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The Innovation Ecosystem of the Tourist Cultural Cluster in the Ancient Villages of Southern Anhui

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Agenda



1

Introduction

2

Literature
review

3

Research
Methods

4

Results

5

Research
Conclusion...

6

References





1

Introduction:



Introduction – objectives



- This research deploys a novel approach to construct an innovation ecosystem model for creative and cultural industries (CCI) in rural-urban nexus. It focuses on rural heritage settings where there is a need for intangible heritage conservation and socio-economic development for locals.

The objectives are:

- 1) To develop a relational model of rural-urban Nexus of an innovation ecosystem for CCI and tourism using SNA (Social Network Analysis)
- 2) To provide insights into the development of the cultural economy and conservation of heritage in Xidi/Hongcun WHS.



Introduction – research site

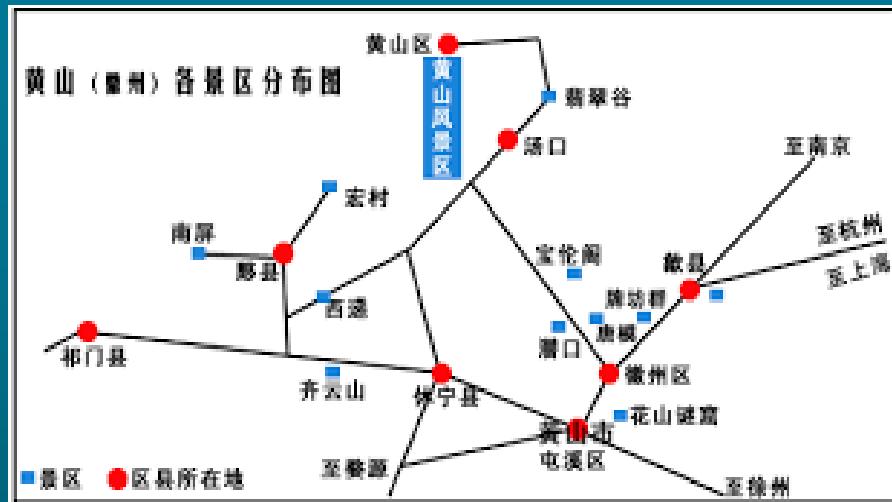


- The Ancient Villages (Xidi and Hongcun) gained WHS in 2000
- Xidi included in the UNWTO Best Tourism Villages (2021)
- Examples of “living heritage” with local communities still living and working in protected buildings, embodying Huizhu culture
- Xidi Village: “the living museum of ancient dwellings” preserved in a style typical of the Ming and Qing Dynasties
- 950 year-history: architectural sites include 3 ancestral halls, 1 archway and 224 dwellings (14th to 19th century)
- Hongcun:(AD 1131) 137 building in Ming and Qing Dynasties style



Local population size and visitor numbers:

- Xidi: 1.22 million visitors in 2019 with a total household of 2100
- Hongcun: 2.76 million visitors in 2019 with a total household of 6600



Xidi



Xidi



Hongcun





2

Literature Review



Rural cultural heritage and development



- WHS status enhances tourism destination attractiveness while encouraging innovation in the design of new tourism products and marketing approaches (*Gao et al., 2023; Cassel & Pashkevich, 2014*)
- CCIs provide facilities and services that enable regions to become tourist destinations encouraging broader socioeconomic development (*LeBlanc, 2010*)
- Increasing efforts are needed to protect rural cultural heritage & cultural villages in China facing similar threats from urbanisation or gentrification as in Europe (*Yu et al., 2016; Herzfeld, 2015, Chan et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2016*)



Tourism cultural clusters



- WHS conceived as a tourism cultural cluster “mighty conglomeration of natural, historical and social resources” in which “amenities and cultural experiences are integrated into the tourist space” (*Ghafele & Santagata, 2006:4*).
- The development of rural tourism enterprises (small firms) in China is a key policy instrument in rural revitalisation and development (*Li et al., 2018*)
- Cultural cluster development policies are pertinent to SMEs as they are more locally rooted and lack internal resources to innovate (*Hervás-Oliver et al., 2021*)





3

Methodology



Methodology



- A relational approach is applied to the analysis of the Xidi & Hongcun tourism cultural cluster
- Social Networks Analysis focuses on the relationships between the actors rather than their individual attributes
- The structural characteristics of the networks (e.g. cohesion, heterogeneity, distance) indicate the social patterns of relations
- Four types of relations are examined:
 1. Collaboration in joint projects
 2. Advice
 3. Funding
 4. Value chain



Data collection



- Cultural and Creative Industry & Tourism organisations were identified by secondary research and information provided by the local government
- The questionnaires were distributed & collected in physical meetings (group meetings with entrepreneurs for data collection, but for some cases, following up individual meetings)
- Information provided on their network contacts
- Other attribute data included:
 - ❖ Area of business activity
 - ❖ Type or organisation
 - ❖ Organisation size & age





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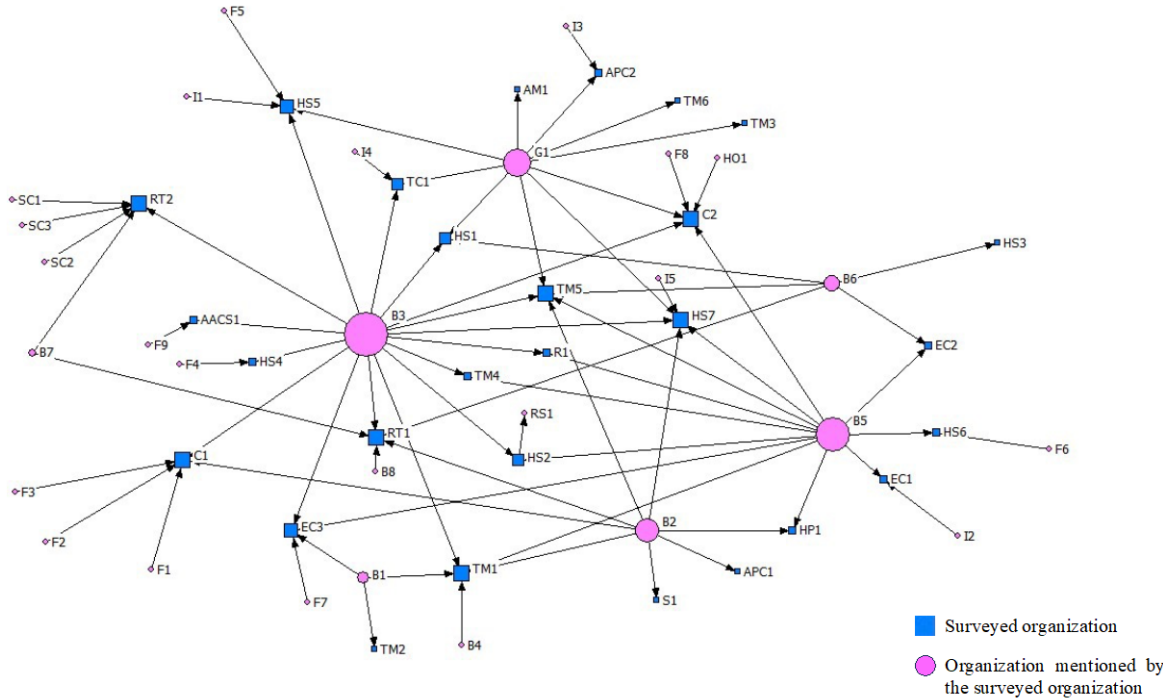
Results



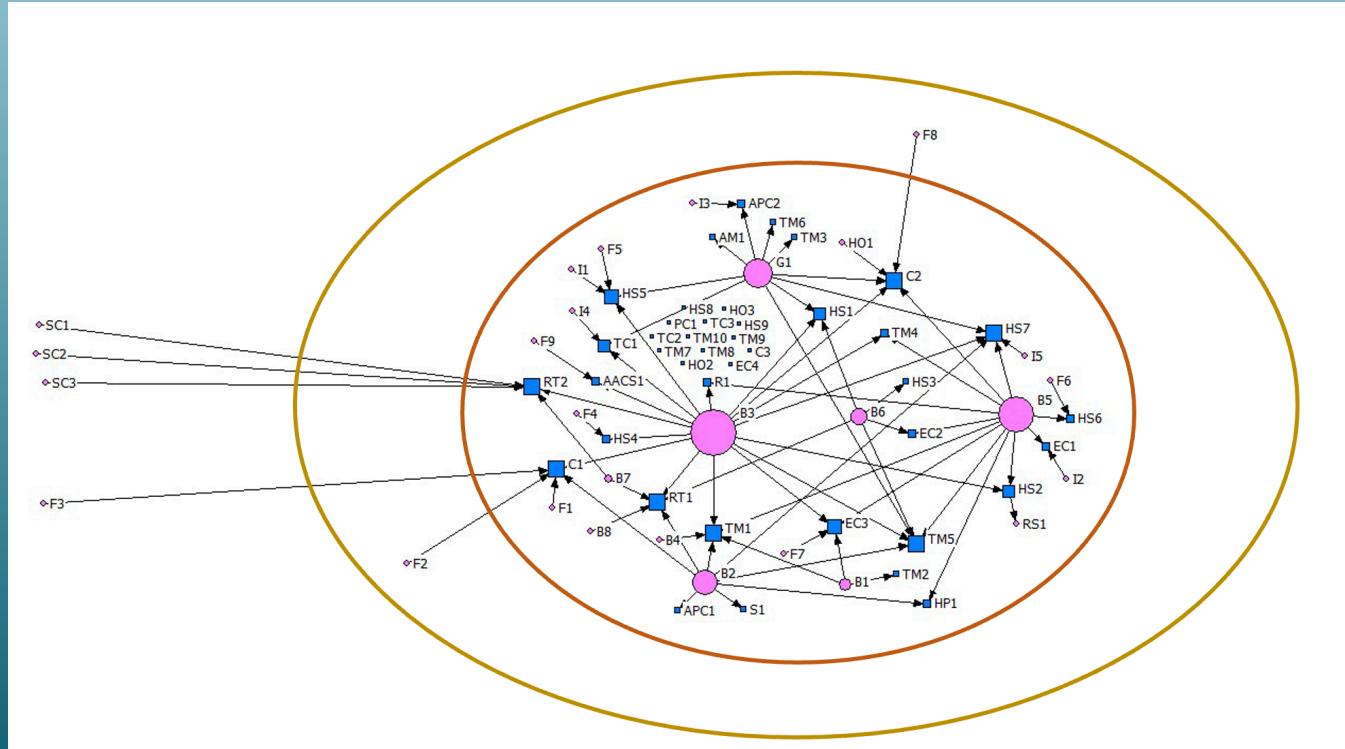
Funding network



- C3
- EC4
- HO2
- HO3
- HS8
- HS9
- PC1
- TC2
- TC3
- TM10
- TM7
- TM8
- TM9



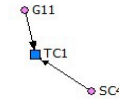
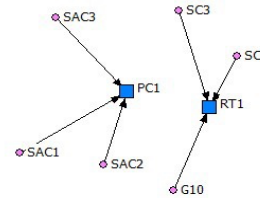
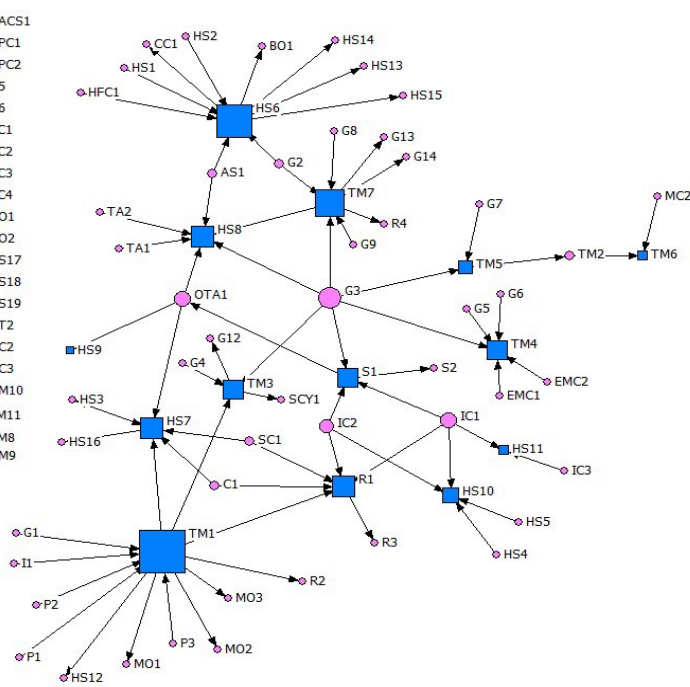
Funding network



The advice network



- AAC1
- APC1
- APC2
- C5
- C6
- EC1
- EC2
- EC3
- EC4
- HO1
- HO2
- HS17
- HS18
- HS19
- RT2
- TC2
- TC3
- TM10
- TM11
- TM8
- TM9

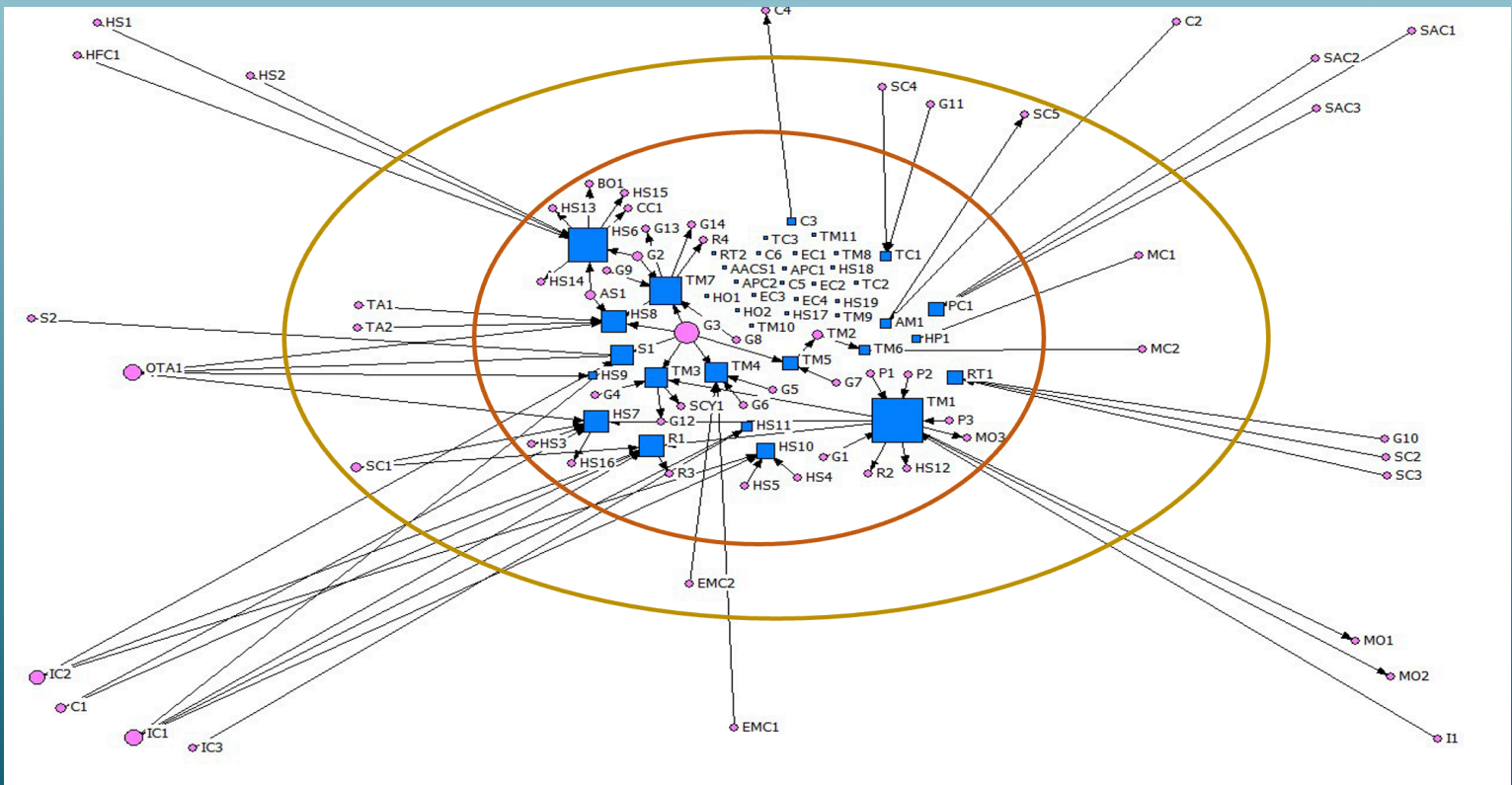


■ Surveyed organization

● Organization mentioned by the surveyed organization



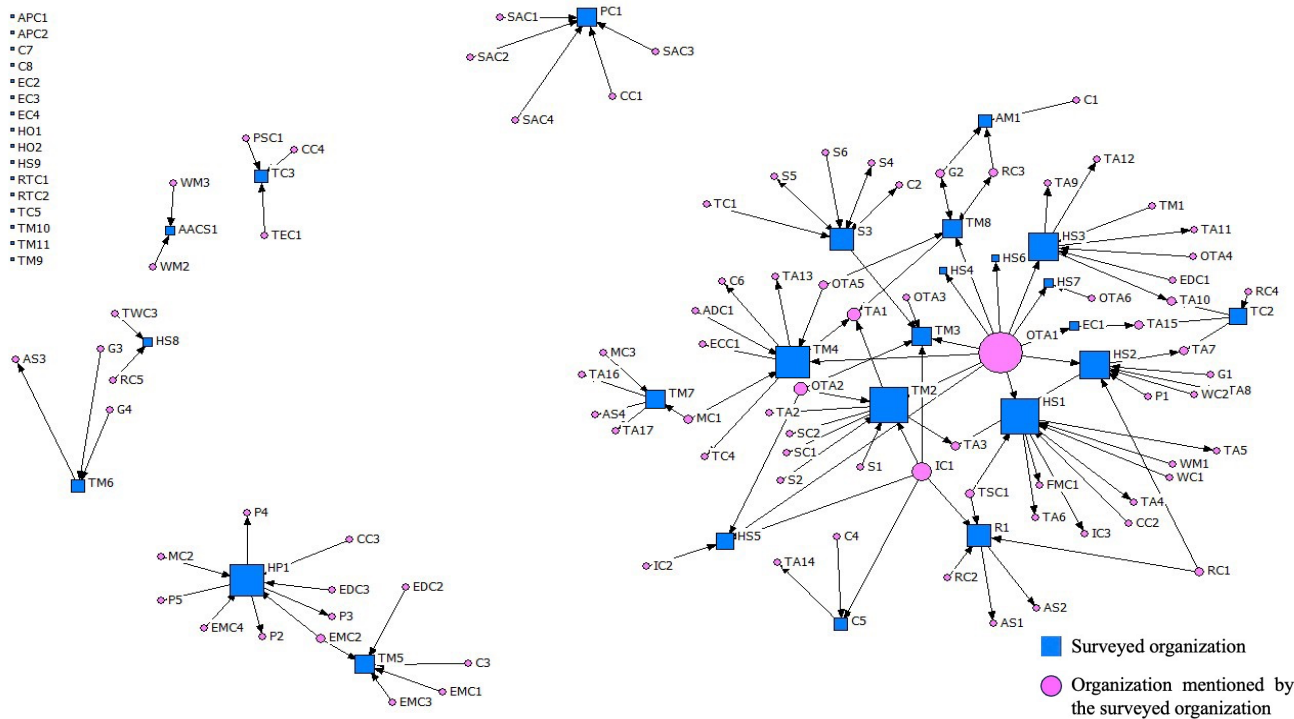
The advice network





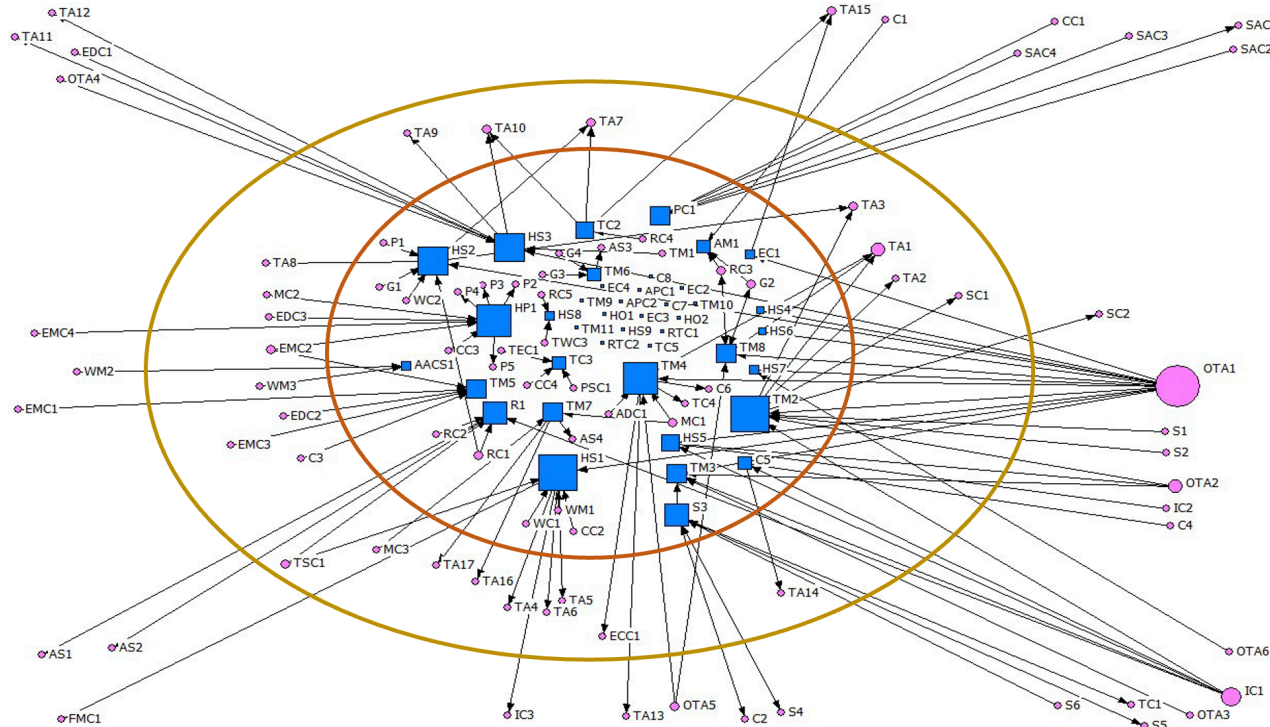
Value chain network

- APC1
- APC2
- C7
- C8
- EC2
- EC3
- EC4
- HO1
- HO2
- HS9
- RTC1
- RTC2
- TC5
- TM10
- TM11
- TM9





Value chain network



Concluding remarks



- 1) *Local government and institutions play a critical role – in providing advice and knowledge but more importantly in sources of capital or funding – no surprise for mainland China. How about other economies?*
- 2) *High availability of funding but not diverse.*
- 3) *There are other actors: – universities, media companies, and social media platforms, including OTAs, booking, ordering, and payment firms.*
- 4) *They depend on social media postings (not only from influencers) to obtain information and advice, as well as innovative ideas and examples. New trend: it could be generative AI?*



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Acknowledgements



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