How to feed a culturally sustainable development plan over time: evidence from the Tuscan Mining UNESCO Global Geopark

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Abstract

Purpose – This research explores the community's role in feeding a culturally sustainable development project over time and the practices which operationally allow the bridging of cultural heritage management and sustainable development according to the approach of "culture as sustainability".

Design/methodology/approach – The primary and secondary sources relate to nearly 20 years of life of the Tuscan Mining Geopark case belonging to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) European and Global Geopark Networks. Textual analysis was applied to the dataset. The interpretative approach was aligned with other investigations within this research field.

Findings – The results highlight how a bold project in an uncertain context harnessed bottom-up mobilisation and accountability to stimulate a sustainable community empowerment. The ability to experiment and learn from experience depicts an organisational logic far from the top-down and predefined design practice widely contested in the literature.

Research limitations/implications – Despite a single case study was analysed, it enables researchers to craft a conceptual model for culturally sustainable development projects, and it fills the literature gap on how to operationalise culture as sustainability under the managerial perspective.

Practical implications – The model assembles an organisational process view and practices that can be tailored to a cultural context with insights for developing culturally sustainable projects.

Originality/value – The research increases the observations of community empowerment within culturally sustainable development projects. It demonstrates how the "incompleteness of the design" was not a weakness but rather a trigger of effective organisational practices.

Keywords Heritage, Community, Sustainability, UNESCO, Geopark, Learning, Accountability, Community empowerment, Organisational practices, Incompleteness

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage represents a vital resource for local community development (Thorkildsen and Ekman, 2013). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) remarked on this in the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), which has stimulated contemporary debates on culture and other critical issues, such as identity, social cohesion and the development of a knowledge-based economy. Culture as "a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (UNESCO, 2009: p. 4) has been critically analysed in relation to sustainability. Indeed, culture as a means or as an aim of sustainable development is still the object of the interdisciplinary discussion that was boosted by its limited

consideration in Agenda (2030) (Wiktor-Mach, 2020). Culture is not precisely identified as a stand-alone sustainable goal, but it is mentioned in four sustainable development goals (SDGs) (#4, #8, #11 and #12). These issues have stimulated research to enlarge existing knowledge of the "place" of culture in the sustainability agenda, despite the spread of the use of culture to encompass the sustainable development models' social dimension of the triple pillars – economic, social and environmental (Loach *et al.*, 2017).

The articulation of culture as defined by UNESCO (2009) calls for less elitist and more inclusive practices and also tries to facilitate interaction processes in decisions and actions (Kosmala and Sebastyanski, 2013; Wang, 2020). Therefore, community engagement and community empowerment are topics of renewed interest in the field of community-based heritage management based on sustainable development. How to empower different community stakeholder groups in heritage sustainable development projects is still underexplored (Throsby, 2017).

This research study is aimed at extending knowledge on the role of community in culturally sustainable development projects in the field of community-based heritage management under the operational perspective. More specifically, the study sheds light on organisational processes' logic and the practices underpinned by a culturally based sustainable development project. The paper is structured into six sections. In the next section, theories on culture, sustainability, community engagement and learning are reviewed to set out the theoretical background for the "design" for community empowerment. In the third section, the research methodology based on the Tuscan Mining UNESCO Global Geopark as a "revelatory" case study is presented, followed by the main findings in the fourth section. Discussions in the fifth section are empirically informed to also depict a conceptual model. Theoretical and practical implications, limitations and further developments from the research are included in the concluding section.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Bridging culture, sustainability and community engagement

There are three exploratory approaches which are used to frame the relationships between culture and sustainability: culture *for* sustainability, culture *in* sustainability and culture *as* sustainability (Dessein *et al.*, 2015). According to Agenda (2030), the first approach stresses the role of culture as an enabler or driver of sustainability. Culture fosters SDGs and development as an end in itself because all developments take place in a cultural landscape, interpreted as a community context (Donato and Lohrasbi, 2017). Culture *in* sustainability is considered to be the fourth pillar of sustainability, with interconnections to the other dimensions of sustainable development. Culture *in* sustainability regards "commons" like cultural capital, which comprises tangible and intangible resources (Throsby, 2010: p. 195). The third approach – culture *as* sustainability – suggests a broader view of culture in the sustainability discourse. It is not the driver of but the foundation for sustainable development: culture encompasses all the dimensions of sustainability.

These approaches provide useful insights for academics and practitioners with respect to culturally sustainable development-based research and the design and implementation of culturally sustainable policies (Soini and Dessein, 2016; Froner, 2017). However, whether or not culturally sustainable development projects could become operational is still underinvestigated (Throsby, 2017; Reher, 2020). The role of the local community in bridging cultural heritage management and sustainable development also deserves more exploration in both operational and theoretical terms (Ferreira, 2018). This gap connects the call for more research on the role of heritage in community life and its potential in community development and community identity under a managerial perspective (Waterton and Watson, 2011). In addition, the critical relationship among heritage, community and

engagement within a specific context cannot be taken for granted in researching the operational factors and conditions for the development of culturally sustainable projects. This is relevant to ensure that such concepts are not empty but meaningful with respect to the cultural context that is observed. This research relates the relationship between heritage and community and assumes the role of the former as a "cypher" for important cultural constructs and as a "marker" of community identity and power (Smith, 2006). The concept of community refers to groups of people with a shared set of values or beliefs, which characterise the cultural landscape (Donato and Lohrasbi, 2017). The power relations among these groups as well as the role they assign to heritage for community life and development affects their engagement (Waterton and Watson, 2011). While acknowledging that "local people, civil society and elected local and national officials will play a key role in the design and implementation of heritage as a driver of development and through raised awareness of heritage, they will have ownership of the development project" (ICOMOS, 2011: p. 6), the literature underlines the lack of community empowerment in the sustainable development conceptual model (Lukman, 2020). Community empowerment refers a participative and developmental approach to a local decision-making process (Maton, 2008). This implies a twofold condition: the involvement of the community in sustainable development initiatives and their effective capability to influence the outcome and to control the core process (Li and Hanter, 2015). Scholars have highlighted, on the one hand, the issue of inclusiveness in collaborative planning (Lusiani and Zan, 2013; Donato and Lohrasbi, 2017) and, on the other hand, the need to enable the community to understand empowerment opportunities from engagement in culturally sustainable development projects (Thorkildsen and Ekman, 2013; Froner, 2017).

Previous critical analysis and discussions on relevant case studies have stressed how particular community types, in conjunction with particular heritage sites, can stimulate particular management skills within an evolving organisational framework to achieve specific community-based heritage objectives (Hodges and Watson, 2000: p. 242). The same research addressed the validity of this proposition in order to design a predictive model with theoretical and practical implications within the community-based management mainstream. In this regard, how a community can contribute to the long-term management of heritage has been added as a research ground and is aligned with the cultural issue within the sustainability discourse, which is the background of this study.

2.2 Learning to design for community empowerment

It is acknowledged in management studies that some aspects of design, including undesired effects, are discovered only by taking the path of action. To learn is to experience this path; participation in organisational life and practices are more similar to a journey into the land of discovery than to following an already paved road of knowledge, a deliberate strategy and an *a priori* formal plan (Gherardi, 1999; Luisiani and Zan, 2013; Chia, 2017). Indeed, Mintzberg (1994) questioned the value of formal, top-down, bureaucratic, linear and deterministic planning approaches. Not only do actors try to learn from many sources and work towards a synthesis and a vision to be pursued, they also learn the strategy-making process by addressing the details and the unexpected occurrences. Strategy and planning cannot be fully formulated before they are implemented (Mintzberg and Waters, 1990). Thus, some degree of flexibility and openness should be maintained (Baarveld *et al.*, 2013).

There is also a tendency towards the strengthening of the social process perspective in which social context, cultural artefacts, collective group actions and participation play an essential role (Chiva and Alegre, 2005), and learning occurs across boundaries through networking (Araujo, 1998) and social interaction (Chiva and Alegre, 2005).

According to a widely-used and accepted definition in the literature, learning is the process by which relatively permanent changes in (potential) behaviours occur because of

experience (Hilgard and Bower, 1981). This definition in its breadth and generality includes all of the main learning theories.

Indeed, from an etymological point of view, the term experience derives from the Latin *experientia* (e.g. a trial, proof, experiment and experimental knowledge) and from *experiens*, the present participle of *experiri* (e.g. to try, put to the test, undertake and undergo). In common language, there are synonyms for the term experience, such as "involvement in", "participation in", "contact with", "awareness of", "familiarity with" and so forth.

Akin to this logic, some researchers in the organisational field have stressed the processual nature underlying iterative engagements with design*ing* and organis*ing* that embrace ephemerality and constant experiential learning and improvement (Yoo *et al.*, 2006). The focus is on the action that is on the verb – *designing, organising* – which questions the permanence otherwise signalled by nouns, such as *design* or *organisation*.

Dunbar and Starbuck (2006) also agreed that the design process includes iterations and is essentially non-deterministic and problematic because designers have incomplete information and face different degrees and forms of uncertainty. This requires the exploration of multiple alternatives and the ability of participants to learn from experience. What arises, again, is a conceptualisation of design as a flexible process open to evolution rather than closed *a priori* through strict protocols; a process that actually now goes beyond the formal boundaries that would hinder the pursuit of organisational objectives, thereby narrowing horizons rather than widening them (Schreyögg and Sydow, 2010).

Garud *et al.* (2008) pushed even more the conceptualisation of design as a flexible process open to solutions that emerge in action. These authors emphasised the openness itself of traditional organisational boundaries and looked beyond the purely symbolic formal dimension that underlies the processes of community empowerment.

Following the previous theoretical background, our research questions arise as follows:

RQ1. What is the role of a community in feeding a culturally sustainable development project over time?

RQ2. What organisational practices towards a culturally sustainable development project over time are necessary?

3. Research methodology

The research is based on a successful single experience that has been labelled by the literature as a "revelatory" case study (Yin, 2017). From an epistemological point of view, this interpretative approach is also aligned with the approach of other studies on community engagement in complex contexts (Thorkildsen and Ekman, 2013).

The case setting we examined is the "Tuscan Mining UNESCO Global Geopark" (hereafter, the "Park"). The motivation behind this research choice was twofold: first, this Park embraces a larger geographic area than any of the other nine Italian parks acknowledged as members of the European UNESCO Geoparks Network (EGN). It includes seven municipalities along the Tuscan Coast. Among these municipalities, the "Montieri" has the local authority in a context that includes all the mines disused and "reused" throughout the Park institution. This represents a great heritage of buildings and land relating to industrial activities over a period from the Etruscans to the contemporary age and places the area among the European territories with the oldest history of mining activity. Second, this setting was chosen because the Park has achieved several EU accreditations for managing cultural heritage since its institution in 2002. Hence, the exploration of this case study fits with the research aim and questions.

The dataset is composed of digital and documental sources that are available, respectively, on the Park website and in its administrative archive. These secondary data

sources have been adopted to reconstruct the main steps in the Park's life, to explore the managerial operations and strategic objectives under a sustainability perspective and to investigate the community engagement practices. In addition, primary data were gathered through unstructured interviews carried out during the timespan of the study (2010–2021).

The three main actors in the Park development project were interviewed: the Park director, the Mayor of the Montieri municipality and one of the more active representatives of the local entrepreneurship environment. The Park director was interviewed because of the key role in coordinating the various partners involved in the Park and in mediating between the latter and the local community. A dialogue with these relevant managerial bodies was deemed critical to an understanding of the organisational practices that have supported the sustainable management of the Park's cultural heritage over time. The interviews were scheduled in years that corresponded with the main events of the Park's life (Table 1). The main events refer to the application to European Destinations of ExcelleNce (EDEN) in 2010 (interview I), to the Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST) in 2013 (Interview II), the revalidation of the EGN and UNESCO Global Geopark Network in 2018 (Interview III) and the formulation of the green economy plan in 2019 (Interview IV).

The other interviewees – the Mayor of the Montieri municipality (Interview V) and the local entrepreneur (Interview VI) – were engaged to triangulate the findings, indirectly by the community through the secondary sources and directly by the opinions expressed by the Director in relation to the research aim and questions. Each interview lasted at least one hour.

The research protocol underpins the text analysis for examining the primary and secondary data (Neundorf, 2016). The interviews, recorded and then transcribed, have been decomposed in words to be dealt as the documental sources. The text analysis used was not focussed on the meaning of the single word, but on the concepts inferred by the text, with regard to the community engagement, the organisational practices and the culturally sustainable projects and actions. Consequently, the evidence has been triangulated as aforementioned and interpreted under the culture *as* sustainability conceptualisation (Throsby, 2010; Dessein *et al.*, 2015; Reher, 2020) and according to the community-based heritage management (Hodges and Watson, 2000; Waterton and Watson, 2011; Lukman, 2020).

4. Findings
During the mid-1990s, the closure of the last mine in Campiano (one of the most important in Europe) in Montieri was also the closure of an era connected with metallurgical activity, which distorted people's daily lives, society and the economy. According to the Statute (Art. 1 – General Principles), the Park was set up by the decree of 28 February 2002 issued by the Italian Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea under the terms of Financial Law 388/ 2000. This formal step was the culmination of a ten-year process which started with numerous works and feasibility studies to reconvert the disused mining areas. However, at the base of the ten-year process, the Park foundation was the intuition and the very strong wish of the local communities to leverage their identity and history and give the reclaimed area a new tourist vocation. As stated by the Director and the Mayor of Montieri,

> With the definitive closure of the mines in the 90s, the miners and their families experienced the dismantling of their lives and local culture, rooted in mining for generations. They were the first to give voice to this problem. Feasibility studies and state-funded interventions were in high demand from the community so as not to lose history and memory, with the intuition to make it productive after reclamation works. There was a clear need to enhance the cultural heritage also economically. The Park was born thanks to the strong will of the local communities and municipalities, as a glue to unite and coordinate multiple and dispersed initiatives. [. . .] Nevertheless, the Park was not born as a naturalistic one under the terms of Law 394/1991 on protected natural areas, with a pre-existing

Research methods	Sources	Research objectives
Document analysis	– Master Plan (from 2002 to 2007, updated after the UNESCO and the ECST accreditation) – Project of the "Park Gateways" (2004, updated in 2010) – Programme Agreement (2014) – Charter of Principles (2007) – Statute – Dossier "Ten Years of Park" – 2002 to 2012 – Application Report to ECST (2013) – Diagnostic Report of the Tuscan Mining GeoPark (2014) – Tuscan Mining Geopark: Report of the GGN Revalidation Mission, 18–21 June 2014 – Final Report on the monitoring of Strategies, Action Plan and Actions (2014–2018)	To examine the main steps of the Park evolution To explore the managerial operations and strategic objectives under the sustainability principles To investigate the community engagement practices adopted
Interviews of the Director of the Mayor of Montieri of the active actor of the local entrepreneurship environment	Interview I (10 October 2010) Interview II (20 November 2013) Interview III (28 July 2017) Interview IV (21 December 2020) Interview V (9 December 2021) Interview VI (9 December 2021)	To gain an in-depth understand of the organisational factors triggering sustainable management of cultural heritage over time To triangulate the evidence to make the research findings reliable

Table 1.
The Research protocol

specific legislation, well defined competences and detailed tasks, and a clear top-down authority. It was born as a mining park, under the terms of financial Law 388/2000, with the motivation to first do the mining reclamations in the area, a necessary step for further initiatives. (Interview I)

The mine affected the lifestyle of the people [. . .] during work, after-work and in whole terms of a relative prosperity [. . .]. The closure occurred almost suddenly and it was traumatic. [. . .] At first the population did not realise what was suddenly happening, focused on the attempts at industrial reconversion which soon failed. In addition, pollution and the risk of severe environmental damage emerged and persisted for years. [. . .] Once the most critical phase of land reclamation and safety ended, the problems of how to rethink the socio-economic dimension and the landscape's issues emerged with more awareness and strength. [. . .] The community drive was to build a body that in some way kept the historical memory alive and that at the same time could support a different look towards the future. Therefore, the Park was born from the need to enhance the mining culture, to preserve and protect the mining history of these places but also to tell it from a cultural and tourist perspective. [. . .] I believe that the birth and growth of the Park first of all responded to the need to provide answers to the local community regarding the end of the mining era. [...] It is also clear that the Park in these years evolved. It started from the mining heritage as a foundation to then deal with other central issues in everyone's life. And doing this, the Park was a forerunner with reference to the wide theme of sustainability, even before this theme became so central and decisive in the current global debate. (Interview V)

Despite this shared vision at the base of the Park's foundation, a high degree of organisational uncertainty arose due to the lack of reference points in Italy, the inability to refer to the terms of Law 394/1991 on protected natural areas and thus to the practices of other natural parks and the stress of a very modest ministerial financial contribution (Master Plan, 2002–2007: pp. 8–9). The Decree of Foundation in 2002 defined the Consortium, a non-economic public body, to operate the Park with its chair appointed by the Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea. The Consortium is constituted of deputies from the Ministry of Cultural Assets and Activities, the regional authority, the province, the mountain community and a vice chairman appointed by the seven municipalities as their representative. The Park's mission involves reclaiming, conserving and developing the environmental, historical/cultural and technical/ scientific heritage of that area. Nevertheless, the Decree, as stated by the Park director, "said little about how pursuing these aims". The Decree also overlooked that the ownership of the sites and assets involved many different actors (some properties belong to the State or are private, some are municipally owned, some belong to the mining firms, etc.), and it also overlooked many other details. The very innovative aspect of the Park lays in the bottom-up ability to exploit Financial Law 388/2000 for the birth of the first mining Park in Italy, supported by the direct engagement of local communities and their elected officials. Indeed, the management of local sites and activities has been delegated to the municipalities with the involvement of their staffs, local networks of associations, cooperatives and so forth, while the direct staff of the Park includes only seven people: the President, the Director and five employees (Statute, Art. 14 "Community of the Park"). The Park collaborates with a wide network of trained and skilled local guides and expert advisors on geodiversity, tourism, sustainability, archaeology, education, valuing and enriching local knowledge and competencies. As stated by the Director and the Mayor of Montieri,

The Park enhances local diversity, individual peculiarities and autonomies. It does not drive toward a flattening homogenisation. At the same time, the Park facilitates a more integrated, coordinated, better allocation and use of resources such as funding, reducing extreme individualisms. (Interview II)

[. . .] the Park has always been a body in the making, a work in progress along the way [. . .] it is not strictly operational, it acts as a catalyst, a facilitator of information exchanges, to bring together ideas and actions that gravitate around its founding principles [. . .] it is also necessary to take into account that the municipalities are small, the economic fabric is fragile and needs information and

support (e.g. for funding search and projects) towards sustainability issues too. [...] The sustainability values are in the DNA of the Park while they are more rarefied in the economic fabric. (Interview V)

The streamlined body allows investment of the available financial resources in the territory without having to earmark many of the resources for overhead. At the heart of the Park, there are seven "Park Gateways", which were inaugurated in the Spring of 2005 according to the Project of the "Park Gateways" (2004, updated in 2010). The Park invests heavily in the Gateways with a double aim: to engage the local municipalities and their communities as much as possible and to strengthen the cultural heritage valorisation of the seven municipal areas. The Gateways are run by the town councils or contracted out to local young cooperatives or associations. The employees of the Gateways and other professionals operate through conventions and programme agreements with the local municipalities. The Consortium coordinates the Gateway events and maintains high-quality standards. The main initial goal was to open ideal entry points into the Park as info-points for tourists. Over time, the role of the Gateways has gradually expanded into central nodes within the local network of museums and libraries. They host courses for cultural education and professional training, cultural and theatrical events and non-permanent exhibitions, thereby actively involving both residents and tourists. As the Director pointed out,

The Park tries to bring the citizens closer through the rituals and celebrations related to the mining history and heritage. [...] the Park is visited by every child of the seven municipalities at some stage of his school life. (Interview II)

Between 2005 and 2006, the necessary documentation to put together the Master Plan of the Park began to be gathered. As the Director argued,

The way of organising the Park and the drafting of the Master Plan have been central to build the network and the community engagement. (Interview II)

The wide participation of the local people, the elected officials, entrepreneurs and associations in the drafting of the Master Plan helped to create an atmosphere of mutual trust: a "bottom-up" mobilisation (Preite, 2009). Local people were engaged through interviews with the families of the miners at the foundation of the Park and through public opportunities for discussion and debate in order to collect stimuli and suggestions during the construction of the Master Plan up until its approval in January 2007. The signing of the Park's Charter of Principles on 14 December 2007 was also open to the widest possible participation. As stated in this Charter, the Park has the task of looking after and coordinating the following activities:

(1) Protecting, preserving and developing the sites and assets connected with the mining activity in the interests of environment, culture, science, education and tourism.

(2) Preserving and developing museums and archiving the industrial archaeological heritage and the heritage of documents, books and photographs about mining history and culture.

(3) Safeguarding and preserving the habitats, cultural landscape and human values connected to mining.

(4) Promoting, backing and developing educational and research in the sectors of history, archaeology, science and technology.

(5) Promoting and backing educational and artistic-cum cultural activities, which are compatible with the values to be safeguarded.

(6) Promoting cultural and environmental tourism.

Another turning point in the Park's development was the process to obtain admission within the international networks of geoparks and protected areas. To succeed, the Park had to follow the admission requirements and to identify multiyear plans for activities, which prompted greater local participation and the co-development of many actions. In 2010, the Park was admitted (as Tuscan Mining Geopark) into the European and Global Geopark Networks recognised by UNESCO and in 2011, into the European Destinations of Excellence programme. The Geopark territory expanded the Tuscan Mining Park. This expansion and the additional status were understood and deeply appreciated by the local community as explained by the Park's Director:

> During the meetings for UNESCO accreditation were all, all the associations [. . .] the evaluators were astonished [...] there was a realisation [. . .] it was clear that the local municipalities engagement, and the continued political support from each one, were important to the Geopark accreditation. . .but equally the Geopark was important to the municipalities as it had been a further occasion for bringing them together and providing direction to work more collaboratively. This also provided a boost to the legitimacy of the Park, based on the actual results so far achieved. (Interview III)

This was also confirmed on the occasion of the revalidation in 2014 as remembered by the Director:

> There was a large meeting with many questions from the audience and everyone was enthusiastic and proud of the inclusion within the Geopark. (Interview III)

These aspects were also underlined by the UNESCO reviewers in their revalidation report. The periodic monitoring of the accreditation induced the Park to adopt an accountability system based on a control report compiled yearly by each Gateway. A Gateway is accountable for the development of the cultural programme, which has to be consistent with the mission and the strategic objectives of the Park. Moreover, each Gateway has to provide an annual report to the Director as a summary of the monthly control reports for deliberation by the governance bodies of the Park. The reporting activity is so important that if the monthly report is provided after the deadline, the Gateway must pay a penalty to the Park (Programme Agreement, Art. 2). This mechanism of accountability is used as a means of mutual monitoring, which develops a kind of competition among the Gateways in order to improve their reputations, legitimacy and the amount of funding.

In 2014, the Park became part of the Protected Areas certified by the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST). This was mostly due to the active engagement of the tourism industry which created a shared vision for tourism, thereby fostering collaboration and producing a comprehensive plan with 46 actions for the coming five years (2014–2018). Proponents of these actions included the Park, the local seven municipalities, associations, farms, farm-holidays, bed and breakfasts, cooperatives and restaurants. As stated by the Director,

> We did not map the stakeholders in a formal way, but we used common sense and openness. [. . .] The fact that the Park did not follow a rigid top-down approach (unlike other parks) allowed the spontaneous emergence of projects and actions also by individual municipalities and other local stakeholders. Then the individual projects have been canalised into a more collective project under the ECST. Thus, in the case of the Park, the charter has been actually more emergent and bottom-up when compared to many other charters developed by other parks. (Interview III)

The ECST accreditation protocol and the UNESCO GGN revision, which are carried out every four years, have reinforced the Park accountability approach. The mechanism of control used by the Global Geoparks Network is based on social, cultural and financial performance. It is composed of a qualitative analysis of the services provided (numbers and types of itineraries provided), the cultural heritage conservation and enhancement actions taken according to the

UNESCO policy and guidelines, the visitor facilities used, the tourism promotion programme developed and management improvement. Compliance with the UNESCO requirements represents the form of accountability across most of the GGN.

After the first forum aimed at ECST certification, the process of engagement has included the iteration of such a forum as a permanent "Working Territorial Table" coordinated by the Park. Participants are citizens, community associations, cultural organisations, tourism agencies and tourist operators, farmers, traders, restaurateurs, trade associations, representatives of environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), journalists, bloggers, wineries, oil mills, bike rentals, sports shops and so forth. The permanent forum is an occasion for the wider attraction and engagement of other local stakeholders. Indeed, as stated by the Director:

> Within the forum, we started with few participants. Working well and with the word of mouth, it went from 47 to 79 subjects involved. There was no formal request, but it was the implementation and work on actions that increasingly stimulated participation. The formal requests for collaboration proposals are used only to start partnerships with large partners on specific projects. (Interview IV)

In order to apply for the ECST accreditation, the Park carried out its first customer satisfaction analysis that has since become a routine practice. This analysis was carried out by the Director of the Park and the actors in charge of the Park Gateways in order to produce accountability information required by the annual revalidation of the ECST accreditation. The results were included in the Final Report of monitoring on Strategies, Action Plan and Actions (2014–2018), which is a summary of the previous ECST annual reports. This analysis shows how the community's awareness of the special qualities of the Park has been creating a wider network of local "ambassadors" for the Park who are not only in the tourism industry. An example is the creation of the "DRAGO" Short Chain Project (Organised Rural Agricultural Gastronomic District). The idea came from one of the participants in the Forum, who stated that

> The DRAGO project involved the PARK, which was immediately available to provide support, for example by participating in a call for tenders and obtaining funding for an experimentation with the CNR *(National Council of Research)*. [...] We considered the Park as an important body from an institutional point of view to legitimise and support our initiative in the area, in particular as the Park is recognised by UNESCO. [...] The awareness of the pre-existence of the Park, which we thought of as an amplifier of our idea and project, certainly influenced us [...] The Park was also useful for delimiting the geographical boundaries of the production chain and the territory within which the ancient wheats are produced. This is due to the specific qualities of the cultivation land of the metalliferous hills. [...] There was an increasing awareness enacted by the territory about the quality and potential value of local products for the market, which was not previously perceived. [...] Also in terms of sustainability, especially the environmental one, a greater awareness has spread compared to previous generations of agricultural entrepreneurs, and the Park has been committed to this. [...] However, I believe that we, as entrepreneurs, must be a stimulus to the Park to promote and assist our ideas and initiatives in the area. (Interview VI)

By applying the UNESCO GEOFOOD brand, DRAGO promotes the marketing of products, thereby guaranteeing jobs and profitability for businesses. DRAGO now, involves over 90 small firms, has landed in large-scale distribution, has obtained huge regional funds and "contributes to greater control of the territory and prevention of all those forms of instability that often derive from their abandonment, trying to counteract it" as stated by the Mayor of Montieri (Interview V).

Another international project that the Park has joined and promoted is the Interreg DestiMED project. As requested, the Park established its Local Ecotourism Cluster (LEC) in

November 2017. It consists of a representative of the Park, a representative of the Tourist Guides, a local Inbound Tour Operator and a representative of the restaurateurs and of the reception sector (both with a rotation every six months). The LEC met in 2018 on a bimonthly basis and developed six ecotourist packages partly intended for the DestiMED/MEET circuit and partly intended for direct marketing by the Park. The economic impact that the Park produces and that the culture supports has affected the agricultural, wine, olive and breeding businesses, encouraging the production of local products that also embody the rural identity of the territory.
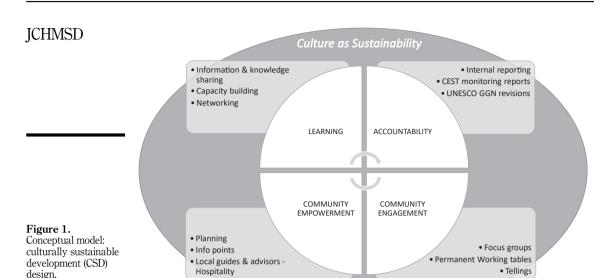
Despite its slenderness and limited funds, the Park thrives in the precise sense of cultural and scientific dissemination (e.g. by organising educational workshops with schools as well as agreements with universities for research purposes). As stated by the Director,

> the Park acts as a support and mediator and in some cases also provides financial contributions for some initiatives. Collaborations need a figure who acts as a flywheel to stimulate new contacts, ideas, opportunities or engage new actors. (Interview VI)

5. Discussion

The findings from the case study respond to both research questions according to the community-based heritage management theory, taking into consideration culture as a sustainability model. Relative to the first question (*What is the role of a community in feeding a culturally sustainable development project over time?*), the Park has been able to produce sustainable outcomes over time through increased engagement of the community, not only initially to legitimise the Master Plan but also to interact in the various stages of its implementation and development. The community has been represented by local people, elected officials, entrepreneurs and cultural organisations operating in the Park Gateways. According to the theoretical background (Waterton and Watson, 2011), the capacity to keep the relationships between the heritage of the Park and the community vital and active was induced by UNESCO and European Union (EU) accreditations which made community engagement a *conditio sine qua non* for its revalidation over time. The findings from the secondary sources and the interviews thus answer the second research question (*What organisational practices towards a culturally sustainable development project over time are necessary?*). Indeed, if the UNESCO and UE accreditations have required community engagement, the accountability practices have contributed to these achievements. In this case study, community engagement also became empowered over time, thanks to accountability practices adopted for the UNESCO and ECST accreditations. However, the accountability practices have taken into consideration the specific characterisations of local communities that preferred face-to-face rather than digital meetings. The UNESCO and ECST accreditations have emerged over time, thanks to the development of ideas and skills that did not exist at the beginning. As understood here, experiential learning is the cause and consequence of this development. Based on this reasoning, a conceptual proposition about the organisational practices underpinning the culturally sustainable development project has arisen: the learning process is supported by accountability practices that encourage community engagement, which can become empowered in a cultural context in which heritage plays a relevant role in community life and its sustainable development (Figure 1).

The Culturally Sustainable Development (CSD) model contributes to filling the research gap underlined by the culturally sustainable development literature bridged with community based heritage management. The research findings corroborate the role of learning in the design of a CSD project, which is a learning process itself, both from a strategic and an organisational perspective. The definition of a shared vision as well as the objectives in the Master Plan and in the Charter of Principles have found a truly fertile ground, thanks to the

Figure 1.
Conceptual model:
culturally sustainable
development (CSD)
design,
implementation,
evolution

ability to reconceive the peculiar cultural heritage linked to metallurgical activity as a foundation for sustainable development as well as in terms of cultural and environmental tourism. Of particular reference to the second research question, a double objective was achieved from the practice of remaining sufficiently open and flexible both in strategy and design. On the one hand, the internal coherence of the project with the objectives of the Charter of Principles was not too stringent nor so vague as to betray the initial vision that emerged from "grassroots" efforts. On the other hand, new and further objectives and practices emerged from experimentation with new projects: for example, the growing role of the seven Gateways and the most recent projects, including DestiMED, LEC and DRAGO. They depict a true process of networking and design which are very far from the traditional practice of top-down management and predefined planning, which has been repeatedly contested (Baarveld *et al.*, 2013; Luisiani and Zan, 2013).

Moreover, the practice of disclosure is related to accountability and builds trust and legitimacy with regard to further decision and actions. The constant search for culturally-sustainable development requires an open-minded relational approach in which a community's interactions are strengthened by trust, legitimacy and confidence (Li and Hunter, 2015) based on results and accountability. The performance measures that were adopted were created by the Park together with the stakeholders, thus creating for them a sense of empowerment in the development of the project. The Park Gateways annual report enables the Park to produce performance information for revalidating accreditations in light of sustainability and, in the meantime, to empower relationships of trust with the local community (Bäckstrand, 2006).

Finally, taking up the proposition of Hodges and Watson (2000: 242) quoted in the beginning of the paper, we agree with the essence, namely that there is no "one fits all" solutions due to many local peculiarities. Our case adds further insights towards a more dynamic and emergent perspective:

(1) The type of community can change over time. In our case, it is from the community group of miners to a multiplicity of other community groups.

(2) The focus of the heritage can change. In our case, it starts from the particular mining heritage sites, the project extended to rural and agricultural sites.

(3) Particular skills can evolve. In our case, not only they were "stimulated" but also because they were learned in the making, during a process of organising and designing.

(4) An evolving organisational framework is congruent with what we have found, especially if understood as a nexus of processes, decisions, actions and practices.

(5) A community's goals can change over time. In our case, in addition to what is highlighted in point 1, community empowerment can bring out new ideas and objectives that were not initially foreseen.

6. Conclusions

This study has added theoretical and practical insights to the community-based heritage management (Waterton and Watson, 2011; Lukman, 2020) and sustainability research grounds (Dessein *et al.*, 2015; Reher, 2020). The research has contributed to a reduction in the literature gaps (Hodges and Watson, 2000; Throsby, 2010; Ferreira, 2018) and has highlighted the *organising* and *designing* views as well as the practices that were successful for the sustainability of the entire project that was analysed. These are interconnected within the model of culture *as* sustainability (Dessein *et al.*, 2015): community engagement is iteratively connected with accountability based on transparency and reporting (Bäckstrand, 2006). The related practices strengthen the relationship of trust between the project manager and the local community and facilitate the interrelationships that lead to the co-creation of value for the territory. The shift from engagement to empowerment is a practical implication of the fertilisation of the whole organisational process and the practices developed over time, and it is, therefore, embedded in the management of the cultural capital of the territory.

The contribution of the study is not only practical but also conceptual (Throsby, 2010; Duxbury *et al.*, 2017).

The culture *as* sustainability approach assembles the logics of organising and designing with practices that can be tailored to the cultural context (Donato and Lohrasbi, 2017). It also adds a relevant perspective to interpretation, which is still underestimated: time. It is precisely with respect to time that it was possible to understand which learning processes, accountability, community engagement and empowerment developed during the implementation of the project and then evolved for the management of cultural heritage. This requires a new way of working by managers and local officials. They must learn to live in hybrid, uncertain and open contexts. They have a key role in facilitating collaboration and community empowerment.

What initially appeared as a weakness – the incompleteness of the design (i.e. the lack of pre-existing specific legislation, well defined competences and detailed tasks, and a clear top-down authority) – represented the peculiar and innovative starting point of the Park project, which unfolded into practices in the course of action.

The limitation of this research is that a single case study was adopted even though it was relevant for crafting the conceptual model provided. To ground its reliability, a call is made for further investigations on similar cases or projects in other cultural contexts.

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