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*Gli articoli ad invito e le Rubriche non sono referati.*
Clusters development as a best organizational Business Practice\(^(*)\)

by Dr. NATALIA KLIMOVA

ABSTRACT: It is widely known that the clusters represent a powerful mechanism of economic development of regions and often even of entire nations. From the theoretical point of view the clusters represent an organizational model which advantages can be demonstrated by the use of transactional approach. Each single enterprise inside a cluster specializes in completing a particular stage of production, which ensures lower costs, flexibility and innovation realizing, besides, a significant contribution to social cohesion in a certain territory being strongly integrated with the local socio-economic environment. In this study we analyze the best practice of clusters development (Italian model) and the factors of its success. Besides, its comparative analysis with the Russian economic reality, where this phenomenon is quite recent, is provided. The research is conducted on the base of Special Economic Zones, the analogue of cluster model in Russia, which is being developed under the direct control of Russian government. The case analysis methodology was applied. At the end the research delivers the analysis of different features of Russian clusters’ development process represented in a SWOT table and defines some directions of possible future research development.

KEYWORDS: clusters, networks, transaction costs, Special Economic Zones

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of cluster as an object of economic agglomeration of interconnected enterprises in a certain territory has been known since craft production. But, only since the last quarter of the XX century, industrial clusters became an important factor of economic development of regions. The increasing diffusion of the point of view that regions with highly developed territory clusters become leaders of economic advancement, is verified among economists all over the world. Such leading regions determine the competitiveness of national economies. However, there is a requirement for a more exact concept that represents clusters and the phenomena connected therewith to conduct researches and to make conclusions for economic policy decisions. For this purpose, an attempt has been made to allocate the basic specific cluster characteristics, as well as to define the range of unresolved issues (HAKANSSON et. al., 2009; JOHANSON, 2011; KOZYREV, 2011; LIPSEY, 2005; PORTER, 1998).

Surely the general features of clusters may have limited applicability on occasion. As a matter of fact, clusters are unique by virtue of their nature. Some elements can be more significant under certain circumstances, and the interrelation between them can change. On the other hand, it would be premature to assert that missing elements aren’t important for functioning of any particular cluster. In our research we will concentrate on the experience of Russian and Italian models.

\(^(*)\)Articolo ad invito
2. Clusters: theoretical background

Different authors (CARDONI, 2012, CASSON, 2000, HAKANSSON et. al., 2009, JOHANSON, 2011, PIANTA et. al., 2007, RICHARDSON, 1972, WILLIAMSON, 1975) recognize business relationships as a specific type of resource that a company can use in the implementation of relational strategies. The opportunity to mobilize others as “partners” has increasingly become an emergent issue in the strategic management literature. From the resource-based perspective, the importance of business relationships is emphasized by the idea that a firm’s critical resources may span the boundaries of the firm itself and be embedded in inter-firm resources and routines. A firm uses resources both within the firm (firm-specific resources) and in other organizations (firm-addressable resources).

Within economics there have been several approaches to studying networks and alliances, mainly including transaction cost economics, strategic management and institutional perspective. In the transaction cost economics literature various roles have been identified for management accounting in inter-firm settings that relates to specific accounting techniques and different uses of accounting information. From the economic point of view, according to the approach of transaction cost theory (CARDONI, 2012; CASSON, 2000; LIPSEY, 2005; SAMPSON, 2004; WILLIAMSON, 1975; WILLIAMSON et al., 1991), the two fundamental ways of organizing economic activities are market and hierarchy.

The form of production coordination according to the market model is achieved when the processes are broken down into individual steps carried out by independent firms that interact with each other through exchange transactions. Price formation, through the dynamics of supply and demand, ensures coordination between the parties. However, markets often do not work perfectly. Asymmetric information, uncertainty, high asset specificity and exchanged risk of opportunistic behavior are the factors that determine an increase in transaction costs and force businesses to make use of hierarchy instead of market as a mode of economic activity organization.

The transaction analysis may lead to the adoption of quite different flexible organizational solutions which can rapidly redesign their organizational aspect as a response to changes in the external environment. One of them is represented by clusters. In addition, organizational restructuring implies a large social aspect, therefore the exploited communication paradigms, patterns and policies should be presented for decision makers explicitly during that process (KOZYREV, 2011; LIPSEY, 2005; SAMPSON, 2004).

According to “The Global Competitiveness Report” (2015, 2016) business sophistication involves two elements that are intricately linked: the quality of a country’s overall business networks and the quality of individual firms’ operations and strategies. These factors are especially important for countries at an advanced stage of development when, to a large extent, the more basic sources of productivity improvements have been exhausted. The quality of a country’s business networks and supporting industries, as measured by the quantity and quality of local suppliers and the extent of their interaction, is important for a variety of reasons. When companies and suppliers from a particular sector are interconnected in geographically proximate groups, called clusters, efficiency increases, greater opportunities for innovation in processes and products are created, and barriers to entry for new firms are reduced.

So, cluster (also defined as an industrial district) may be defined as a territory with a high concentration of small and medium-sized enterprises with high production specialization,
generally characterized by strong interdependence of their production cycles and strongly integrated with the local socio-economic environment. Another source (Porter, 1998) defines them as geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions that compete but also collaborate. The competitiveness of industrial districts derives from the particularity of production organization in form of flexible specialization for which the production cycle is divided into different phases, and each firm specializes in completing a particular stage of production, which ensures lower costs, flexibility and innovation.

Actually, clusters formation and development have become one of the priorities also at the European level. Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth are the key objectives indicated by the Europe 2020 Strategy paper (2010). The increased economic interdependencies and the global impacts of the financial crisis demand sophisticated handling and planning at the political level in various areas of importance. Through their value networks and proven channels between businesses, research and academic reality, clusters provide efficient catalysts for innovation policy interventions. They are able to transform policy interventions into value creation and multiply public spending by private investments.

Besides, the characteristics of the national innovation system of many European countries explain the serious impact of the economic crisis on innovation in its beginning. Policy responses were concerned with supporting innovation systems and developing innovation capacity, such as improving infrastructure, public investments in R&D and innovation, investment in education and training at all levels, as well as demand-oriented innovation policies, including public procurement, financial support to SMEs, venture capital and, an important factor, policies aimed at the development of enterprise agglomerations. They are seen as a part of the national strategy for coping with the effect of the financial crisis in many countries, partly because the industries involved in such programs represent industries oriented towards the global markets that were most affected by the crisis (Europe 2020 Strategy paper, 2010, Pianta et al., 2007, Sampson, 2004).

In this context, cluster is a valid alternative to organizational hierarchy or market, in terms of transaction costs, that can achieve benefits of both of them. On the one hand, it allows to reach high production volumes that provide the possibility to benefit from economies of scale (a typical effect of "hierarchy"), and, on the other hand, preserving the small business district, it continues to benefit from the advantages of flexibility of its market form. The conclusion about clusters’ creation and location and, more importantly, the aspect of interdependency of cluster participants can be drawn on the basis of a careful transactional analysis by the means of modern instruments and information systems (Black et al., 2001, Kozyrev, 2011, Lipsey, 2005, Sampson, 2004).

From the business perspective it is also evident that the presence of successful clusters and clusters in crisis does not depend on the geographical location of the sectors they belong to, but is due to strategic decisions realized by them. In particular, the causes for crisis in some districts include (Porter, 1998):

- inability to control the markets;

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6) From this point of view, Italy represents a very good example: according to “The Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016” of the World Economic Forum, it ranks fourth (preceded by United Arab Emirates, USA and Germany) in the sample of 140 countries among the economies with more widespread development of the cluster model.
• low levels of investment in product and process innovation;
• difficulties related to generation exchange;
• shortage of specialized skills;
• lack of cooperation between companies.

The presence of these factors cancels the benefits of agglomeration determining in local businesses of the cluster worse performances than those of firms that operate autonomously in the same sectors. And vice versa, in case of successful clusters, the enterprises adopt strategies aimed to:
• promote cooperation with other companies;
• formulate and implement product and process innovations by investing in research and development;
• pool efforts in marketing and staff training;
• strengthen the company’s equity and increase the size.

In summary, the business-perspective-based understanding of the evolutionary dynamics of a cluster depends on the analysis of the behavior of individual units, which represents the real part of the explanatory capacity of growth of the entire aggregate cluster.

3. Clusters in Italian and Russian economies

The originality of the district model represents a particular "Italian" approach to capitalism and is based on a balanced mix of historical craft tradition and modernity, competition and cooperation, corporate profit and value of social capital essential for its operation and development. In a country like Italy, the economic policy should be primarily focused on leading through the crisis the industrial districts, which, on the one hand, are the main engine of the Italian economy, and, on the other, make a major contribution to social cohesion in the country (BLACK et al., 2001, KOZYREV, 2011, PORTER, 1998).

Different studies (CARDONI, 2012, HAKANSSON et. al., 2009 KOZYREV, 2011, PORTER, 1998) confirm that the strategies of successful districts are cooperation with other companies up to the establishment of business networks across the territory, the joint effort aimed at applying product and process innovations, common marketing and internationalization strategies, the limited location, synergies with universities and research centers, and collaboration with social partners.

The weight of districts in the Italian economy grew ever since the early fifties till the mid-nineties, when we started to witness a slowdown in the expansion process. According to the data made available by the Federation of Italian Clusters, the enterprises (mostly small, with 84.3% of them not exceeding 9 employees) operating in the districts in 2006 numbered approximately 188,000 and employed 1.45 million people. Those districts secured 28.3% of the added value (67.1 billion euro), 31.4% of employment in manufacture (in 2005), and 26.9% of export (93 billion euro in 2007).

Such an advantageous organizational form made it possible to attenuate the severe effects of the economic crisis, even though the data confirm the reduction of the export value of the districts. In particular, the first half of 2009 showed a 21% contraction in exports as compared to the first half of 2008, with a more emphasized decrease registered in
automation and mechanical districts (-30.9%), home furnishing (-24%) and fashion clothing (-8.3%). On the contrary, the positive dynamics was revealed in export operations of food districts (+4.2%) and hi-tech (+3.1%).

The prior years demonstrate that in some cases the network between companies and techno structures worked well, while in other cases it was found less effective. The success of the districts, therefore, results from the improvement of links between business operations and service facilities. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the best experiences were those where firms expressed clear needs by exercising a proactive role. In this perspective, the role of the area becomes even more important to support the development of districts. The circulation of knowledge must develop not only between companies but also in the established relations with universities, research centers, technology centers to contribute to further development of manufacturing districts.

So, in order to be successful, a cluster must create a compelling value framework to attract and develop members. For a cluster to succeed, the value-added must be greater than a firm's additional costs of either moving to or operating within a cluster. This value added can be either direct, such as through reduced building rents or transportation costs, or indirect, such as through a cluster's quality reputation, or by collaborating with experts, perhaps in other companies. Through agglomeration and proximity benefits, clusters can stimulate productivity growth and employment, drive innovation, and facilitate the commercialization of new products and encourage new business formation.

However, it's obvious that there is a need for a specific area in which the relationships between companies and between companies and service centers are characterized by innovative project-making ability (BLACK et al., 2001, KOZYREV, 2011). A territory receives a competitive advantage if it provides knowledge, production techniques, and innovative financial services to enterprises. To achieve this it is necessary to reset the governance of the districts, which currently constitutes their main weak point. A governance must be able not only to comprise but also to anticipate the needs of enterprises and provide practical solutions to improve their competitiveness\(^2\).

As far as Russia is concerned, it ranks 110th (out of 140) in "The Global Competitiveness Report" in terms of development of clusters in 2015-16, and 118th (out of 144) in 2014-2015, showing a positive, though slight, trend. From this point of view, clusters serve as a good example of adoption of best practices, with special account for the historically growing economic relations between Russia and Italy\(^3\) that have drastically slowed down after the

\(^{2}\) The analysis of Italian clusters experience would have been incomplete without mentioning different legislative measures undertaken in this field. In particular, the Law n. 317 of 1991 defines a cluster as “local territorial area characterized by a high concentration of small enterprises with particular reference to the relationship between the presence of the enterprises and the resident population, as well as to the specialization of the same companies”; the Law n. 140 of 1999 speaks about “local production systems characterized by a high concentration of industrial enterprises as well as by the specialization of enterprise systems”; the Law n. 266 of 2005 introduces clusters as “free business aggregations distributed by territory and by functions with the aim of enhancing the development of the local areas and reference sectors, to improve the efficiency in the organization and production, according to the principles of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity, also identifying the collaboration modes with entrepreneur associations”.

\(^{3}\) In particular, the model of the Ligurian technological cluster (SIIT, Intelligent Integrated Systems), one of the clusters created in 2001 by the Italian Ministry of Education, was reintroduced in Ekaterinburg, the capital of the Russian region of Sverdlovsk. This area has a strong concentration of hi-tech combined with a significant number of scientific disciplines and research centers, but lacks the overall direction, and the local Russian authorities decided to borrow the Italian initiative. In the transfer of know-how Liguria International District, the regional instrument to promote the internationalization of Liguria, serves as an intermediary. Liguria International has been active for some
introduction of the economic sanctions against Russia.

In fact, clusters contribute much to the strengthening of Russian-Italian relations. In particular, during the V Session of the Task Force on the Italo-Russian Districts and SMEs (constituted after the meeting between Silvio Berlusconi and Vladimir Putin in 2002) held in Russia (Republic of Chuvashia) in October 2003, a Memorandum aimed at promoting the creation of industrial clusters in the Russian Federation was drawn up. This Memorandum was subsequently signed by the Italian and Russian ministers during President Putin's visit to Rome in November 2003.

Later, in 2006, during the Tenth Session of the Task Force held in Trieste "The three-year program of work 2007-2009" was signed which, among other objectives, provided for the creation of several industrial districts in Russia.

Simultaneously, in order to develop industrial production and technology, the legislative bodies of the Russian Federation adopted an Act on July 22, 2005 which regulates the establishment of Special Economic Zones (so-called SEZ) of two types:

1. industrial/productive: with an area not exceeding 20 sq km;
2. techno-scientific: divided into two separate areas at most, totaling to not more than 2 sq km.

These economic structures are very similar to clusters from the location point of view. SEZs have a life cycle of 20 years, after which residents will have the opportunity to acquire both land and buildings thereon. Among the objectives of establishment of SEZs there are development of the manufacturing industry and the areas of advanced technology, the diffusion of new industrial models and commerce of scientific and technological products. The main protagonists of this initiative were, beyond the Russian government, the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Bank for Foreign Economic Activity (Vnesheconombank) and the Foundation for the Support to Small Innovative Enterprises.

Actually, with the current economic growth challenges of the global economy and the shrinking ability of both fiscal and monetary policy to front these challenges, the development and growth of clusters presents an attractive alternative way of using an economy's internal resources. Nowadays this question has vital importance because of drastic consequences of EU trade sanctions introduced against Russia.

33 SEZ were active in Russia as of January 1, 2016 (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, 2016). The dynamics of their development by type of activity is presented below:

years in Yekaterinburg to support companies interested in investing in the Urals under an interchange agreement that links Liguria to the Sverdlovsk region.
Besides, the development of the SEZ(4) is aimed at the reduction of the alarming
dependence from Russian oil and natural gas exports. The Russian government wants to use
the experience of the SEZs to boost scientific development and especially the innovative
sectors of industry fostering the development of special industrial and technical-scientific
zones, from which innovative technologies will evolve to be later transferred to the big
industry. One of these zones was set up right in Dubna, a city with a considerable technical
and scientific potential.

The Russian government established a programme of incentives to attract Russian and
foreign capital in these areas. The aim for 2010 was to achieve in the industrial and
technical-scientific zones at least 250 resident companies(5) with investments amounting to
one billion euro. The main point of establishment of these areas is their gradual
transformation into "growing points" from which the new Russian economy of a
qualitatively new type will sprout, based on innovative principles(6). Besides, Russia aims to
increase clusters development in the service sector (what is demonstrated by the high per-
centage of touristic-recreative zones): according to (Cisco, 2013) the real GDP growth in
Russia in 2020 will be dominated by services for 9.5%.

The Russian government intends to develop activities in special areas based on a "state-
private” partnership: according to the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian
Federation, 2015, the State has invested 20% to 30% in the project, while the rest was borne
by private investors. In order to avoid being buried under the rubble of an economy based
on exporting oil, Moscow is looking for ways to diversify its economic system(7).

Fig. 1 Dynamics of Russian SEZ by type of activity

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(4) In 2005, the first six SEZ were created: four techno-scientific SEZs (Zelenograd, Moscow region, microelec-
tronics sector; Dubna, Moscow region, physics and nuclear technology; Saint Petersburg, IT-sector; Tomsk, advanced
materials development) and two industrial/productive SEZs (Lipetsk region, household electronic appliances sector;
Elabuga (Tatarstan), auto components sector and hi-tech products for petro-chemistry).
(5) This objective was just about achieved: by the end of 2010, as many as 238 foreign investors were operating in
the Russian SEZs.
(6) Currently, technical and scientific research centers complain of the great gap that divides the research process,
often linked to basic sciences, technologies and their translation to the Russian industry. In this context, the special
economic zones are expected to become a practical tool for product marketing in scientific and technological research
and, subsequently, for increasing the volume of products with high potential for scientific innovation. In this way Rus-
sia wants to remove the image of the country that exports oil, metals and other raw materials, but very few high-tech
products.
(7) The creation of these zones is a fertile ground for cooperation between Italy and Russia. When meeting with
To obtain the status of "resident" of a SEZ, a company must provide an initial investment of $13 million, of which 1.5 million are payable in the first year of activity. For companies in a SEZ the unified social tax rate was lowered from 26% to 14%. Taxes on land and properties of all types were also abolished and the regime of free customs zones was introduced: imports and exports are exempt from customs duties and all other taxes.

However, if imported products are to be then delivered to the rest of the Russian territory, the custom duties should be paid. In case such imported products are subject to some processing in the territory of the area, residents may choose the type of duty to be paid. The controls will be reduced to the minimum: tax and other audits will be conducted once every three years.

A comprehensive technical modernization of the Russian system of transport routes would enable the country to earn up to six billion dollars a year and provide jobs to more than two million people. To enhance the attraction of investors and companies as residents to the Special Economic Zones, the Russian government has tried the "single window" system in the Dubna SEZ. In just one operating room, representatives of 17 federal services issue all necessary permissions and licenses to companies interested in working in the SEZ.

4. Results and conclusions

Russian clusters which operate in Special Economic Zones represent an attempt to stimulate the development of flexible organizational forms to meet the challenges arising in the modern Russia’s economic situation. Still, as it was demonstrated above, it presents some differences in comparison with Italian model.

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<th>Italy</th>
<th>Russia</th>
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<tr>
<td>Legislation base</td>
<td>Follows the clusters development</td>
<td>Precedes the clusters development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation between the clusters' enterprises</td>
<td>Strongly exists</td>
<td>Sporadically exists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation potential</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production clusters development</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to GDP and employment</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relation with the territory</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>weak</td>
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Table 1. Italian and Russian clusters experience: a comparative analysis

In addition to the Special Economic Zone, the transport infrastructure will be developed: according to a survey prepared by experts of the Council of the Russian state, economic growth (7.5% in 2007) was slowed down by the inadequacy of the means of transport and their infrastructures. The country does not utilize its strategic geographic position between Europe and Asia: less than 1% of the goods flow between European and Asian countries pass nowadays through the territory of Russia; the potential for transport in Russia is being used to just 5-7 percent. If Russia was able to channel into their lines of communication 5% of the Euro-Asian cargo flows, the country would earn up to a billion dollars a year.
As one can see, what Russian clusters lack for now mostly, apart the purely economic aspects, is the existence of solid relations between the enterprises belonging to the SEZ and the territory which may become a source of sustainable competitive advantage. From this point of view the Italian experience can be seen as a sort of reference model. Still, clusters in Russia represent a promising strategic mechanism of economic policy and in order to evaluate its peculiarities for policy-makers we propose a SWOT-analysis of this phenomenon.

Table 2. Russian clusters experience: SWOT-analysis

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<th><strong>Strengths</strong></th>
<th><strong>Weaknesses</strong></th>
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<td>Innovation potential and human resources quality</td>
<td>Low development of productive clusters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong development of service clusters</td>
<td>Underdeveloped legislative base</td>
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<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major concentration on the inner market</td>
<td>Excessive role of the State</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of entrepreneur spirit and competences</td>
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Clusters development in Russia represents quite a recent phenomenon, so this research faced the unavoidable problem of lack and inhomogeneity of statistical data. Still, the analysis has made it possible to realize the importance of this mechanism and has opened two possible directions of future scientific and practical activities. The first one regards the most attentive analysis of financial indicators of the SEZ residents’ activity, preferably by making use of financial reports, balance sheets and new forms of reporting (sustainable development reports or integrated reporting), and also performing an analysis of their efficiency.

The second direction regards the investigation of possible measures for nearing the Russian clusters’ experience to the Western one which, as we have seen, constitutes a powerful economic mechanism in developed economies. Such direction presumes also the enlarging the set of the parameters used in the Table 1, probably using the statistical tools in order to quantify their values. Certainly, the actual operation of SEZ doesn’t allow us to affirm that SEZ represents a cluster in a traditional sense of this term because the interrelations between the residents and the “market” component of SEZ should be examined better. Still, the phenomenon is quite young, but the large presence of SMEs in these aggregations and their active development make us hope that these business constellations can be ultimately analyzed as clusters in every detail. Most probably, these zones just need time for their development to realize completely their full potential.

Recent World Economic Forum (WEF) data suggests that a sizable amount of potential economic growth exists in Russia due to its size and resource potential. But a lack of business sophistication, innovation potential and market efficiencies are views as impediments to global competitiveness. A systematic, national cluster-strategy can directly address these shortcomings. A separate analysis of macroeconomic data shows that Russia’s services sector remains still relatively small compared with the services areas in the U.S. and Europe. This, too, can be a focus of Russia's national cluster strategy as most clusters are concentrated around technology or information issues.
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