

Preface

For some time now, and almost by chance, my strong interest and fascination with the study of sustainable development has prompted me to take a closer look at the impact of sustainability on the business world and, more specifically, how corporate competitiveness could effectively contribute to the welfare of the community.

During my studies, I have come to realise that sustainability is not just about philanthropy, nor is it the mere combination of marketing actions or initiatives mainly pursued by large enterprises to enhance their business image or reputation. Sustainable development and the relevant integration of its practices into corporate management precisely mean that by virtue of a business competitive model, both products and processes may acquire an ecological and a social value.

It is rather through the reformulation of a management process that many business resources and skills can be requalified, codified and channelled towards a more viable implementation. In this scenario, the competitive model would uphold the active role of small- and medium-sized enterprises and encourage cooperation with the entire supply chain while promoting the adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach.

In a win-win relationship, businesses, while striving to meet the growing demand for sustainable products and services, can keep abreast of competition (i.e. Asian competitors) through the implementation of a differentiation strategy based on quality and innovation. With a responsible view, enterprises may therefore not only restore a balance between the community and the ecosystem, but also ensure the inherent respect for human dignity.

This book directly addresses these issues and identifies in the ‘clustering-based approach’ the best viable solution for the practice of sustainable policies to enhance economic growth and social well-being.

Nowadays, economic systems and production process sustainability need formal recognition in a framework of integrated planning and implementation, especially in relation to a number of variables that have a clear impact on the development of initiatives and business sustainability strategies.

This work seeks to inquire as to the contextual factors relevant to the sector characteristics of local clusters and production centres.

The choice of the units of inquiry of business clusters and production centres is significant for two reasons. Firstly, the unbundling of the productive processes among many actors, namely subcontractors, service sectors and related activities, shifts the focus of sustainability from an ‘individual practice’ of a single enterprise to a networking and clustering one.

Individual practice for the protection of human rights and the environment has met with limited or no results due to the unethical conduct of other players in the sector. In order to achieve the very common good, it is important to share sustainability with a large variety of actors, create public/private partnerships and cooperate with the supply chain. In fact, through the creation of the correct contexts, it will be feasible to target actions in a collaborative fashion and legitimise the development of capital projects for their effective implementation. In so doing, sustainability becomes the real and genuine opportunity to establish collaborative interaction and partnership between the public and the private sectors.

The second reason refers to the entrepreneurial nature of the Italian economic-productive tissue, characterised almost exclusively by SMEs, for which, in order to foster corporate social responsibility practices (CSR), the literature has indicated, for large enterprises, the need to adopt a collaborative approach focusing on the *stakeholder theory*, while SMEs should rely on the concept of *social capital*. On the other hand, the institutions have proposed practical approaches based on dialogue with stakeholders (UNIDO 2007), or the creation of business clusters (i.e. business networks and business clusters) to boost growth and increase competitiveness (EC 2011).

Industrial districts represent a privileged organisational context to study SMEs’ sustainability initiatives, considering their strong ties to the territory and local communities.

The issue of sustainability in networks and business clusters is thus particularly significant, although the literature tends to address its distinctive features by mainly focusing on the perspective of a single enterprise (McGuire et al. 1988; Wheeler et al. 2003).

To bridge this gap, this work examines industrial clusters and production centres’ sustainability projects relevant to a number of enterprises sharing a high level of productive interdependence and stable relations based on trust. This interaction among firms creates the right climate for exchanging mutual resources and activities in order to improve them and strengthen the competitive position of their businesses. This work will therefore investigate the dynamics of sustainability management in industrial districts and production centres, and the relationships among stakeholders and identify suitable approaches and tools to foster engagement.

The text is divided into two parts. Part I relates to the theoretical background of the existing mutually interdependent relationship between the territory and the enterprises, especially SMEs, whose influence affects competitiveness (Chap. 1). More specifically, it analyses the contribution of classical economy, the theory of industrial districts, international marketing and territorial marketing researches in order to establish the value of the territory for business competitiveness.

By placing emphasis on the increasing belief that the territory is one of the key factors for strengthening the business competitive advantage, these studies seek to show that there are different ways for a territory to be competitive and various alternatives to create competitiveness. This part also identifies in social capital the strategic resource for the implementation of sustainability strategies in small- and medium-sized enterprises (Chap. 2). The relational nature, typical of these actors, has drawn attention to social capital and emphasised its significant strategic role, which, with a responsible view, would enable these actors to reinforce their relational resources. Relationships are thus vital connectors and the stakeholder engagement among the best viable approaches for sustainability development in small-sized enterprises. This chapter covers a literary review on the concept of corporate social responsibility, identifies the distinctive features of the sustainability strategy, describes business advantages and stakeholders' benefits, and highlights the distinctive aspects to be applied to supply chains, business clusters and local systems.

Finally, the next part covers the major role of engagement in the decision-making process and its undisputable value in the implementation of strategies and management tools to achieve sustainable development (Chap. 3). Different theoretical views on this topic have been investigated: the proposed model considers engagement as the foundation of modern knowledge as well as a means to develop cognitive capabilities by focusing on the individual subjective sphere through *intentionality processes* and on the social and collective dimension through *interaction processes*. This chapter provides principles and tools to manage engagement and ensure the sustainability and governance of business clusters.

Part II focuses on the empirical research of the eight main industrial districts and production centres in Campania, ranging from the leading *Made in Italy* industries, namely food and fashion (textile, tannery and footwear), along with jewellery products for their traditional value in the manufacturing sector and significant contribution to the local economic system. The purpose of the research and survey methods (Chap. 4) also includes direct interviews with the examined business clusters and production centres' representatives, and paves the way for a cognitive analysis of the current state of sustainability policies in compliance with the ISO 26000 guidelines for business clusters and production centres in Campania. At the same time, it provides an insight into the 'network projects' and their relevant operating procedures, objectives and benefits achieved (or meant to be achieved) in relation to the project beneficiaries, namely the network enterprises and the involved external actors (Chap. 5).

The final part of the work tackles the role of local public policies that brings to light a series of critical aspects in clusters' and production centres' sustainability management while investigating local institutions' initiatives to improve their current performances. This analysis shows that local authorities should find the right balance between legislation and the promotion of sustainable actions, thus enabling production centres and business clusters to adopt 'unique' models, which, as part of the cultural heritage of the region, would contribute to the social and

economic development of the community, while boosting their competitive advantage on a global scale.

The industrial policy should therefore enhance the production traditions of clusters and local expertise and take advantage of the full range of their unparalleled resources.

This book concludes by suggesting potential courses of action institutions should embrace to make the clustering-based approach a viable solution that enables SMEs to foster the implementation of adequate policies that would, in turn, confirm the validity of the so-called sustainable competitive model (Chap. 6).

Naples, Italy

Alessandra De Chiara

References

- European Commission (2011) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A renewed EU strategy 2011–14 for Corporate Social Responsibility. COM (2011) 681, Brussels, 25 Oct 2011
- McGuire JB, Sundgren A, Schneeweis T (1988) Corporate social responsibility and firm financial performance. *Acad Manage J* 31:854–872
- UNIDO (2007) The UN Global Compact operational guide for medium-scale enterprises. UN Global Compact, July 2007. https://www.unido.org/fileadmin/user_media/Publications/Pub_free/UN_global_compact_operational_guide_for_medium_scale_enterprises.pdf. Accessed 7 May 2013
- Wheeler D, Colbert B, Freeman RE (2003) Focusing on value: reconciling corporate social responsibility, stakeholder theory and sustainability in a network world. *J Gen Manage* 28 (3):1–29

Implementing Sustainability Strategies in Networks and
Clusters

Principles, Tools, and New Research Outcomes

De Chiara, A.

2017, XV, 167 p. 28 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-40200-0