands
- ❍ Independent designers
- ❍ Final consumers

Where do they come from?
- ❍ Your own geographic area
- ❍ Italy
- ❍ Europe
- ❍ Other _____

Thanks to the organisation…	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
We have increased our revenues					
We have increased our output					
We did the right thing for the firm					

As a firm…	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
We know exactly what the organisation is					
We think the organisation is beneficial for our business					
We think the organisation is beneficial for all members					
We feel we belong to the organisation					

The organisation…	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Increased our contacts with similar firms in our district					
Helped us start a collaboration with firms in our district					
Increased our conacts with similar firms in the region					
Helped us start a collaboration with firms in our region					
Helped us get in contact with different manufacturers					
Helped us start a collaboration with different manufacturers					
Organises regular F2F meeting with other members					
Facilitates CMC across members (emails etc.)					
Increased cooperation across members					
Increased competition across members					

The organisation…	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Facilitated knowledge sharing across members					
Organised conferences or courses to which we participated					
Helped us improve our production skills					
Made us share our knowledge and know-how with others					
Made others share their knowledge and know-how with us					
Increased our relationships with educational institutes					

Thanks to the organisation…	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
We improved our production system					
We started realising new products					
The quality of our production increased					
The quality of our cluster or region in general has increased					
We expanded on new segments of the market					

Thanks to the organisation…	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Our employees could enlarge their personal network					
There are more enterprises and start-ups					
More people managed to find a new job					
More people managed to find a better job					
We have freelance workers working on a specific project					

Joining the organisation…	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
We participated/were represented at fairs or trade events					
We reached new customers and expanded our market					
We started a collaboration with firms external to the organisation					
We got in contact with firms in Italy, Europe or elsewhere					
We have more international visibility					
Customers trust more the Made in products of our region					
The quality of our production is more recognised					
We have contacts with local/national/international institutions					

Are you available for a brief interview?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Email address_____

Telephone number _____

C. Interview guidelines (Italian version)

Struttura	Argomenti			
		Aziende / Rappresentanti dell'organizzazione	Istituti di formazione	Istituzioni / Associazioni di categoria
Introduzione	*Blocco 1*	Presentazione del ricercatore Presentazione della ricerca Mettere a proprio agio l'intervistato Chiedere il permesso di registrare		
	Blocco 2	Domande in generale sul background dell'intervistato		
		Presentazione dell'azienda (attività, prodotto, brand etc.)	Presentazione dell'istituto (corsi, numero di studenti etc.)	Presentazione dell'istituzione / associazione
Parte principale	*Blocco 1*	Informazioni generali sulla partecipazione e sull'adesione all'associazione		Esempi di coinvolgimento
	Blocco 2	Benefici generali dell'organizzazione Senso di appartenenza		
	Blocco 3	Relazioni interne all'organizzazione Contatti all'interno dell'organizzazione Collaborazioni Competizione		
	Blocco 4	Scambio e creazione di sapere Istruzione all'interno dell'azienda, dell'associazione, corsi, imparare facendo necessità educative		
	Blocco 5	Innovazione		
	Blocco 6	Mercato del lavoro Transizione scuola lavoro Benefici per gli impiegati		
	Blocco 7	Apertura del cluster: eventi commerciali, fiere & global pipelines Relazioni con altre istituzioni Visibilità		
	Blocco 8	Contesto e mercato esterno		
	Blocco 9	Prodotti "Made in": qualità e futuro		
Conclusione		Aspettative future o progetti dell'associazione Controllare se mancano domande Commenti finali dall'intervistato Saluti e ringraziamenti		

C.1 Structured interview guideline for educational institute (Italian)

La presentazione del ricercatore e della ricerca è stata fatta telefonicamente

Presentazione dell'istituto di formazione [Introduzione]:

- Quando è stato fondato?
- Missione e obiettivi principali?
- Che tipo di attività organizza? In quali campi?
- Tipo di studenti, numero di corsi e studenti in media?
- Chi partecipa normalmente a questi corsi? Direttori? Lavoratori? Sarti? Impiegati o disoccupati?
- Quale percentuale degli associati prende parte alle vostre attività?
- Età media dei partecipanti? Provenienza geografica dei partecipanti?

Adesione all'associazione [Blocco 1]:

- Da quanti anni ne fate parte? Come siete entrati in contatto?
- Che tipo di relazione vi lega (membro, a pagamento, ecc.)?
- Perché ne siete entrati a far parte?

Benefici generali [Blocco 2]:

- Quali sono i benefici per voi? Cosa vi rientra?
- Vi sentite di appartenerne? Perché?

La Vostra attività all'interno dell'organizzazione [Blocchi 3, 4, 5]:

- Che cosa fate concretamente per l'associazione? Che cosa organizzate?
- Che tipo di corsi, workshop e conferenze?
- Con quale frequenza?
- Sono privati per i membri del network o aperti a tutti?
- Contattate e invitate direttamente voi gli associati o ci pensa l'associazione?
- Avete in generale contatti diretti con gli associati?
- Ci sono agevolazioni economiche per i membri sui vostri servizi?
- Qual è l'atmosfera generale nei corsi? Collaborativa o competitiva?
- Si sono mai create collaborazioni tra aziende o progetti all'interno dei corsi? Cercate di facilitarne la creazione? Nuovi prodotti?
- Quanto i membri delle diverse aziende sono inclini a condividere il loro sapere?
- E' un insegnamento diretto o si crea un'atmosfera di collaborazione fra i diversi corsisti che contribuiscono con il proprio sapere?
- Che cosa aggiungono i vostri corsi agli associati, soprattutto in termini di innovazione, qualità produttiva e creazione di nuovo sapere all'interno dell'azienda?

Mercato del lavoro [Blocco 6]:

- Livello di istruzione e preparazione medio dei partecipanti: possiedono già le abilità necessarie a lavorare in quel tipo di azienda?
- Se si, dove le hanno acquisite?
- Quali sono i corsi più richiesti? Quali le figure più richieste sul mercato?
- Fornite assistenza/consulenza a chi vuole mettersi in proprio e aprire la propria impresa? E a chi cerca lavoro?
- Di cosa hanno bisogno adesso le aziende da parte degli impiegati?
- C'è bisogno di specializzarsi dopo le scuole professionali?

Apertura [Blocco 7]:

- Rapporti con altri istituti di formazioni o università?
- Relazioni con altre istituzioni? Ne notate per i membri?
- Sapete di partecipazioni a fiere o eventi commerciali? Avete contribuito in qualche modo?

Contesto e Made in Italy [Blocchi 8, 9]:

- Come sono le condizioni economiche per le aziende adesso? C'è una ripresa?
- Che futuro intravedete per il Made in Italy?
- Quale può essere il vostro ruolo in quanto istituto di formazione?

Conclusione:

- Progetti futuri con l'associazione?
- Commenti finali?

Grazie del vostro aiuto e arrivederci!

C.2 Structured interview guideline for educational institute (English)

The introduction of the research and the researcher was made via phone

Introduction of the educational institute [Introduction]:

- When was it founded?
- Mission and main objectives?
- What kind of activities do you organise? In which sectors?
- Type of students, number of courses and average number of students per course?
- Who takes part to your courses? Owners? Workers? Tailors? Employed or unemployed?
- Which percentage of associates takes part to your activities?
- Average age of participants? Geographic provenience?

Membership [Bloc 1]:

- How long have you been members? How did you get in contact with them?
- What type of relationship do you have (member, paying member, etc.)?
- Why did you join?

General benefits [Bloc 2]:

- What are the benefits for you? What do you get back?
- Do you have a sense of belonging? Why?

Your activity within the organisation [Blocs 3, 4, 5]:

- What do you actually do for the organisation? What do you organise?
- What kind of courses, workshops and conferences?
- How often?
- Are they organised only for members or open to everyone?
- Do you contact and invite directly the associates or the organisation does that for you?

- In general, do you have direct contacts with associates?
- Are there economic incentives for members in participating to your courses?
- What is the general atmosphere in the courses? Collaborative or competitive?
- Have you ever noticed inter-firms collaborations originating from your courses? Do you facilitate them? How about new products?
- How are members willing to share their knowledge?
- Do you teach in frontal classes? Or do you try to create a collaborative atmosphere in a way that every student is encouraged to share her knowledge?
- How do your courses contribute to innovation, quality of production and knowledge creation within firms?

Labour market [Bloc 6]:

- Average level of preparation of participants: do they already have the necessary skills to work for these firms?
- If yes, where did they acquire them?
- Which courses are the most requested? Which positions are most requested on the market?
- Do you offer support to those who would like to start up? And to job seekers?
- What do firms require from employees nowadays?
- Do workers need to further specialise after a professional institute?

Opennes [Bloc 7]:

- Relationships with other educational institutes or universities?
- Relationships with oher instittuions? How about the members of the organisation?
- Do you know of any fair or trade even to which they participated? Did you contribute somehow?

Contest e Made in Italy [Blocs 8, 9]:

- What are the economic conditions for firms now? Is it getting better?
- What future do you envisage for Made in Italy?
- What could your role be as an educational institute?

Conclusion:

- Future project with the organisation?
- Final comments?

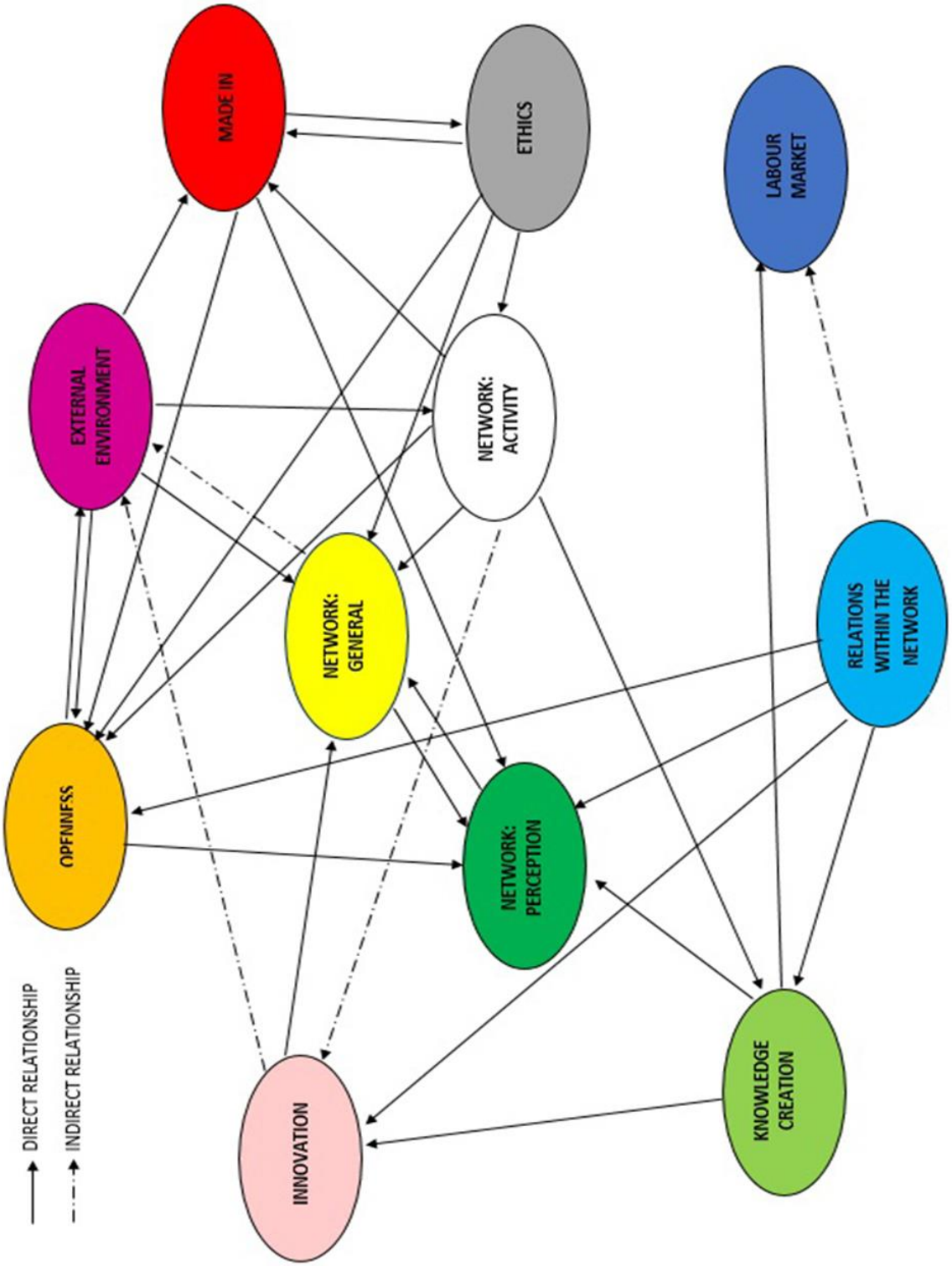
Thanks for your help and goodbye!

D. Overview of codes and categories

Categories	Codes
1. Network: General (What is the network? Which are the firms that compose it? How is it organised?)	
	After Work Customers Employees Filiera Firms outside the network Independence of production Membership Organisation of the network Own Brand Promotion of the network Tailoring Tradition & Heritage Type of firms
2. Network Perception (Do firms feel part of it? Has it improved anything?)	
	Belonging Benefits to educational institutes Benefits to owners General benefits of the network
3. Relations within the network (Increased contacts? Collaborations? With whom? General climate?)	
	Collaboration vs.Competition Collaborations Collaboration with different firms Contacts
4. Knowledge creation (Opportunities for sharing? For debating? Courses? Improvements?)	
	Contacts with educational institutes Discussion Education Education within the firm Education within the network Knowledge Echange Learning by doing Need for Education Students
5. Innovation (Changes in quality? Production schemes? New products?)	
	Education & Creativity Education & Research Innovation
6. Labour Market (Benefits for employees? More or better jobs? New enterprises?)	
	Benefits to employees From education to work Job market New Enterprises

Categories	Codes
7. Openness of the network (Fairs? Institutions? Infrastructures? Increased trust? Visibility?)	
	Fairs Independence Institutions Internationalisation New Clients Trust Visibility
8. External Environment (Market conditions? Geographic conditions?)	
	Continuity Environment Financing Geographic Position Infrastructures Market Physical distance Seasonability South
9. Made in (Current situation of Made in production? Future?)	
	Artisanship Certification Future of Made in Luxury/Niche Made in Quality Unfair competition
10. Ethics (Why do they join the network? Intrinsic motivations?)	
	Being together Ethics Final consumers Local Territory Purpose of the network Respecting standards Sustainability
11. Network Activity (Degree of participation? Attitude? How should it change in the future?)	
	Attitude Future of the network Participation

E. Relationships among categories



F. Quantitative results: average scores and standard deviation per statement

General Characteristics	Apulia Fashion Makers (n=15)		Consorzio della Moda (n=9)	
Question Thanks to the organisation…	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**
We have increased our revenues	2.50 (n=16)	0.97 (n=16)	3.22	0.83
We have increased our output	2.73	1.22	2.89	0.93
We did the right thing for the firm	1.67	1.05	2.00	1.25

Perception of the organisation	Apulia Fashion Makers (n=15)		Consorzio della Moda (n=9)	
Question As a firm…	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**
We know exactly what the organisation is	1.40	0.51	2.30	1.16
We think the organisation is beneficial for our business	1.60	0.74	2.33	1.22
We think the organisation is beneficial for all members	1.38 (n=16)	0.62 (n=16)	2.67	1.12
We feel we belong to the organisation	1.40	0.63	2.33	1.22

Internal Relationships	Apulia Fashion Makers (n=15)		Consorzio della Moda (n=9)	
Question The organisation…	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**
Increased our contacts with similar firms in our district	1.87	0.92	2.67	1.12
Helped us start a collaboration with firms in our district	2.20	1.21	2.56	0.63
Increased our contacts with similar firms in the region	1.87	0.83	2.78	1.09
Helped us start a collaboration with firms in our region	1.93	0.88	3.11	1.05
Helped us get in contact with different manufacturers	1.93	1.16	2.50	0.76
Helped us start a collaboration with different manufacturers	2.00	1.13	2.63	0.74
Organises regular F2F meeting with other members	2.47	1.36	2.38	0.92
Facilitates CMC across members (emails etc.)	2.13	1.19	2.67	0.87
Increased cooperation across members	1.93	1.03	2.75	0.89
Increased competition across members	2.13 (n=16)	1.09 (n=16)	2.63	0.74

Knowledge exchange & Creation	Apulia Fashion Makers (n=15)		Consorzio della Moda (n=9)	
Question The organisation…	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**
Facilitated knowledge sharing across members	1.93	1.16	2.40	0.84
Organised conferences or courses to which we participated	1.63 (n=16)	1.02 (n=16)	2.33	1.00
Helped us improve our production skills	2.07	1.10	2.56	1.33
Made us share our knowledge and know-how with others	2.00	1.07	2.78	1.09
Made others share their knowledge and know-how with us	2.07	1.10	2.89	1.05
Increased our relationships with educational institutes	2.40	1.24	3.22	1.39

Innovation	Apulia Fashion Makers (n=15)		Consorzio della Moda (n=8)	
Question Thanks to the organisation…	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**
We improved our production system	2.36	1.01	3.00	1.00
We started realising new products	2.67	1.18	2.86	1.07
The quality of our production increased	2.67	1.11	3.38	1.06
The quality of our cluster or region in general has increased	2.44 (n=16)	1.26 (n=16)	3.29	1.11
We expanded on new segments of the market	2.67	1.11	3.43	0.98

Labour Market	Apulia Fashion Makers (n=15)		Consorzio della Moda (n=8)	
Question Thanks to the organisation…	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**
Our employees could enlarge their personal network	2.87	1.13	3.75	0.89
There are more enterprises and start-ups	3.13	1.13	3.50	1.07
More people managed to find a new job	3.00	1.20	3.11 (n=9)	1.27 (n=9)
More people managed to find a better job	3.00 (n=16)	1.15 (n=16)	3.57	0.98
We have freelance workers working on a specific project	3.20	1.15	3.38	0.92

Openness	Apulia Fashion Makers (n=15)		Consorzio della Moda (n=8)	
Question Joining the organisation…	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**	**Mean (M)**	**St. Deviation (s)**
We participated/were represented at fairs or trade events	2.06 (n=16)	1.06 (n=16)	2.88	1.13
We reached new customers and expanded our market	2.47	0.99	3.13	0.99
We started a collaboration with firms external to the org.	2.93	0.88	3.00 (n=9)	1.12 (=9)
We got in contact with firms in Italy, Europe or elsewhere	2.53	1.13	3.13	0.99
We have more international visibility	2.60	0.99	2.25	0.46
Customers trust more the Made in products of our region	2.20	1.01	2.63	1.06
The quality of our production is more recognised	2.20	1.08	2.88	1.13
We have contacts with local/national/international institutions	2.50 (n=16)	1.03 (n=16)	2.50	0.76