

CONVIVIALITY IN ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES: MAIN RESULTS FROM AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

by Simone Guercini, Matilde Milanesi, Silvia Ranfagni

Abstract

The present study investigates conviviality, as related to social capital, in entrepreneurial communities and how it makes social relationships a context for developing business relationships and recognizing entrepreneurial opportunities. The methodology adopted includes both qualitative (in-depth interviews, case analysis) and text-mining techniques for the analysis of qualitative data. The empirical research is based on emblematic cases of Italian entrepreneurial communities from the textile-clothing industry, located in Italy and China. The study sheds light on the mechanisms (from social to business relationships) that conviviality can trigger and the drivers of these mechanisms. The potentials and limits in using of conviviality for entrepreneurial activities are highlighted at the end of the paper.

Keywords: *Conviviality; Social Capital*

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship research has given attention to entrepreneurial communities understood as a number of individuals and groups that assume entrepreneurial roles and are actively engaged in capturing new market opportunities (Dana, 1995, 1997). Such group of entrepreneurs is distinctively recognizable and characterized by a network of social and business relationships that provide its peers with the conditions necessary to firms' growth (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2004). In such communities, social relations are at the basis of the social capital that entrepreneurs and the community they belong can exploit. Individuals who share same contexts and who know each other may have access to and benefit from social capital (Bourdieu, 1980; Coleman 1988) defined as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 2). Social capital is a resource for entrepreneurs and open to opportunities discovery (Shu *et al.*, 2018).

Social capital produces information and develops entrepreneurship (Light and Dana, 2013). But how? Social relations are based on the mechanism of social obligations that pushes actors of the relationship to mobilize resources. Social obligations act in this sense, together with trust between actors. According to scholars from the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group (Håkansson and Snehota, 2002; Håkansson *et al.*, 2009), social relations mobilize resources that impact on business relationships. Combining an entrepreneurial prospective with the IMP approach on social relations, it emerges that social capital is a strategic asset that animates entrepreneurship and can drive entrepreneurs in developing business relationships. In this process, conviviality can act as driver of membership by developing social relationships among members of entrepreneurial communities. Conviviality is an emerging topic; it is an interdisciplinary concept that has been studied mainly by sociologists and anthropologists (Lloyd, 2002; Maitland, 2008; Williams and Stroud, 2013), and only recently it has attracted the attention of marketing and management scholars (Guercini and Ranfagni, 2016). Conviviality is commonly described as an undeniable means of socialization that creates interactive spaces for revealing personal and real intentions (Illich, 1973). The social relationships driven by conviviality are not so distant from the business ones. More specifically, the concept of embeddedness (Macaulay 1963; Granovetter, 1985, 1992) has been developed to make sense of the closeness between social and business relationships, for which social relationships include and hence animate business relationships.

The present study investigates conviviality in entrepreneurial communities and how it makes social relationships a context for developing bu-

business relationships and recognizing entrepreneurial opportunities. More specifically, the study, exploratory in nature, aims at investigating the dual mechanisms (from social to business relationships and vice versa), that conviviality, experienced by entrepreneurial communities, can trigger, as well as the drivers (antecedents) of such mechanism. The paper focuses on the analysis of three communities: two of them are rooted in Italy (Tuscany) and one is located in China (Hangzhou). The paper is articulated as follows: next section illustrates social capital and the interdisciplinary concept of conviviality, then the research methodology and objectives are explained. Subsequently, the main results of the empirical research are described together with discussion, implications and final remarks.

2. Literature review: social capital and conviviality

Social capital is a concept that has been investigated by researchers belonging to different disciplines such as sociologists, political scientists and economists. Each of them gave their own contribution by outlining this complex and widespread concept. As highlighted by Adler and Kwon (2002), it has its origin “in the social structure and contents of the actor’s social relationships” (p. 23). And as such “it is a resource available to actors as a function of their location in the structure of their social relations” (p. 18). It is a capital that can turn out to be a long-lived asset if supported by continuous investments aimed at feeding, intensifying and developing social bonds; it generates benefits above all in terms of superior access to information, power and solidarity (Baron and Ensley, 2006; Foss *et al.*, 2013). Compared to other forms of capital, it is accessible through social relations and it exists through participation in the structure of relations and shared circumstances (Putnam, 2001). According to Kwon *et al.* (2013), social capital has a dual nature, public and private. If we consider it as a “public good” (Putnam, 1993), it can be seen as a community social capital, which resides in the boundaries of a community that nurtures and shares it among its members. In the perspective of a private good, it is embedded in dyadic relations and constitutes “an individual resource whereby individuals benefit directly from their own social affiliations and network strategies” (p. 981). Members who do not have high level of personal social capital can benefit from it, and community cohesion and information flow contribute to this (Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006). Thus, social capital is in the actors and in the social relations that they develop. Social relations mobilize resources that affect entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011; McKeever *et al.*, 2014; Gedajlovic *et al.*, 2013). Batt (2008) considers social capital as “the mobilization, use and benefits gained through accessing present and future resources through social intra-and inter-firm networks” (p. 488). The me-

chanism social relations-social obligations-resources mobilization has recently emerged in the paper of Bondelli, Havensvid and Solli-Sæther (2018) as a basis for interpreting the interaction between personal relations and business relationships. According to the authors, resources are mobilized through the activation of social obligations that arise in social connections in the wake of social practices. Social practices foster mutual recognition and commitment between actors and, by generating social obligations favour the mobilization of resources (Bondelli *et al.*, 2018). Thus, at the basis of this mobilization there are the social obligations that are established with individuals. Social capital is a form of credential, it is made of social obligation and as such entitles social network members to credit. The concept of social obligation was previously explained by Coleman (1988), by relating it to the concept of expectation: "if A does something for B and trusts B to reciprocate in the future, this establishes an expectation in A and an obligation on the part of B. This obligation can be conceived as a credit by A for performance by B" (p. 102). Social capital is a resource as a sum of social obligations that accumulate over time; it acts as an engine to mobilize resources. Access to resources lies in the development of bonds through social relations. Its magnitude depends on the resources made available to the other nodes of this network. Together with social obligations, also trust constitutes a social capital resource (Inkpen and Tsang, 2005). Napahiet and Ghoshal (1998) argued that social capital is "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit" (p. 243). They discuss that business relationships evolve with the changing social relationships, and the development of relationships between companies is the basis of entrepreneurial processes. Similarly, one important study is that by Rich, Mandják and Szántó (2010) who regard social relations as an opportunity for business actions and stress that no business relationship is possible without personal bonds.

Following this line of reasoning, we argue that conviviality may impact on social relationships and makes social relationships a context for developing business relationships and developing entrepreneurial opportunities. Conviviality is an interdisciplinary and multifaceted concept that can be related to sharing, free collective spaces, socialization and embeddedness. *Conviviality as "sharing"*. The term conviviality derives from the Latin "*convivium*", often translated as banquet, that is a meal shared by many, often as part of a ritual or ceremony. In historical accounts, convivial meetings combined aspects of friendship, hospitality and unity. In the classical Greece, public banquets gathered citizens around common interests and favoured a certain democratic management of businesses. In the Christian tradition, banquets were a sign of collective sharing. Thus, conviviality is a way to experience and feel part of a community. Maitland (2008) convin-

ingly argues that, also for tourists, “getting to know the city [London] was a convivial and community experience – local people and local places to drink coffee or shop were important” (p. 21). The membership feeling that emerges can be positive and implies the sharing of a particular city’s atmosphere. Lloyd (2002) demonstrates that conviviality (as sharing) had even an impact as driver of public fund raising policies. More recently, Germov *et al.* (2010) explore the portrayal of the slow food movement in the Australian middle media. Authors demonstrate how some resulting aspects of conviviality stem from analyzing the social pleasure associated both with sharing good food, which can in turn be linked to localism (the social, health and environmental benefits of local producers) and with romanticism (an idyllic rural lifestyle as an antidote to the time poverty of urban life).

Conviviality as free collective spaces. Conviviality opens to authentic relationships within social communities. Some philosophers (Illich, 1973; Fusaro, 2014) see conviviality not only as a means to create sharing and socialization. They also see it as the opposite of the predatory individualism that characterizes modern capitalism, which generates forms of social levelling and smothers individuals in the coils of the aggregate. In this regard, Illich specifies that without a reorganization of the society, we cannot escape the progressive homogenization of everything, the cultural eradication and the standardization of interpersonal relationships. Even though Illich does not expressly describe the tools of conviviality, he does recognize their ability to provide space and power to individual intentionality. Thus, conviviality acts as a conductor of meaning, a translator of intentionality. Illich sustains that capitalist productivity is predicated on having, conviviality, instead, on being. Conviviality becomes the flywheel that empowers social relationships and drives the creation of a community.

The community is conceived in the Aristotelian concept of *Koinonia* that includes sharing, freely being together and being part of a community composed of an aggregate of individuals who find full freedom within the community itself. The emerging community is thus more than a mere collection of individuals sharing the same surroundings and thus forming a recognizable group (Cova, 1997); it is a setting that promotes social relationships, which are the fruit of free individual manifestations.

Conviviality as socialization. Both sociological and business marketing studies focalize their attention on socialization – more than directly on conviviality – as a way to build and develop interpersonal relations. It is in the socialization that, according to sociologies, it is possible to find trails of conviviality. Lohr (1982) explains how trust in individual interactions can be reinforced by “the after-hours sessions in the bars and nightclubs”. These are places “where the vital personal contacts [between businessmen] are established and nurtured slowly. Once these ties are set, they are not easily undone” (Granovetter, 1985, p. 497). Researchers from the IMP Group

achieve similar considerations by starting their analysis from business relationships. According to them, behind business relationships there is a web of social relationships (Håkansson, 1982; Håkansson *et al.* 2009) that act as mediators of business. In this regard, Håkansson and Snehota (1995) highlight that “the individuals inter-acting on behalf of their organizations in a business relationship take on other roles in other contexts. They take part in other relationships; belong to professional associations, are relatives, neighbours or schoolmates, have perhaps developed other types of personal relationships in other arenas, creating various social bonds in working places, social and sporting clubs, religious organizations and the like” (p. 15).

Thus, socialization can be fostered in moments and in contexts that are convivial. Granovetter adds (1973) that it is just socialization that enables managers to broaden their mutual acquaintance and to exploit “the strength of weak ties”. More specifically, it is a way “to know people that we do not and, thus, receive more novel information”; new acquaintance can then “connect us to a wider world... and maybe better sources when we need to go beyond what our group knows” (Granovetter, 2005, p. 34).

Conviviality and embeddedness. Embeddedness is a state of interpenetration between social and business relations. Introduced by Granovetter (1985), it highlights that social relations incorporate and animate business relationships. It refers to “the fact that economic actions and outcomes, like all social actions and outcomes, are affected by actor’s dyadic relations and by the structure of the overall network of relations” (Granovetter, 1992, p. 33). In other words, as Lohr (1982) explicitly claims, “friendships and longstanding personal connections affect business connections everywhere”. Macaulay (1963) even explains that “even where the parties have [already defined] a detailed and carefully planned agreement which indicates what is to happen if, say, the seller fails to deliver on time, often they will never refer to the agreement but will negotiate a solution when the problem arises as if there never had been any original contract” (p. 61).

Thus, social relations are intertwined with business relations. More in general, they are the context in which business relations can take shape, develop and acquire interactive fluidity. Even though IMP scholars view the company as landmark in their studies, social networks are considered as essential components of business networks and the web of personal relations that underlie business relationships appear “to be a condition for the development of inter-organizational ties between any two companies” (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995, p. 10). Hence, social relations coexist with business relationships and act as mediators of business. Since conviviality is related to socialization, it may be that convivial relations embed business relations. This is consistent with what suggested by Granovetter (1985), who argues that all human behaviors (including economic ones) are “embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations” (p. 487). Indeed, in

this context, conviviality can be considered as a tool through which social relations come to emerge and evolve. The specialized literature highlights how the main condition for creating interweaving between social and business networks, and thus embeddedness, is trust between individuals. For sociologists, trust is not the result of the so-called “generalized morality” (Granovetter, 1985, p. 489) but stems instead from personal relations. For managerial scholars, trust makes possible “one party’s belief that its needs will be fulfilled in the future by actions undertaken by the other party” (Anderson and Weitz, 1989, p. 312). According to them, trust can be enhanced by commitment that leads to an “exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p. 23).

3. Methodology

Entrepreneurship research has been characterized by quantitative studies that need to be complemented with qualitative ones aimed at getting closer to the phenomenon under study, investigating processes, interaction and context, never taking for granted the meanings of words, concepts or behavior (Dana and Dana, 2005). To this aim, the present study, exploratory in nature, adopts a mixed methodology that includes different steps. The first step is qualitative and concerns in depth, face-to-face interviews (Boyce and Neale, 2006) with members of selected cases of entrepreneurial communities, integrated with occasions of participation of the authors themselves in the convivial community life. The second step is complementary to the first and includes a content analysis of the transcribed text performed with a specific text-mining software (T-LAB). Text mining refers to the process of extracting several types of information from unstructured text documents (Tan, 1999). Text mining is a technique adopted in qualitative research (Janasik *et al.*, 2009) for the analysis of data collected, in the present study, by means of in-depth interviews. This articulated analysis has contributed to an understanding of the mechanisms that conviviality triggers in entrepreneurial communities, and of the correlated drivers. Finally, the relation between antecedents and consequences of conviviality was explored in depth through an analysis of each case of entrepreneurial communities (Yin, 2003). More specifically, the study involves entrepreneurs who are part of the same communities, purposely selected for the present study. Two of them are rooted in Italy (Tuscany) and one in China (Hangzhou). For reasons of confidentiality, the communities situated in Italy have been respectively denominated Cultural Association (hereafter CA) and Leather Consortium (hereafter LC). The first, founded in 1983, includes about forty entrepreneurs from SMEs operating in textiles and clothing but also

in professional services. The second community emerged in the '60s and '70s and gave rise in 1997 to a Consortium, which groups more than fifty entrepreneurs from SMEs in the leather industry. Both consist of mainly business-to-business (B2B) companies. Their customers are mainly multinational fashion and luxury goods companies. The third community under investigation is composed of Italian entrepreneurs and is localized in China, exactly in Hangzhou, Province of Zhejiang, where one of the most important Chinese textile-clothing districts is located. Confidentially named Italian Fashion Association (hereafter IFA), its members operate principally in the textile and clothing industry and work for both local and international fashion companies. The purpose of the IFA is to develop and strengthen relations among Italian entrepreneurs who have decided to intensify their business activity in China, trying to facilitate their social and business integration. We conducted ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) with the President of the LC, the Director of IFA and of CA. All three have leading roles in entrepreneurial communities, but the first two are also company-owners and the second one is a company-manager. These interviews have been combined with other supplementary interviews that have involved six entrepreneur-members¹ of the IFA. Personal interviews have been integrated with occasions of participation in the convivial community life. The topics of each interview included: a) convivial activities organized and/or attended ; b) experiences and benefits from conviviality; c) perspective in the use of conviviality. The aim was to shed light on the dual mechanisms (from social to business relationships and vice versa), that conviviality, experienced by entrepreneurial communities, can trigger, as well as the drivers (antecedents) of such mechanism. All the interviews were made of open-ended questions, leaving the respondents to express freely and spontaneously their opinions. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, discussed and interpreted by each author to ensure inter-reliability. A content analysis was then performed, driven by a text-mining analysis. The transcribed text (total words 11,300) was processed through analytical methods and instruments borrowed from the field of corpus linguistics, which exploits software programs to perform automated analyses of relatively large quantities of electronically stored texts (Witten, 2005). The text-mining analysis was done with T-LAB, a multifunctional software widespread in international research centres (<http://tlab.it/it/partners.php>). The file including all the interviews was subjected to a "linguistic normalization" (Salton, 1989) that allowed to correct ambiguous words (typing errors, slang terms, abbreviations), carry out cleaning actions (e.g. elimination of blank spaces in excess,

¹ The members interviewed belong to different companies whose confidential names are Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, Zeta and Eta (with the exception of this last, all the companies operate in the textile and apparel industry).

apostrophe marking, additional spaces after punctuation marks, etc.), and convert multi-words in unitary strings. It prepared the ground for the next “lemmatization” (Steinbach *et. al.* 2000) that turned words contained in the textual files into entries corresponding to lemmas. A lemma generally defines a set of words having the same lexical root (or lexeme) and belonging to the same grammatical category (verb, adjective, etc.).

Thus, lemmatization acts by transforming, for example, verb forms into the base form and plural nouns into the singular form. By means of the co-occurrence analysis (Doddington, 2002), T-LAB identified how many times two lemmas jointly occurred in the paragraphs composing the processed file. “Conviviality” is the lemma whose co-occurrences was investigated. The resulting co-occurrences indicated the words that respondents associate with “conviviality”. In addition, in order to detect how many times, the single co-occurrence (SC) is used alone and together with “conviviality” (CC), the co-occurrence analysis calculates for each co-occurrence the level of the cosine similarity (Cos_Sim) and of the chi-square. The former is an index of association: the greater its value, the higher the number of textual paragraphs containing the co-occurrence. The latter measures the level of significance of the co-occurrence: the lower its value, the stronger the association with the co-occurrence. The attention is focused on co-occurrences, which have a high chi-square value; for each co-occurrence, T-LAB allowed to go back to the textual paragraphs co-occurrences are part of. Each paragraph was then analysed in order to identify whether the selected co-occurrence described the consequences of conviviality (A), the related antecedents (B) or the potential and the limits (C). Table 1 classifies the main co-occurrences by distinguishing them based on the three levels of analysis. In order to interpret them, the direct or indirect relations with the lemma “conviviality” was also analysed, as it emerges from the representation of the network analysis that T-LAB provides (see Figure 1 in next paragraph). More specifically, the combined linguistic analysis is based on the following steps:

- identification of the co-occurrences of conviviality, focusing on those that are statistically significant according to the chi-square analysis;
- content analysis by exploring the textual paragraphs in which co-occurrences are inserted, in order to identify if they contribute to explain the levels A), B) or C) of our analysis; the co-occurrences that do not belong to the levels A), B) e C) have been excluded from the investigation (see, for example, the lemma “strong” and “current”);
- analysis of and interpretation of the identified co-occurrences, by considering the co-occurrences that in turn, are associated to them. The identification of the correlated co-occurrences, combined with the analysis of the relative textual paragraphs, allowed to enrich the study of the investigated phenomena. The relations that exist among the different co-occurrences derived from the representation of the network analysis.

4. Main results

4.1 Antecedents-conviviality-consequences: results emerging from the co-occurrences analysis

We have explored the results of the co-occurrences analysis starting from those related to the consequences of conviviality (“relations”, “social”, “business”, “network”, “community”, “opinion”, “partner”, “public”, “table”, “entrepreneurial”) to investigate then those that describe their antecedents (“tool”, “trust”, “dialogue”). Finally, we have investigated co-occurrences correlated to the limitations and opportunities of conviviality (“new technologies”, “transversal”). In the analysis, co-occurrences were grouped together since they contribute to defining the same facet of conviviality in terms of consequences. It emerges for example that “relations”, “social” and “business” define the relational facet of conviviality and therefore they were grouped into the label “relation” (A1).

(A) Conviviality co-occurrences as consequences.

(A1) *Relation*: conviviality implies interaction; in fact, it is associated to the lemma “relations”. The latter is in turn correlated to other lemma that are “social” (relations) and “business” (relations). The chi-square values indicate that the tie that conviviality has with “social” is stronger than that the tie it has with “business”, although between the two, as the Figure 1 illustrates, there is a connection. Some paragraphs involving the cited lemma extracted by the software include the following: “*Conviviality impacts on social relations. These relations impact in turn on business relations. Conviviality becomes a way to develop business relations with new entrepreneurs. We believe that it is an association-marketing tool*” (LC). “*This topic of conviviality is important: there is not a lot of it but we need to foster it. That is, the ability to do more social networks to enhance business networks. It is something that costs... but it is necessary to invest on this*” (CA). It results that conviviality generates social relations that may be the basis for the development of business relationships between entrepreneurs. Convivial relations include business relations. Conviviality is source of embeddedness.

(A2) *Community*. Through “relations”, conviviality is also associated with “community”. Figure 1, however, shows how this relation goes through the lemma “business” (relations). The latter connects on one side with “network” and on the other side with “entrepreneur”. From the text that the software identifies, we read: “*we were convinced that we should continue to work in Italy and our Consortium was founded by a group of entrepreneurs who attended at least for fifteen years. Conviviality then has been for us a source of business community*” (LC). It can derive that convivial activities deal with sharing; more specifically, they contribute to generating an entrepreneurial community that is both a social and business context. In this regards,

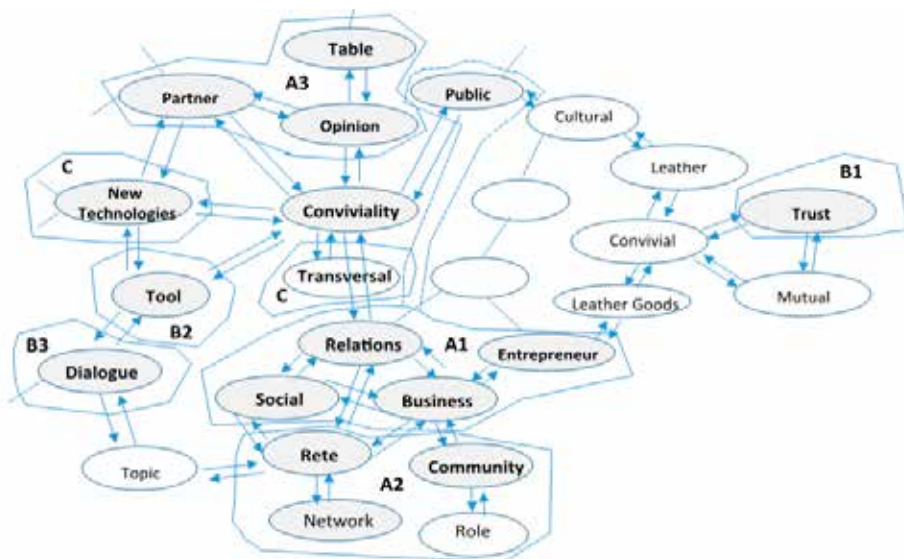
the lemma “relations” is linked to “business” and thus, to “community”, passing also through “social”. Moreover, among the extracted paragraphs we read *“entrepreneurial communities are usually made of social relations... conviviality can be a tool to make them weave with relations based on business purposes”* (CA). Correlated to “community” through different lemma such as “business” and “entrepreneur”, there is even the association that “conviviality” has with the lemma “public”. In fact, textual paragraphs where this co-occurrence is contextualized narrate that *“conviviality impacts on personal contact networks and facilitates not only the access to external networks of the community, but also the acquisition of a relevant role within them. People who have been members of the Association, then had access to public communities and play public roles, became establishment figures and have gained awareness of social problems”* (CA). Thus, conviviality may be seen as the access key to communities of the public sector. (A3) *Cognitive exchanges*. The direct relation between conviviality and the lemma “opinion” (Table 1) shows how it also acts as a tool for favouring information exchanges and reciprocal knowledge. This is another possible consequence that conviviality generates. The following paragraph is an example: *“you can tell your opinion; you can ask if you have a doubt involving who sits next to you. Conviviality is based on a direct and spontaneous confrontation”* (IFA). The lemma “opinion” is then related to those of “table” and “partner”; it derives that conviviality deals with free interactive spaces among convivial members. In fact, we read: *“When we think about conviviality we think about the American one, with round tables; we, here, have not conceived the conviviality in this way”* (CA). *“There is no one who listens to you, there are no newspapers”*(LC). *“We want conviviality with a single table, the table has to be long so that every partner will look at each other, and individuals can say, exchange ideas, information, knowledge in the face to the other. Convivial occasions require time and concentration. It is a public discussion, also open to a wide audience...not only to partner-members”* (TA).

(B) Conviviality co-occurrences as antecedents

The text mining analysis demonstrates that the antecedents of the conviviality effects we have just illustrated are correlated to co-occurrences that do not have a direct relation with the lemma “conviviality”. They act as connectors among co-occurrences. (B1) *Trust*. “Trust” is a lemma that is related to conviviality (Table 1) not in a direct, but in an indirect way. From Figure 1, in fact, it emerges how it is connected to conviviality by passing through various lemmas and in particular through “entrepreneur”, “business” and “relations”. From the sentences the software selects, it emerges that: *“conviviality can help entrepreneurs in creating business relations. The mechanisms to realize this are trust, mutual sympathy, and style”* (IFA). *“Members can learn to know the others and to generate trust... all this if they spend together convivial moments”* (LC). *“But conviviality has to be created and managed. The animator of conviviality feeds trust among members”* (CA). Conviviality deals

with mutual trust that even in convivial relations can be seen as a driver of business relations. (B2) *Rituality*. Conviviality is associated with being a “tool” to create sharing. The forms and contents that it assumes may be those of the dinners and business meetings, repeated over time according to predefined schemas. Thus, they are characterized by a certain rituality. From the text the software identifies, the following emerges: “Conviviality is a social tool that favours interpersonal relations through different and periodical activities... I remember what we organized during the year dinners with family, very numerous dinners; we talk about events (the Christmas and the pre-holiday) that at least twice a year involved fifty entrepreneurs in the same field, and with their families” (LC). “Here in Hangzhou there are Italian entrepreneurs. Convivial dinners in important periods of the year (Christmas) are usually organized. We feel members of the same community” (IFA). (B3) *Self-expression*. Through “tool” conviviality is associated to the lemma “dialogue” that in turn is correlated to “network” and “relations”. The conviviality co-occurrence with “dialogue” (Table 1) results in textual paragraphs and is described as follows: “Conviviality is an open dialogue, participatory, free and interdisciplinary. Then, conviviality lets go deep” (IFA). “The conviviality... allows to examine a problem, to go in detail to the problem, that is, dialogue with people.. this dialogue is a means to reveal yourself not only as managers, but also as human being” (CA). “Dinner is an important moment during which you can freely dialogue and in this way, you can know each other and develop relations” (IFA). Figure 1 shows how through the lemma “tool” there is a connection between “dialogue” and “opinion”; it emerges a relation between reciprocal knowledge and dialogue as self-expression in the sense that the latter may animate the former.

Fig. 1: Representation of co-occurrences through the network analysis



(C) *Limits and potential of conviviality.* The relation between conviviality and “technologies” (Table 1) reveals the emerging potential of new technologies as an instrument to create a more direct and fluid interpersonal comparison. At the same time, conviviality, when combined with the lemma “transversal” (Table 1), shows some of its main perceived limitations. Concerning the new technologies, it results that “*conviviality and new technologies: a relationship not to the exclusion, but integrated. New communication technologies have given a huge contribution to make the views of members circulate in a real-time*” (IFA). “*There is a need among members to deal directly. New technologies lead to an acceleration of the times, of the news and a greater ability to transfer the views of the Association*” (TA). Indeed, about the transversal, it emerges that “*the conviviality and self-reference is a possible key to the conviviality crisis. Convivial life is still as active today as it was in the past, but it has changed a lot, and nowadays it is completely different. I think that conviviality today is partitioned off, fragmented and has become much more self-referential, hence the need for transverse conviviality that is not shared (solely) among individuals in the same organization, but among individuals of different organizations. We have convivial acquaintances in the same business group for supply to and convivial relations with a large customer, but we do not enjoy transverse conviviality, which involves components of different groups (trans-conviviality). And I think this is a problem, because conviviality helps in (opening up) important business pathways through the transverse flow of thoughts and knowledge*” (LC).

Tab. 1: Main results from co-occurrence analysis

Lemmas	Lemmas analysis	Cos_Sim	S.C.	C.C.
New technologies	P	0,426	4	4
Tool	A	0,32	4	3
Transversal	L	0,32	4	3
Opinion	C	0,286	5	3
Relations	C	0,286	5	3
Partner	C	0,257	11	4
Public	C	0,246	3	2
Trust	A	0,226	8	3
Entrepreneur	C	0,213	9	3
Community	C	0,213	16	4
Dialogue	A	0,213	4	2
"Rete"	C	0,202	10	3
Network	C	0,191	5	2
Social	C	0,191	5	2
Talble	C	0,191	5	2
Business	C	0,155	17	3

Legenda: A=antecedents, C=consequences, P=potential, L=limitations.

4.2 How antecedents relate with consequences: main results from the case studies

The results emerging from the text-mining analysis have oriented an in depth analysis of the interviews, which revealed how consequences and antecedents are related to each other.

Rituality, community, self-expression. The members of CA, LC and IFA do not experience the convivial events organized as merely occasional meetings in which they participate, but as ritual events. They revolve around ritual practices that engage the participants. Rituality can assume different forms. *“At each event, which usually takes place at the group’s headquarters, we first sign in and then discuss different topics. There are usually local guest professionals from outside our community who put their competences at our disposal. Afterwards, we all go together to have dinner and continue talking and exchanging ideas”* (IFA). The director of the CA highlights: *“We organize residential meetings devoted to a specific subject, dedicating two days of full immersion to the problem... Moreover, in the summer months the Association was used to organize an important event. [It] consisted in the screening of a film on business issues and in a [follow-up] debate”*. The recurring, repeated participation in these convivial rituals (B3) generates and increases among members the sense of belonging to the community (A2). With the aim of satisfying the desire to be together, the members take part in the convivial rituals, thereby sharing and reinforcing the practice. *“Overall, our participation in periodic convivial meetings is important to make us feel part of a community...”* (Zeta). *“At these times, we follow a sort of ceremony, and the point is not so much to do business, but rather to satisfy the desire to be together and get to know each other”* (Beta). *“Being and feeling like you are part of a community helps you to live better and to face everyday life.... Then, ultimately, if you live better, you work better”* (Eta). Rituality makes members participate the community as active contributors, not as mere spectators. What attracts them is the sharing the pleasures of freely discussing their own experiences. *“We are glad to be able to spend some time together, to participate in a sort of banquet at which to exchange our life and work experiences”* (Delta). *“All together with good food and good wine...”* (Epsilon). *“Participation takes place without commitments, obligations and supervision...you feel quite free”* (Delta). Therefore, the sense of community can be favored and reinforced by the free recount of personal stories that rituality generates among members. It can be animated by bouts of *self-expression* (B3), whereby members allowed their most private feelings to slip out into the open and with them their fears. *“All of us recount freely our experiences, let the others know about our professional challenges, career path, the skills that we have acquired”* (Delta). Convivial relationships revolve around stories of life and professional experiences. It is by recounting them that members develop social relations sharing opinions, feelings and attitudes.

Convivial relations, cognitive exchange, trust. Through the conviviality-ba-

sed social relationships (A1), the members of the community mutually acquire knowledge in terms of activities performed, skills, abilities and ambitions. More specifically it emerges an exchange of information (A3) between the participants that can render convivial relations a resource to aid in finding solutions to both entrepreneurial and personal problems. *"It also happens that we exchange opinions, information... and very often, we find solutions both at work and in personal situations. We live situations that, if shared, can become a problem solver"* (Beta). Knowing such professional details, together with the more personal ones, makes the relationships between members closer and leads to states of empathy that contribute to generating mutual trust (B1). *"We also get to know each other through our personal life experiences. So what happens is that you identify with other people and their problems, which are then yours too... so trust builds up between us...."* (Epsilon). Convivial trust is thus empathy based. Empathy implies a process of internalization of social relations (i.e., the capacity to place oneself in another's position) and it develops through the sharing of emotions, settings and perspectives. Usually the trust-based relationships that are formed during convivial meetings are useful to solve the managerial emergencies that emerge. *"I was looking for a fair services supplier with a certain degree of urgency... an exchange of information with other managers in the community enabled me to find an organizer. I trusted him because the person who gave me his contact information had recommended him to me..."* (Gamma). *"Someone needs an attendant or a local supplier, we can send a collective e-mail and ask whether anyone has someone to propose in response to the request"* (Delta).

Trust in convivial relations together with reciprocal knowledge generate embeddedness that convivial members could exploit. Such relations encompass inevitable business relations that may remain latent and unimplemented. Entrepreneurs tell that: *"I sent some articles of clothing, to which I applied laser, to a member of the community ... from this test application we would also be able to think about doing business together"* (Epsilon). *"We realize that we have a lot of complementary resources to devote to a common goal and above all trust each other... very often there is no time to get organized and work together"* (Beta). In order to embed convivial relations in business relations it may be useful to find via some means or agent able to convert the trust existing between members, so as to transform it into the driver of community business relations. *"The community is small, but members are working to develop business together. We need someone to help us make it possible.... we have thought about collective buying, specifically we have considered purchasing some materials together, such as for instance, packaging, that is to say, transverse and not competitive materials"* (Eta). *"It is something we have thought about and that we would like to put into action. It takes time and we need someone to organize it all. Many of us cannot do these things as it means taking time away from our work as entrepreneurs"* (Alpha). What is needed is a sort of coordinator-converter with

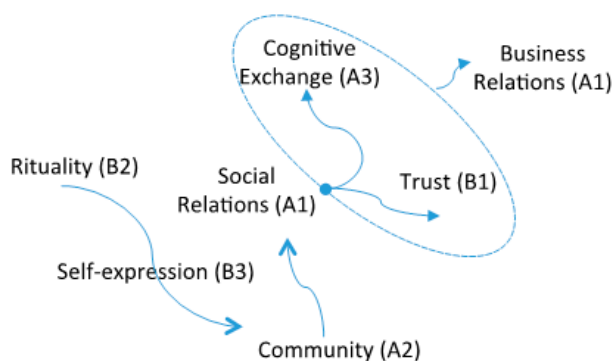
managerial competencies who can identify, propose and organize collective business activities by exploiting companies' business motivations. However other barriers that are more personal, can hinder the development of business opportunities. In this regards, an entrepreneur underlines: *"If I had to do business with a person I knew, I would have to pay more attention than usual because I would be afraid to disappoint him. There is also a personal relationship between us so I want to be sure not to make mistakes"* (IFA).

5. Discussion

Conviviality as an instrument of socialization is quite different from a simple dinner (Granovetter, 1985) and from participation in social groups outside the workplace. Conviviality involves not two individuals, but a group; it promotes rituals rooted in the pleasure of being together, and is predicated on formally organized meetings. It is therefore a collective, ritual and formal phenomenon. Members participate in the convivial meetings periodically; they respect the associated ritual practices, recount their experiences, discuss the present and future and reveal their feelings. In this way, they produce a shared knowledge that can feed trust based on the empathy created between them. In the community under study, conviviality produces a sort of social homogenization that reduces potential distances deriving from power relations. The ritual inherent in conviviality fosters a sense of community stemming from a shared emotional connection.

As described in the previous section and illustrated in Figure 2, the emerging relations are the following relations: rituality favors the creation of a community also by fostering a self-expression attitude among convivial members; it derives social relations that animate mutual knowledge and mutual trust. Both of the latter could be driver of business relations. We have interpreted the route represented in Figure 2 according to the direction from "rituality" to "business relations", but we can also read it in the reverse direction.

Fig. 2: The relation between antecedents and consequences of conviviality



However, on the basis of the explored relations between the consequences of conviviality and their antecedents, we have identified specific research propositions we are going to propose. The convivial rituality of being together affects the sense of belonging to the community by animating among members the desire of expressing themselves, telling their personal stories. (P1) *Thus, the more the sense of belonging produced by the convivial rituality is high, the more convivial relationships can act as carriers of opportunities, abilities, skills, and knowledge.* The greater the rituality, the greater the social capital of which social relations are bearers and the greater the entrepreneurial opportunities. Convivial relations are social relations that have no objective other than the pleasure of literally “living together (*cum-vivere*)”. The sense of community that the involved members perceive can be stimulated by their professional and personal stories. This facilitates the development of reciprocal empathy, which in turn breeds trust. Two further consequence of this are: (P2) *the potential business relationships embedded in the convivial relationships are filtered by a deeply personal understanding,* and (P3) *the trust engendered in the convivial relations tends to be mediated by the states of empathy produced between the participants in conviviality.* Empathy is important because it is the base of trust and because it strengthens social obligations, which are at the basis of the mobilization of resources within the social capital, fostering entrepreneurship.

At this point, a question that comes to mind is whether these convivial relations do embed business relations as well. Such question leads to observations we synthesize as follows: (P4) *Although convivial relationships are social relationships based upon mutual trust, they may not always encompass business relationships.* This could be interpreted as the “paradox of trust”, in the sense that excessive reciprocal knowledge and empathic trust could hinder business relationships, due to the fact that they reveal weaknesses or foster the fear of not being able to meet the expectations of others. If it is true that the more the rituality is intense, the more convivial members tell about themselves animating a sense of community, the lower the probability that business relationships may arise, then it is necessary to calibrate the effects pursued through the combination “rituality”, “self-expression” and “community”. In any case, conviviality is an important tool for socialization, and as such, it promotes and reinforces specific social relationships. In order to generate embeddedness, the trust it produces should not be used to attain individual advantages by responding to short-term needs. But, this may not be enough. In fact, it produces embeddedness in convivial relationships if it is not destined to perform instrumental roles; for this reason, it has to be managed by someone who can channel it toward common business activities emerging from individual interests.

6. Conclusion

The current research is an attempt to explore conviviality in entrepreneurial communities and how it makes social relationships a context for developing business relationships and recognizing entrepreneurial opportunities. The analysis we propose is part of an exploratory research that is focalized on the study of conviviality in different local entrepreneurial communities located both in Italy and in China. The emerging results clearly demonstrate that an empathy-based mutual trust is the strategic resource that conviviality is able to produce. We wonder now how the generation of embeddedness should be managed, that is to say how to run the trade-off between the mutual knowledge that rituality favors and the propensity to develop collective businesses. This is a challenge that whoever believes in conviviality as a management tool has to face. Moreover, it will also be necessary to foresee a “community connector” of convivial activities, for example a promoter or a mediator of community businesses who could also contribute to their management. We are aware that the study presented is not without limitations. Our linguistic investigation should be extended to other interviews with other entrepreneurs belonging to communities considered emblematic for our analysis; moreover, it could be further improved by introducing a social network analysis that is capable of estimating measurements related to the relations among the different conviviality’s co-occurrences. We also need the fell of deepening the analysis of the trust that conviviality embeds, on its management, and on organizational solutions to create, develop and maintain community business activities. We believe, in fact, that conviviality contains certain interactive mechanisms that, if properly managed, are capable of creating new spaces for collaboration between businesses, and it is on these mechanisms that we intend to concentrate our energies and attentions.

Simone Guercini
Università degli Studi di Firenze
simone.guercini@unifi.it

Matilde Milanesi
Università degli Studi di Firenze
matilde.milanesi@unifi.it

Silvia Ranfagni
Università degli Studi di Firenze
silvia.ranfagni@unifi.it

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