

The European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy (EJCMP) | 2022-2023 Retrospective

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Standard Journal Abbreviation (ISO 4):
Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic.
Abbreviation: EJCMP
Electronic ISSN: 2663-5771
ISBN 978-2-8325-5341-1
DOI 10.3389/978-2-8325-5341-1

Dear ENCATC community,

It is with joy that we present this eBook compiling the manuscripts published by EJCMP in 2022 and 2023, the inaugural years of the publishing partnership between ENCATC and Frontiers. This collaboration marks a significant milestone, bringing together a wealth of knowledge and expertise from scholars and practitioners around the globe.

We are grateful to all the authors, editors, and reviewers who have been contributing to EJCMP. Their dedication and hard work have been crucial in shaping the journal into a platform that not only fosters academic excellence but also bridges the gap between theoretical research and practical applications in the field of cultural management and policy.

This collection represents a diverse range of topics, methods and perspectives, reflecting the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of cultural management and policy studies.

As we celebrate this inaugural compilation, we look forward to the continued growth and impact of EJCMP. Our goal remains to provide a vibrant forum for the exchange of ideas, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural policies and practices. We encourage scholars, practitioners, and students to engage with the content of this eBook, and we hope it serves as an inspiration for future research and discussions.

Anna Villarroya
Editor-in-Chief

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 15 May 2022

ACCEPTED 01 December 2022

PUBLISHED 15 December 2022

CITATION

Phong W (2022), Beyond the audience:
Creating effective engagement
strategies for students on the spectrum
in the theatre classroom.
Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 12:11086.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11086

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Beyond the audience: Creating effective engagement strategies for students on the spectrum in the theatre classroom

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Historically, theatre and dance have had challenging relationships with disability to say the least. This challenge stems from ableist perspectives that fail to consider specific needs and experiences of persons with disabilities. At all levels, from youth education to training and professional performance, opportunities are limited. Often, performing arts engagement is limited to audience seats for individuals with disabilities, more frequently this focus is on relaxed performances geared toward those identified as autistic. As the prevalence of autism diagnoses have increased, theatre and dance course engagement, specifically youth engagement, which is shown to have life-long positive impacts and predict regular and continued arts engagement, must be determined. Through an observational study, emphasizing autism research and theatre and dance classroom practices, student engagement was measured against curriculum and course planning. Through this strengthened understanding of engagement, theatre and dance curriculum can be planned to engage students on the spectrum. In building an equitable foundation for engagement, autistic students will be better equipped and prepared to move beyond audience seats.

KEYWORDS

theatre, dance, education, autism, engagement

Introduction

A 2016 autism prevalence report by the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention concluded that autism prevalence in the United States has more than doubled from the network's first estimate in 2000 of one in 150 to one in 54 (Maenner, 2020: 2). Autism-Europe notes the prevalence between one and one and a half percent across 38 European countries (Barthélémy, 2019: 3–8). Autism-Europe and United States counterparts argue this prevalence of diagnoses must be met with increasing awareness and expansion of programs and services to support autistic individuals and their families (2019; Autism Society, 2020). This spotlight extends to many nations that have begun to address how they might be more inclusive for populations diagnosed with autism.

Over the past decade and a half, theatre makers have primarily focused on audience as the access point for students on the spectrum to engage with arts. My own experience in schools and theatres, creating autism-friendly performances—namely those with deliberate adjustments for sensory sensitivities—has led me to consider how we, as theatre practitioners, might be more effective at engagement beyond audience seats.

In my professional practice, I regularly encounter a youth-centred approach employed by community engagement leaders from arts, education, and government agencies. As early engagement predicts life-long participation and has been proven as an effective tool for educational outcomes, it is then paramount to consider whether special populations are being engaged in arts practice. Research supports a youth-centred approach; First conducted in 1982 and then on a quinquennial basis, the [National Endowment for the Arts \(2019\)](#) conducts a Survey for Public Participation in the Arts which consistently shows that supporting arts engagement in childhood directly informs participation as an adult (2019). Also in 1982, [Paul DiMaggio \(1982\)](#) published a positive correlation between arts engagement and grades, in so much as suggesting that “the impact of cultural capital will be greater on the grades of less advantaged youth, for whom the acquisition and display of prestigious cultural resources may be a vital part of upward mobility” (195). In a more recent 2019 report, [Bowen and Kisida \(2019\)](#), confirm through empirical analysis that arts are shown to positively impact student’s learning and reducing arts activities by embracing subject-only assessment-focused measures “pose significant costs” (17). For communities looking to benefit autistic youth through educational and social opportunities, arts pose a significant opportunity for individual and academic growth. However, for these benefits to take place it must be clear that students on the spectrum are being engaged.

Through an emerging partnership between the Burkhart Center for Autism Education and Research (Burkhart Center), the School of Theatre and Dance (SoT&D) at Texas Tech University (Texas Tech) theatre and dance courses were offered to the community. The partnership is supported by and managed through two SoT&D community arts courses, which take on the challenge of developing theatre and dance courses in consideration of underserved populations. In these courses, graduate students in theatre lead undergraduate mentees in theatre or dance. Activities are planned as either theatre or dance based on the undergraduate mentees. Faculty in theatre and dance oversee both courses and provide expert guidance in community arts practice.

Following an initial pilot study and in response to needs and adjustments to the pilot protocols, I developed the observational study in this article with consultation from Dr. Wesley Dotson, then Director of the Burkhart Center. In this case, we decided that the evaluation of theatre and dance curricula could be more effectively pursued by including additional effective engagement

strategies and measures suited for students on the spectrum. Curriculum design in this case refers to the planned sequence of instruction for theatre and dance classes held at the Burkhart Center. Students in Burkhart Center theatre courses were divided into youth (5–10 years old) and teen (13–18 years old). The measurement rubric also allows for autonomous disciplinary course planning within a curriculum evaluation method designed to measure student engagement.

We considered that a positive outcome of student engagement is possibly connected to patterns in activity selection, sequencing, and frequency. Specifically, the way the course curriculum is designed might provide valuable insights when plotted against learning objectives, student participation level, and behaviour measures. [Figure 1](#) details the relationship between variables observed and recorded in this study with further explanation in the following section.

In this article, I advance preliminary answers to a number of questions regarding the development of effective engagement measures and strategies for students on the spectrum in theatre and dance classrooms. These questions include the following:

- (1) Can borrowing measures of specific praise, disruptive behaviour, engagement, and activity completion from autism studies provide effective evaluation for theatre and dance curricula? What further insights can autism measures provide for activity selection, frequency, and sequencing?
- (2) How does increasingly complex engagement (individual, individual in group, and group) affect total engagement for students on the spectrum? Is student engagement affected when instructors require group cooperation to complete an activity?
- (3) Are learning objectives of behaviour (physical expression and/or interaction), communication (use of oral/verbal cues and interaction), and/or social interaction (interaction with others, including the instructor) able to predict levels of engagement? Does the sequencing or pairing of these objectives affect engagement?
- (4) Does age group affect the outcome for students?

By seeking answers to these questions, I might support others working in community engagement from arts, education, and government agencies seeking youth-centred approaches to theatre and dance education for autistic students.

Background

A pilot study provided preliminary assessment of evaluation methods used in autism research that were new to processes in theatre and dance classrooms. The pilot study that occurred in the spring of 2016 focused on theatre curriculum rather than intervention and used time-interval assessment. [Figure 2](#) provides detail on the pilot study measurement sheet, while [Figure 3](#) contains

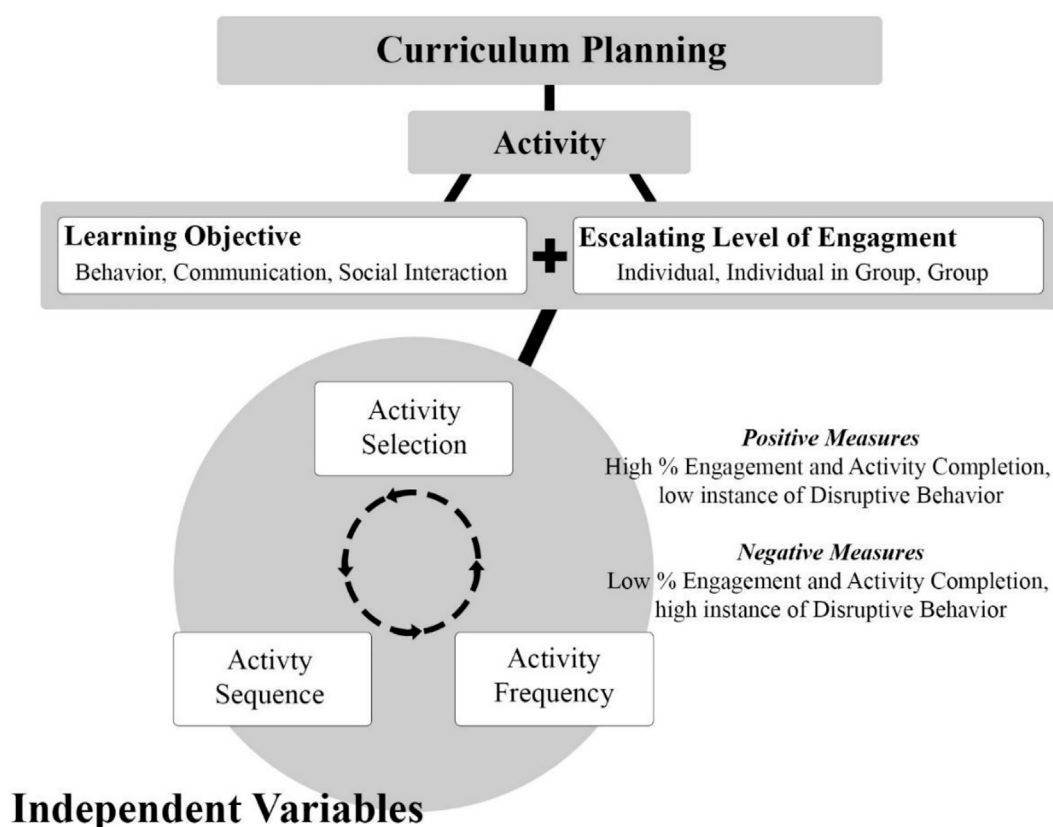


FIGURE 1

Independent variable relationship—curriculum planning relates to learning objectives and increasingly complex engagement for activity selection, sequencing, and frequency with outcomes for positive and negative dependent variable measures. Source: Figure by author.

the measurements undertaken in the longer observational study. Following these figures, I discuss selection of measurement criteria and the reasoning behind selection of variables.

The focus in this study was on theatre and dance instruction and not intervention. Intervention is defined as a one-on-one therapeutic method used to reduce and/or manage the physical and psychological symptoms of autism. An intervention might include special training to improve attention span or help manage anxiety in stressful social environments. Nevertheless, curriculum design in this case still requires a basic understanding of autism diagnosis. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) publishes a manual to identify and define conditions and disorders, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-Fifth Edition (DSM-5), specifically outlines “persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts” as one of the possible diagnosis criteria used by clinical psychologists and trained physicians (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Autism symptoms can manifest in a spectrum of severity, some unnoticeable and relatively mild (such as a sensitivity to particular smells) to more extreme and severe (such as self-flagellation triggered by a strong smell).

Symptom domains, provide engagement insight and support evaluation criteria for curriculum design in theatre and dance: 1) social interaction impairments: “poor eye-contact, poor non-verbal communication, lack of mutual attention behaviours, poor awareness of others’ emotions, and poor peer relationships,” here non-verbal refers to non-speaking; 2) communication and play impairments: “poorly developed language, lack of conversational skill, language that is stereotyped, and play that is similarly stereotyped or lacks the quality of make-believe”; 3) repetitive and restrictive behaviours: “narrow interests, inflexible adherence to routines or rituals, repetitive motor movements, or preoccupations with parts of objects” (Fein, 1996: 23–35). Using these symptom domains from autism research, learning objectives of behaviour, communication, and social interaction were developed. In theatre and dance, behaviour is readily identified in activities, such as students performing a dance move or technique or students miming an action, like walking on a tight rope. As for communication, theatre is often more readily identified through speech. However, spoken and unspoken communication is essential in theatre activities and is readily understood in dance as a form or through a style. Social

Study: _____
 Participant Initials: _____ Scorer Initials: _____ Date: _____
 OT: Off-Task CB: Challenging Behavior PR: Proximity EN: Engagement

Circle the letter if the behavior occurred AT ALL during the interval.

Time:	Problem Behavior				Time:	Problem Behavior			
00:15	OT	CB	PR	EN	00:15	OT	CB	PR	EN
00:30	OT	CB	PR	EN	00:30	OT	CB	PR	EN
00:45	OT	CB	PR	EN	00:45	OT	CB	PR	EN
01:00	OT	CB	PR	EN	11:00	OT	CB	PR	EN
00:15	OT	CB	PR	EN	00:15	OT	CB	PR	EN
00:30	OT	CB	PR	EN	00:30	OT	CB	PR	EN
00:45	OT	CB	PR	EN	00:45	OT	CB	PR	EN
02:00	OT	CB	PR	EN	12:00	OT	CB	PR	EN
00:15	OT	CB	PR	EN	00:15	OT	CB	PR	EN
00:30	OT	CB	PR	EN	00:30	OT	CB	PR	EN
00:45	OT	CB	PR	EN	00:45	OT	CB	PR	EN
03:00	OT	CB	PR	EN	13:00	OT	CB	PR	EN
00:15	OT	CB	PR	EN	00:15	OT	CB	PR	EN

FIGURE 2

Session engagement interval scoring data sheet utilized by the Burkhart Center for autism education and research and for the theatre and dance pilot study. Source: Figure by author based on pilot study observation sheet.

interaction is readily understood in both disciplines, theatre through production work and dance through group or partner choreography.

Beyond these learning objectives, scaling activity engagement also follows a pattern often taken in acting or dance classes, wherein students learn individual skills to develop better arts practice like monologues or technique independent of other participants, individual; students then progress to activities that may include others, like setting a stage environment or learning choreography with others, individuals in a group, and finally a production or recital (or what we termed group), a mix of social interactions or choreography that must be completed together for a performance to be complete. This describes increasingly complex engagement, which was also examined in relation to engagement in this study.

This study also utilized a method of time-interval assessment. In “Behavior, Social, and Emotional Assessment of Children and Adolescents,” Whitcomb and Merrell (2013) describe “essential characteristics of interval recording,” which involves: “1) selecting a time period for the length of the observation; 2) dividing the observational period into a number of equal intervals; and 3) recording whether the specified target behaviors occur during each interval” (2013: 103). They identify interval evaluation as a means to observe behaviour as the key tool for accurate assessment for individuals with autism; “it holds a prominent position as being one of the most empirically sound of these assessment techniques” (2013: 95). For accurate behavioural observation using intervals, Rebecca Sharp, Oliver Mudford, and Douglas Elliffe also

advise recording a high volume of all interactions for proper sampling, no less than 10-min intervals observing at least 30% of total activity engagement to gain accurate representation data (2015: 153–159). In an initial study, “A Measure of Representativeness of a Sample for Inferential Purposes,” by Salvatore Bertino (2020) and supported in a later Sharp et al. (2015) study, they determined that observed behaviour and assumptions made about subsequent behaviour should rely on observational methods that “produce data that closely reflect the overall (i.e., true) occurrence of an individual’s behavior” (2006: 150; 2015: 153). Whitcomb and Merrell (2013) argue that, as long as observation includes “formal behavioral recording in naturalistic settings, or whether it is done informally as part of other measurement strategies” and “naturalistic observation,” then “behavioral observation” is the ideal “most direct and objective assessment” (2013: 95–97). They also further stipulate that to account for accuracy, researchers should “limit behaviors captured” that directly “relate to the overall time a specific behavior may take to accomplish,” a refinement also discovered in the pilot study when taking into count theatre and dance classroom engagement behaviours (2013: 103).

Engagement and activity completion are the primary behaviours tracked in interval observations. Logan et al. (1997) propose that engaged behaviour is “a [comprehensive] proxy for direct measures of learning” and accurately observe engagement “over multiple activities, instructional arrangements, and teach behaviors” (1997: 482). Corsello (2005) and Kishida and Kemp (2006) identify students on the spectrum as less engaged overall, exhibiting passive participation (2005: 82; 2006: 106–111). Mark Wolery,

Theatre/Dance Engagement Data

DATE: _____ # KIDS PRESENT: _____

SP: Specific Praise

DB: Disruptive Behavior

For Specific Praise Statements & Disruptive Behavior, indicate the number of times the behavior occurred during each interval in the box as indicated below:

0 = ☐ 1-5 = ☒ 6+ = ☒

For Engagement (E), indicate what percentage of children during the interval actively participated in the class tasks, games, or interactions as estimated on the scale below:

0% 50% ☒ 100%

For Percentage of Activity Completed (AC), indicate what percentage of students completed activity fully or participated to the end of the assigned activity as estimated on the scale below (only score if an activity ended during the interval, if no activity ended during the interval, circle NA):

0% 50% ☒ 100%

Time:	Behavior:	Activity/Staff:	Notes:
x:00- x:05	SP DB E: 0% 50% 100% AC: 0% 50% 100% -NA		
x:06- x:10	SP DB E: 0% 50% 100% AC: 0% 50% 100% -NA		
x:11- x:15	SP DB E: 0% 50% 100% AC: 0% 50% 100% -NA		
x:16- x:20	SP DB		

FIGURE 3

Theatre/dance engagement data sheet used for the observational study for theatre and dance courses taught at the Burkhart Center, administered by SoT&D graduate and undergraduate students in community engagement courses. Source: Figure by author.

Donald B. Bailey and R. A. McWilliam identify positive measures of attentional engagement, behaviourally appropriate and on-task, as a “mediating influence on engagement,” to which McWilliam and Bailey (1995) consider active engagement an excellent measure of learning for students on the spectrum (Bailey and Wolery, 1992: 240–241; McWilliam and Bailey, 1995, 1995: 123–125). Deb Keen indicates that low levels of engagement further limit the practice of social skills, and that time-interval observations of engagement can assess activity schedules, autonomy, and instructional strategies in a way that can help mitigate issues of measuring engagement (2009: 3–5). Watanabe and Sturmey (2003) performed a study on

engagement that discovered higher participation levels for students who were given autonomy to decide whether to engage and complete an activity (2003). Students have complete autonomy in the theatre and dance classroom at the Burkhart Center, which indicates active participation over timed intervals as a good measure for engagement.

Additional concepts included in my observational study that were borrowed from autism studies include those of disruptive behaviour and specific praise. Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions World define common disruptive behaviours as those tactics that are likely to disrupt a class (2019). Disruptive

behaviours include physical distractions, voiced distractions, and social distractions (PBIS World, 2019a). In the PBS LearningMedia (2019) video series focused on “Managing and De-escalating Challenging Student Behaviors,” off-task disruptive behaviour is readily addressed by educators through refocusing and re-engaging the student in the activity (PBIS World, 2019b). This practice of re-engaging was also seen as effective in the pilot study, which reinforced behavioural measures for disruptive behaviours and introduced specific praise as a meaningful data point to collect.

The project

From spring 2017 to spring 2019, the observational study to assess student engagement and curriculum design took place at the Burkhardt Center where theatre and dance courses are held. Graduate students and undergraduate mentees taught weekly courses observed by a trained observer and/or me.

Research design

We designed the observational study to measure engagement to discover effective curriculum strategies for students on the spectrum in theatre and dance courses. The study was meant to be unobtrusive; we recorded data behind a two-way mirror in two observation spaces and off to the side in the third space with no interaction with participants. Data collected and collection processes allowed for participants to remain anonymous, which was important considering the vulnerability of the target population of students on the spectrum.

To evaluate the effectiveness of theatre and dance curricula, the observational study included independent variables of activity selection, frequency, and sequencing with dependent variables of activity completion, engagement, disruptive behavior, and specific praise, with independent variable relationships identified in Figure 1. These variables allow for discovering relationships between student engagement and theatre and dance activities through percentage of students engaged and percentage of activity completed with activity details and notes recorded over 5-min intervals. Figure 3 provides a sample of the data collection sheet used in this study. Following collection of data, activities were coded into increasingly complex engagement and learning objectives to uncover effective strategies in curriculum planning. By measuring engagement through observation methods proven effective for individuals with autism, I can better evaluate theatre and dance curricula and potentially plan more effective engagement strategies for students on the spectrum.

For this study, we collected data each semester, from spring 2017 to spring 2019, for nine Burkhardt Center courses. We required a minimum of 80% of days observed, with 100% of intervals observed

on those days. Only two courses went unobserved because I was unable to assign a trained observer to cover the entire length of the course. Each course ran for 7 weeks in spring semesters or 8 weeks in fall semesters, six occurring twice a week (one fall, five spring) with 12 5-min intervals and three occurring once a week (one fall, two spring) with 18 5-min intervals, providing a total possible 1,428 intervals for measurement. The volume of intervals create higher reliability for behavior measures and improve reliability in coded levels of engagement and learning objectives. The volume and consistency of measures helps to ensure validity of the observational study.

Participants and setting

The Burkhardt Center Administrative Business Assistant sent email advertising available dance and theatre courses to the guardians of potential participants. All participants had previously attended events or received services from the Burkhardt Center. The youth courses were for elementary-age students, ranging from ages 5 to 10. The Burkhardt Center advertised teen courses and allowed participation for ages 13 to 18.

Courses were offered in the afternoon twice a week for 1 h, or on Saturday for 90 min. Afternoon classes that met Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday started at either 3:00 p.m. or 4:00 p.m. and were held in one of the three classrooms at the Burkhardt Center. Saturday courses were for teens only and began at 10:00 a.m. The Burkhardt Center limited enrollment at ten for any given course. SoT&D graduate and undergraduate to Burkhardt Center student ratio was typically around one to two for classes with low enrollment, and one to three for fully enrolled courses.

Classes were held in three different spaces at the Burkhardt Center. The first was Burkhardt Center's clinical space, a large open room with restrooms and a kitchen at one end, a mirrored wall at the other, and several windows looking to the exterior. The clinical space is roughly 1,000 sqft in size with the mirrored wall concealing an observation room. With approximately 400 sqft of open floor space, the second classroom is a modular space with tables and chairs removed from the room for activities on the other side of the mirrored observation room. The third room is the gymnasium at the Burkhardt Center, with roughly the same usable floor space as the clinical space, though it has a footprint closer to 800 sqft. The gymnasium has no hidden room, so the observer or I sat off to the side on a chair when recording class data.

Measures

Using data collection sheets (Figure 1), observers measure engagement, activity completion, behavioural measures, and space for notation of class (youth or teen), date, time, activities, class size, number of instructors, and length of class.

Engagement, the primary dependent variable across the 5-min interval, measured active participation in theatre and dance

activities. The percentage of engagement measured the overall percentage of students engaged in an activity. Active participation required students to follow the rules and expectations delineated by the instructor(s). For instance, an activity may have required students to move with sound in an environment (e.g., act by moving and making sounds like pig on a farm: student was on all fours, pretended to wallow in mud, and squealed/snorted like a pig). If one of five students sat quietly, even in the given play space, we recorded the total percentage engaged as four in five or 80%.

Activity completion, the secondary dependent variable measure for participation, was only recorded during intervals when an activity concluded. Observers selected a percentage of activity completion based on the ratio of students who finished an activity to the total number of students. Observers recorded participants engaged for appropriate intervals and only recorded activity completion when students accomplished all activity tasks given by the instructor.

Behavioural measures for disruptive behaviour and specific praise are dependent variables compared against engagement. Disruptive behaviour included any off-task actions that inhibited activity completion by one or more members of the group including themselves, other students, instructors, or mentees. Specific praise measured the number of instances when an instructor or mentee responded positively to student actions.

The data collection also noted activity selection. While not a behaviour measure, attention to this activity allowed for the evaluation of engagement, and important measure given increasingly complex engagement and learning objectives based on independent variables of activity selection, sequencing, and frequency.

Procedures

All observers were required to fulfill Human Subject Training requirements for Texas Tech, to have had experience in theatre and dance and to have previously worked with students on the spectrum. Training included the use of data sheets (Theatre/Dance Engagement Data Sheet and Theatre/Dance Engagement Digital Data Sheet). Each measurement rubric was explained in detail, with examples provided, and with an opportunity for questions following. Observers viewed class sessions and completed course data observation intervals, with support from Dr. Dotson and me during at least their two initial observations, this allowed for real-time training of observation protocols.

The assigned observer recorded the date in MM/DD/YYYY format, as well as the number of students in attendance, with tardy arrivals noted in the interval in which they occurred. They then noted the start time in the first interval. They recorded the number of instructors.

Over each interval, the observer noted behavior and activity details. For instances of specific praise or disruptive behavior, observers tracked across intervals and then selected no praise/

disruptive behavior, one to five instances, or six or more instances. The observer completed the "Activity/Staff" section to include the activity being performed, the identity of the instructor lead, and the rules and procedures for the new activity. Observers did not record student names but noted if an activity was student led.

At the end of the interval, the observer marked the estimated participation percentage and activity completion percentage for students. Percentage selection is directly related to the number of students engaged in an activity and a separate measure for activity completion, both compared to total number of students. If no activity was concluded by the end of the interval, no percentage was recorded. If two activities occurred in the same interval, the observer noted activity completion for all activities finished in the interval. The interval observations repeated until the end of the class session.

Following observations, I coded activities into level of increasingly complex engagement and learning objectives. The coding of increasingly complex engagement uses three levels of participation: individual, individual in a group, and group. Activities were only assigned one level of engagement, based on requirements to engage and complete an activity. Activities were also coded for learning objectives of behavior (physical expression and/or interaction), communication (use of oral/verbal cues and interaction), and/or social interaction (interaction with others, including the instructor). Up to two learning objectives were coded for each activity; based on instruction and desired output, a primary learning objective was identified.

Results

Curriculum design was distinctive for each course even though all courses shared a similar disciplinary origin. Only one notable difference arose from the fact that a written guide was completed in December of 2017, and so was only available to instructors in subsequent semesters. The total available classes to observe was 108 (1.334 intervals).¹ In the study, we observed 89 class sessions and 1.080 intervals for a total of 90 h of instruction, with details provided for comparison in Table 1. I evaluated the success of curriculum for each class by using measures of engagement, activity completion, disruptive behaviour, and

1 Over the course of the study, we discovered that classes often began late or ended early, reducing observational intervals by at least one for each class session, resulting in an average of 11 instead of 12 intervals for youth classes and an average of 17 instead of 18 intervals for teen courses. An average of 53% of the classes had fewer than anticipated intervals to observe, with none exceeding, reducing intervals from 1.428 to 1.334. To meet the 80% minimum observations required, we needed to observe a total of 86 classes (1.067 intervals). Spring term presented low attendance or class cancellations during spring break periods, including during Texas Tech and students' spring breaks on different weeks. Spring break for students only affected youth courses.

TABLE 1 Observational study classes and intervals observed.

	Classes	Intervals
Total ^a	108	1,334
80% Threshold	86	1,067
Observed	89	1,080
Total Teen ^a	22	375
Total Youth ^a	86	946
80% Threshold Teen ^a	18	300
80% Threshold Youth ^a	69	757
Observed Teen	19	335
Observed Youth	69	806

^aCalculated from actual possible classes and intervals to observe.
Source: Table by author.

specific praise. Once these scores were compiled, I examined activities for patterns of increasingly complex engagement and learning objectives to uncover any significance in activity selection, sequence, and frequency.

My first research question asked if borrowing measures of specific praise, disruptive behaviour, engagement, and activity completion from autism study could provide effective evaluation for theatre and dance curricula, and what further insights might autism measures provide for activity selection, frequency, and sequencing. Each observed course followed a specific pattern, but no two courses followed identical patterns, which resulted in different participation outcomes for each class and variation across study measures.

The engagement measure was taken across all intervals and measured the active engagement of students. Table 2 reveals average engagement and Table 3 activity completion. Figure 4 provides these measures together across all classes. The average percentage of engagement across all intervals in the study was 91%, with the average for each individual semester falling within two percentage points of the overall engagement average. This percentage was significantly higher than that recorded for the pilot study (68%) but is justified by consistent results across all classes. This suggests that the new measurement protocols were more effective at measuring engagement for theatre and dance courses and proves consistency in the engagement measure.

Activity completion, the other participation dependent variable, served as a secondary engagement measure. We observed activity completion in 55% of the 1,080 intervals, or 597. Of these intervals, students completed activities 89% of the time. Comparing the two participation measures against each other shows an expected positive relationship between engagement and activity completion. The two lowest rated were the lowest rated in activity completion. This trend was also true for highest participation percentages.

We recorded disruptive behaviour in 7% of intervals and specific praise in 16%. The concurrence of both was only, 65%

TABLE 2 Student engagement percentage.

	Average (%) engaged
Spring 2017	91
Youth Dance	99
Youth Theatre	82
Fall 2017	89
Teen	87
Youth	90
Spring 2018	92
Teen	100
Youth Theatre/Dance Hybrid	86
Spring 2019	91
Teen	95
Monday and Wednesday Youth	98
Tuesday and Thursday Youth	81
All Courses	91

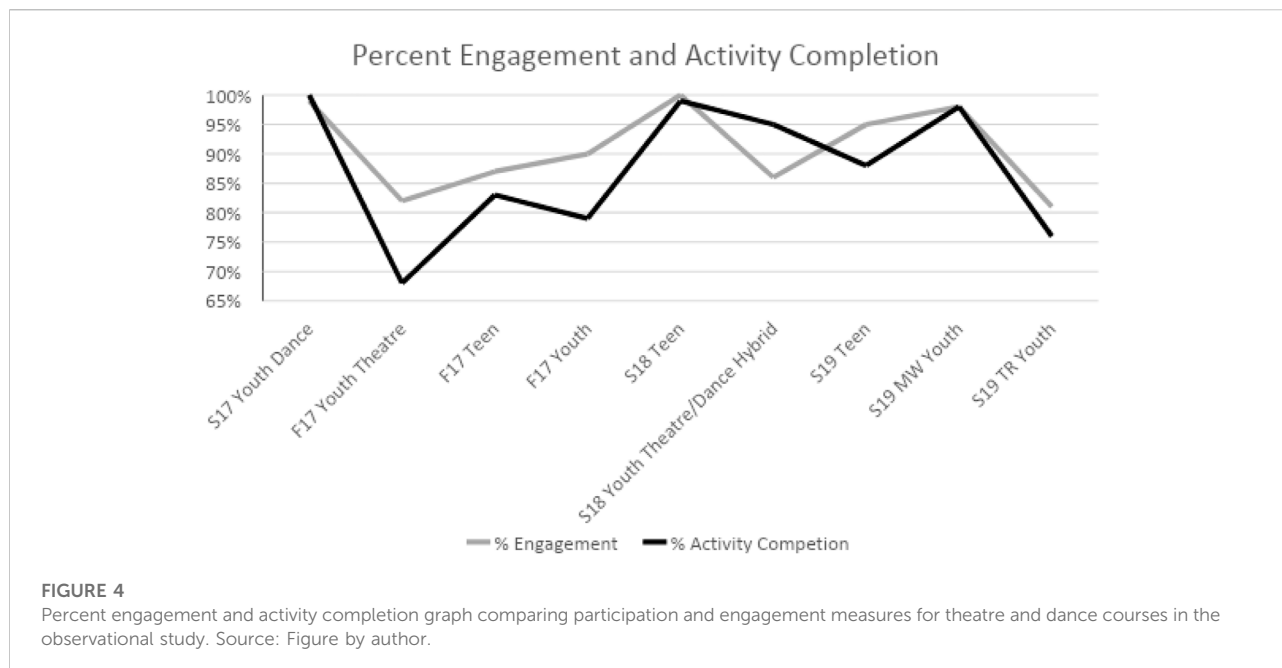
Source: Table by author.

TABLE 3 Activity completion percentage.

	Average (%) activity completed
Spring 2017	88
Youth Dance	100
Youth Theatre	68
Fall 2017	81
Teen	83
Youth	79
Spring 2018	97
Teen	99
Youth Theatre/Dance Hybrid	95
Spring 2019	90
Teen	88
Monday and Wednesday Youth	98
Tuesday and Thursday Youth	76
All Courses	89

Source: Table by author.

for all intervals, with a 3% chance of overlap. Despite limited intervals containing both, observers noted improved engagement and activity completion rates, with instances of disruptive behaviour limited or eliminated in intervals following. Observers noted the continuation of disruptive behaviour in subsequent intervals when no instructor gave specific praise. This suggests that specific praise can mitigate disruptive behaviour, but as the concurrence was limited it is impossible to definitively say that specific praise will always mitigate disruptive behaviour. However, we observed specific praise more often in classes with higher engagement and activity



completion percentages. When measured against each other, specific praise mitigated disruptive behaviour nearly 100% of the time.

The courses that proved the most successful in engaging students demonstrated consistent activity selection across class sessions and the course. Activity selection included a course-specific and consistent mix of increasingly complex engagement and learning objectives. Classes that performed average for engagement and activity completion also showed consistent selection, but more often relied heavily on a single level of engagement or learning objective and included a significant portion of variable activity selection. The courses with the lowest engagement levels relied predominantly on a single activity type, ones with the same level of engagement and learning objective or a variation with no discernible pattern. The result of unbalanced selection revealed reliably lower engagement across courses without consistent curriculum planning.

Courses with the highest engagement and activity completion levels reliably selected the same activity or the same activity type, frequency, with the same level of engagement and learning objective, from class to class and across the course. Courses performing average and below average for participation measures had too much variation, regular change in activity more frequently than the average 8 min, and/or too little variation in activity or activity type, with change occurring after around 20 min.

Activity sequencing per class session and across courses revealed engagement patterns again. As noted in the course breakdown, the most successful courses showed a pattern in class sessions of consistent or alternating learning objectives. Engagement and activity completion levels were greater when

behaviour-centred activities opened class sessions. Inconsistent sequencing or broadly varied activity selection over the course and class sessions precipitated lower engagement levels. However, when a student-selected activity preceded, student engagement and activity completion remained high over the class.

Courses designed with consistent curriculum had better percentages of engagement and activity completion. These measures proved effective for evaluating theatre and dance curricula design as patterns emerged that were consistent for courses with higher, average, and lower levels of participation and directly correlated to consistent planning.

The next question addressed by the observational study was how increasingly complex engagement (individual, individual in group, and group) affected total engagement for students on the spectrum, and whether student engagement was affected when instructors required group cooperation in the completion of an activity.

I found student engagement and activity completion percentages to be higher for group activities. Given the interval instances for individual level of engagement and participation, 23% of individual activities recorded lower, below 100%, of engagement and/or activity completion. Similarly, individual in group scored 22% lower across intervals, but group activities were only 13% lower. Student engagement appears to be positively affected by group cooperation for theatre and dance activities. Disruptive behaviour occurred more often in individual or individual in group activities. Again, no positive correlation was found in changing level, but rather by instructors offering specific praise. The length of the course and the age group revealed no notable differences in engagement when considering increasingly complex engagement.

The third research question I addressed using data collected was whether learning objectives of behaviour (physical expression and/or interaction), communication (use of oral/spoken cues and interaction), and/or social (interaction with others, including the instructor) are able to predict levels of engagement, and whether the sequencing or pairing of these objectives affect engagement. I coded activities into learning objectives: 50% into communication, 45% in behaviour and nearly 5% in social interaction. Learning objectives alone are not likely to predict participation percentages. Reviewing activity selection, I noticed activities were most often coded with the following levels of engagement and learning objectives: individual/behaviour, individual/communication, individual in group/communication, group/behaviour, and group/communication. Among classes recording lower levels of engagement (23% of observed intervals), individual/behaviour and individual in group/communication made up the overwhelming majority, 60%. Overall, for popular combinations, communication comprised nearly 50% and behaviour 45%. These combinations are common and can be found in well performing courses, which suggests that these types of activities should not be avoided but instead considered within a well-planned curriculum. Within some of these intervals, observers recorded disruptive behaviour; 79% occurred in individual/behaviour (35%) or individual in group/communication (44%) activities. This suggests that instructors could offer more specific praise when incorporating individual/behaviour or individual in group/communication into curriculum planning.

I was unable to distinguish significant differences for my final research question regarding whether age group affected the outcome for students. Teens and youth had similar instances of disruptive behaviour and specific praise, and when considering activity selection, sequencing and frequency patterns against participation rates, there appears to be no variation in results for increasingly complex engagement or learning objectives with respect to student ages.

Conclusion

We undertook this observational study to further develop strategies to support engagement for students on the spectrum in theatre and dance classes. To assess theatre and dance curricula, we borrowed measures found in autism studies to measure engagement, identify learning objectives (behaviour, communication, and social interaction), and consider escalating levels of engagement (individual, individual in group, group). The measures selected revealed clear indications for curriculum planning for theatre and dance courses for students on the spectrum. Definitively, the measures selected provided significant and relevant measurements of participation, engagement, and activity

completion. When combined with measures of disruptive behaviour and specific praise, participation was further interpreted and as noted, positively affected.

These measures alone only provide part of the curriculum planning picture. We were able to reveal the significance in activity selection, frequency, and sequence when examined across all measures. Specifically, curriculum planned with activity selection closely linked to sequence and frequency showed higher levels of participation. Courses with consistent activity selection, consideration for sequence in class sessions, and frequency of activity type demonstrated positively impacted participation, as seen in the highest performing courses. The lowest performing courses offered no consistency across activity selection, limited sequencing uniformity, and exhibited nearly no frequency of activity or activity type, except for student influenced selection. This suggested high impact of autonomy in activity engagement and completion. Average performing courses adhering to more consistent activity planning revealed common learning objectives, and with variation in level of increasingly complex engagement improved engagement or activity completion for students on the spectrum.

Observations also revealed common combinations occurring in activity learning objectives and increasingly complex engagement. Disruptive behaviour was predominantly (95%) found to occur during two of these combinations: individual/behaviour and individual in group/communication. Planning is not likely to eliminate disruptive behaviour, but instructors can be aware of activities that require increased specific praise. By uncovering patterns like these, curriculum preparation can better support activity planning in theatre and dance courses for students on the spectrum.

Using these measures, our observational study was able to reveal strategies to improve engagement for students on the spectrum in theatre and dance courses. Curriculum planning that uses consistent activity selection, sequencing, and frequency leads to better engagement, an assertion confirmed by my analysis of our observations. The results of this study additionally suggest that curriculum planning can be improved by considering learning objectives and increasingly complex engagement as they relate to activity selection, sequencing, and frequency.

Recommendations

If we were to undertake this study again, I would retain all measure features and activity coding. They provided clear, effective, and consistent results for student participation, engagement and activity completion while being readily recorded by observers. Observation of the courses offered strategies to improve engagement in theatre and dance classrooms with students on the spectrum. The most effective strategy revealed was consistency of curriculum selection. Since the

instructors freely designed curriculum for these courses, future observational studies might select features to be individually isolated, in order to measure success for specific learning objectives and increasingly complex engagement combinations as they relate to activity selection, sequencing and frequency.

Based on my experience, autism research, and our observational study, my recommendations for curriculum planning theatre and dance courses with students on the spectrum are as follows:

- Instructors should identify a clear vision and focus for the course; Instructors should identify goals and learning objectives to inform activity selection, sequencing, and frequency. Consistency proved a key element in the most successful courses in this study.
- Age appropriateness is also an important feature when planning. Though students on the spectrum may have communication barriers, their IQ is not limited by autism. If instructors are insensitive to a student's abilities or needs, they may create an environment where the student is less likely to trust the instructor. While we did not see variations in our age group measure, in considering our population without prejudice or bias, we are better able to get a clear picture on positive engagement.
- Specific praise should be incorporated regularly into classes and planned when an activity is especially challenging to students. This was shown to have a positive impact on courses with high participation and helped to mitigate issues in classes that had average and below average participation.
- If there is room for student selected activities or a selection between activities, students are anticipated to be more engaged. Autonomy is important and should be incorporated as possible into activity selection. Autonomy of activity selection was shown to be the greatest predictor of continue and sustained engagement, even in the courses with the lowest engagement.

This study was able to reveal positive correlations between measures and coded activities, which can provide a crucial first step in curriculum planning with students on the spectrum in mind. The lack of similar research makes this study crucial to exploring theatre and dance curricula design to improve engagement for students on the spectrum. The courses in this study only provided a short opportunity, with few weekly sessions, to review part-time curriculum. Ideally, a future study would include a full-length course, one fitting into school curriculum.

The study might also be adapted to review college and university age courses for theatre and dance or examine ways to explore autonomy in activities planned in other subject areas. I will continue to apply this unique approach as I explore ways to

further engage students and artists on the spectrum. Though this process is an uncommon way to plan theatre and dance curricula, I suspect continued unsiloing of disciplinary practices can provide a basis for more robust examinations of theatre and dance processes, so that they can become more equitable to persons with disabilities.

This research project and similar have potential to impact policy and practice. As organizations seek to engage special populations and underserved communities, like those on the spectrum, programs can better organise. Additionally, through university programs, future practitioners are better able to address and plan for work as teaching artists or those seeking to engage various members of their community in practice. Artists and arts leaders will be able to better consider the target population, their needs and experiences, and measuring their engagement, based in relevant disciplinary measures. Community leaders, government organizations, and arts agencies are likely to set better institutional and education policies when special populations engagement is better understood. In doing this work and building capacity for access, we are better prepared to welcome diversity, build inclusive environments, and provide more equitable engagement.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

Acknowledgments

This study and results were made possible by support from Dr. Andrew Gibb, Dr. Wesley Dotson, Professor Rachel Hirshorn-Johnston, Dr. Paul N. Reinsch, and Dr. Virginia E. Whealton. Further acknowledgment to The Burkhart Center for Autism Education and Research for its commitment to the arts and Texas Tech University's Theatre and Dance in the Community for its inclusive programming.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 21 April 2022

ACCEPTED 01 December 2022

PUBLISHED 16 December 2022

CITATION

Sedova A (2022), Impact analysis on adaptive reuse of obsolete ecclesiastical cultural heritage.

Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 12:11083.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11083

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Impact analysis on adaptive reuse of obsolete ecclesiastical cultural heritage

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Today, many churches all around the world are in various states of disrepair, which would be an irreparable loss. This research paper examines the new, mixed or extended adaptive use of underutilised and abandoned ecclesiastical cultural heritage with specific reference to human-centred impact analysis and the creation of added value. Sixty-five (65) international case studies are analysed to explore creative holistic solutions to re-integrating underutilised and disused religious assets back into contemporary urban and rural landscapes. The case study analysis encompasses: ecclesiastical stakeholder valorisation; forms of obsolescence; dimensions of adaptability; interpretation of complex value relationships and human-centred impact analysis. The case study findings indicate that sensitive adaptive reuse of obsolete religious structures to Post Religious Uses has the potential to encourage positive inflows of investment capital with corresponding positive impacts on the economic values attached to new and extended uses in addition to spiritual, cultural, social, environmental and economic values for society. The research proves that churches which are brought back into the contemporary urban fabric of communities has the potential to yield benefits that contribute to sustainable development and contribute to cultural capital.

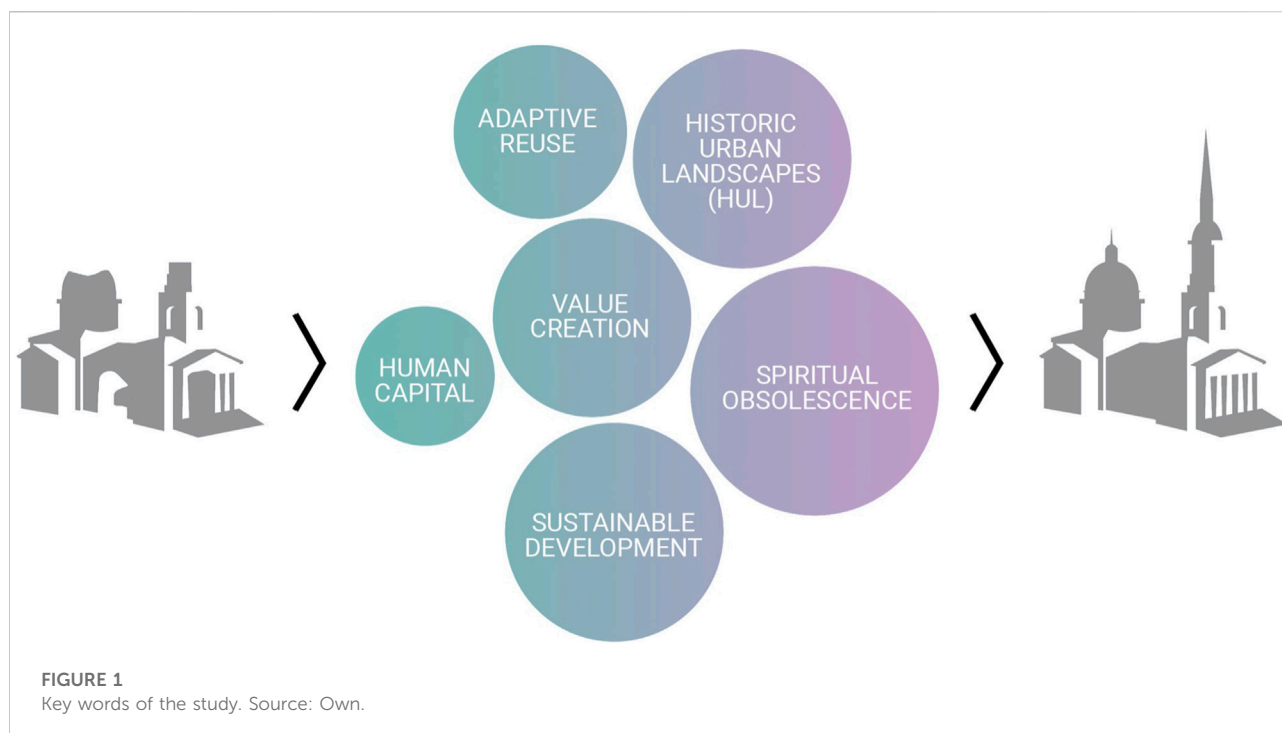
KEYWORDS

adaptive reuse, ecclesiastical cultural heritage, value creation, impact analysis, sustainable development

Introduction

Ecclesiastical heritage forms a distinctive visual keystone to urban and rural landscapes in addition to encompassing complex multi-faceted spiritual, cultural, aesthetic, social, environmental and economic values. Falling numbers of active religious worshipers have resulted in large numbers of heritage assets falling out of their original spiritual use and thus falling prey to negative value judgements by society.

This paper relates to immovable ecclesiastical historic structures and ensembles encompassing both tangible and intangible cultural heritage values, which cannot be replaced once the structures are destroyed—including destruction by neglect. Sixty-five international ecclesiastical case studies are examined to explore creative holistic solutions to re-integrating underutilised and disused religious assets back into contemporary urban and rural landscapes, when adaptive reuse is considered an essential strategy for the



sustainability of cultural heritage, and furthermore for preserving the image of the city (Dogan, 2019). Case study analysis encompasses: ecclesiastical valorisation; forms of obsolescence (pre-adaptation); dimensions of adaptability; impact analysis and interpretation of complex value relationships.

This analysis and dialogue on possible new forms of use for religious heritage is mindful of the necessity to respect and protect diverse cultural beliefs and the collective memories of past, present and future communities—worshippers and non-worshippers alike (Sedova, 2020). In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that creative adaptive reuse solutions for ecclesiastical heritage assets are not always directly transferable between regions and cultures due to differing traditional spiritual beliefs and value systems (Pickerill et al., 2009).

Literature review

Underutilised and abandoned religious heritage assets provide an unprecedented opportunity for local communities to benefit from “human-centred” (EU, 2020) strategic development approaches. According to the European Commission, a “human-centred” city is a city “that is well-assembled, where there is history, character, distinctiveness, diversity and vitality, with high levels of liveability and all the necessary support facilities, from health and education to culture and public spaces. All of these generate a rich civic life” (EU,

2020, p. 16). Thus, “human-centred” impact analysis is the one which is based on the recognition of history, character, distinctiveness, diversity and vitality. The history is the first aspect which is used to describe the “human-centred” city concept. The Leeuwarden Declaration makes specific reference to religious sites’ history (including religious sites located in cities but not limited to) and explores the multiple benefits of finding “new, mixed or extended use” for underutilised and abandoned heritage sites that have lost their traditional function in society (ACE, 2018).

In general terms, “Adaptation” can be defined as any work done to a building, over and above maintenance, to change its spaces, tasks, capacity, function, or performance, in other words, any interventions to adjust, reuse, or upgrade a building to suit new conditions or requirements (Douglas, 2006; Wilkinson et al., 2014). In the context of this research, Foster (2020) provides a definition of cultural heritage adaptive reuse projects as the retrofit, rehabilitation and redevelopment of one or more buildings that reflects the changing needs of communities. Tying in with the circular economy approach, adaptive reuse provides a strategy aimed at preserving cultural, social, economic and environmental values, while at the same time adapting obsolete built heritage for new, extended and shared uses.

This initial theoretical perspective lays the groundwork for the practical case study analysis to highlight potential new, mixed or extended uses of ecclesiastical cultural heritage through adaptive reuse and further clarify possible relationships between the above components within a sustainable circular

economy development strategy (see [Figure 1](#)). The Author argues that the study of such topics as “human capital,” “adaptive reuse,” “value creation,” “sustainable development,” “historic urban landscapes (HUL),” and “spiritual obsolescence” builds a bridge between the obsolete historic religious cultural heritage and the prosperous one. All these topics build up adaptive reuse, which therefore contributes to circular economy.

Holistic management and valorisation of ecclesiastical cultural heritage

With regard to religious cultural heritage, the Second Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) expresses the sentiment that historical places, objects and manifestations of cultural, scientific, symbolic, spiritual and religious value are important expressions of the culture, identity and religious beliefs of societies. Their role and importance, particularly in the light of the need for cultural identity and continuity in a rapidly changing world, need to be promoted ([United Nations, 1996](#)).

The Leeuwarden Declaration states that heritage buildings, including ecclesiastic heritage, that have lost their original function, still embody cultural, historic, spatial and economic values. Through adaptation, obsolete religious heritage can find new, mixed or extended uses. As a result, their social, environmental and economic value is increased, while their cultural significance is enhanced. As such, the Leeuwarden Declaration refers to the beneficial impacts of adaptive reuse based on the four pillars: social, environmental, economic, and cultural; but, more importantly, it stresses the strong spiritual values of religious sites, which have lost the functions for which they were originally built ([ACE, 2018](#)).

Value formation in spiritual context

Based on the information from [Throsby \(2012\)](#), [UNESCO \(2013\)](#), [CHCfE \(2015\)](#), and [Foster \(2020\)](#), this research divides ecclesiastic heritage values into four categories: Cultural, Social, Environmental and Economic:

- Cultural Value incorporates inter-related, multi-dimensional values, where significance may vary depending on the particular ecclesiastical cultural heritage asset and human value judgements placed on it by society.
- Spiritual Value is associated with the sense of identity of local communities and memory of our ancestors. [Mason \(2002, p. 12\)](#) states that spiritual values “encompass a secular experience of wonder, awe, which can be provoked by visiting ecclesiastic heritage places.” [Throsby \(2012\)](#) refers to intercultural understanding inspired by different communities recognising shared spiritual values.
- Emotional Value is associated with feelings of happiness, pride or agony of believers and parishioners. These emotions are rooted in the “Collective Memory” of the community, in the culture of worshiping, and symbolic reminder of important life events such as christenings, weddings and funerals ([Sedova, 2020](#)). Such collective values that people attach to the historic environment are a valid justification for preservation laws ([Wells and Lixinski, 2016](#)).
- Historical and Aesthetic Values exist where a religious building, or ensemble, possesses beauty in itself or in its current and past relationship to the surrounding landscape. Historical values also relate to identity and use of traditional building methods and vernacular structural materials, which have sustained for many centuries and therefore represent connection with and the knowledge of past generations.
- Architectural and Symbolic Values, where the symbolic value of ecclesiastical architecture is often highlighted by distinctive landmark locations together with ornate ecclesiastic interior architectural decoration, furniture and icons which embody faith and pride in the presence of a higher order.
- Political Value is defined by [Mason \(2002, p. 11\)](#) as “the use of heritage to build or sustain civil relations, governmental legitimacy, protest, or ideological causes.” Political intervention in religious affairs can also be devastating due to social and cultural intolerance and hostility.
- Social Value stems from social connections, relationships and shared beliefs that exist due to the religious use of the ecclesiastic heritage, namely performing church services and celebrations, christenings, wedding ceremonies, funerals. Social value is based on community identity and the “Collective Memory” of individuals, which creates social cohesion and stability that has the potential to sustain even if a church function becomes redundant.
- Environmental Value is established *via* environmental impact assessment of ecclesiastic heritage on environmental sustainability.
- Economic Value stems from demand and supply in the marketplace and is influenced by location-specific existing use values, in addition to potential adaptive reuse or redevelopment values i.e., Hope Value ([Pickerill, 2009](#)). [Wilkinson, Remoy and Langston \(2014\)](#) observe that obsolete objects of cultural heritage have low market values based on their underutilised value in use.

Diverse values of religious cultural heritage establish a framework when owners, occupiers, worshipers, local communities, developers, financiers, sponsors and voluntary bodies will experience a different perception of the costs and benefits of adaptation, thus creating diversity in the decision-making process. The European Declaration on Cultural Diversity ([COE, 2000](#)) and the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity ([UNESCO, 2001](#)) recognise that respect for cultural diversity is an essential condition of human society. Successful adaptation efforts to

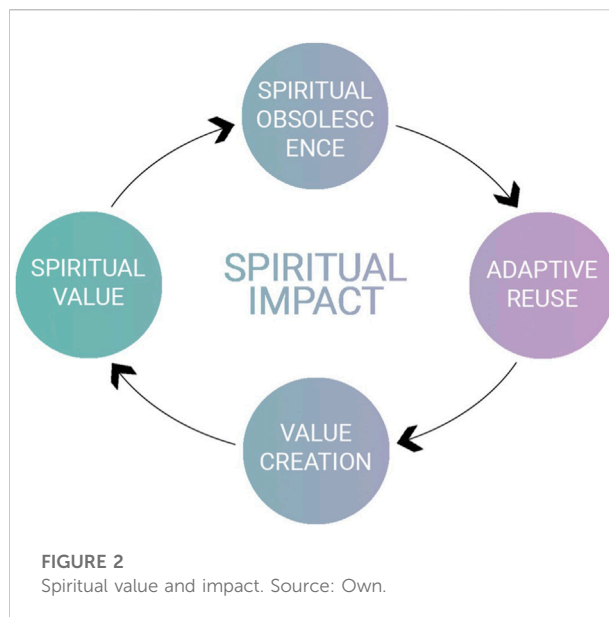
protect the historic religious fabric have to recognise and reconcile divergent value systems and conflicting interests of stakeholders. Collaborative approaches in decision making with regard to the future reuse of abandoned religious assets can contribute to building up “Institutional Capacity” by addressing the reality of conflict of interest between stakeholders in non-combative ways.

Stakeholder value judgements in spiritual context

Within value assessment as a process, it is suggested that the evaluation of information happens through a participatory process by bringing together all stakeholders’ opinions to formulate statements of significance (Gallou and Fouseki, 2019). As such, reuse decisions regarding abandoned ecclesiastical heritage are influenced by value judgements of a diverse range of stakeholders (Sedova, 2020). Capital expenditure on cultural heritage investment projects, such as preventive maintenance, conservation, upgrading or adaptive reuse is often subjected to standard market-driven, risk averse, investment appraisal techniques (Throsby, 2012) (Pickerill, 2009; Pickerill, 2015). The Nara Document on Authenticity explores the idea that it is not wise to base value judgements within rigid set criteria, as recognition of authentic cultural heritage “may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture” (ICOMOS, 1994, S.11). Hutter and Rizzo (1997) refer to cultural heritage as “nomadic” due to ever changing values and social norms through time and across groups. Pignataro and Rizzo (1997) assert that the strength of regulatory control directly impacts the investment costs associated with adaptation, maintenance and ongoing restricted use. As private sector investors and developers seek to maximise profit levels, there is an inevitable danger that socio-cultural values will be sacrificed to minimise costs in order to enhance commercial values. Misguided profit orientation will deprive historic monuments with a strictly cultural (and by association spiritual) function of their integrity and intrinsic attractiveness.

Ecclesiastical impact assessment

Impact analysis can be used as a prerequisite for ecclesiastical adaptive reuse project evaluation where impacts can be translated into potential direct and indirect costs and benefits. Landry et al. (1993) defines “Impact” as a dynamic concept which presupposes a relationship of cause and effect that can be measured through the evaluation of the outcomes of particular actions, suggesting that an impact is the power to produce change. Ost and Van (1998) identify two forms of analysis aimed at identifying actions, perceptions or attitudes in the context of cultural built heritage. Both methods utilise a description of economic flows in the



impact area, identification of direct and indirect effects and a differentiation of stakeholders.

- Impact Analysis (a non-decision-making process) encompassing analysis of the costs and benefits generated by the presence and/or utilisation of cultural built heritage in its current state.
- Project Evaluation (a decision-making process) encompassing analysis of the costs and benefits that will eventually be generated by some form of physical intervention over a period of time.

CHCfE (2015) proposes a holistic framework approach, utilising four interrelated impact domains (social, cultural, economic and environmental), to highlight the relationship between value and impact in the context of cultural heritage. This four-pillar framework approach is based on the proviso that the assessment of value and the decision to undertake heritage activities are dependent on stakeholder perceptions of value versus impact. The relationship between tangible and intangible values and impacts of heritage is a two-fold process where value can affect impacts which in turn can lead to changes in value (CHCfE, 2015).

Utilizing this approach, integrated values and impacts are connected *via* the process of adaptive reuse within a religious structure’s life cycle (see Figure 2). Adaptive reuse of underutilised or abandoned ecclesiastic heritage may alter value perceptions by stakeholders, which in turn may generate impacts (positive and negative impacts), which may further influence value perceptions. Value creation, which results in added values such as community amenity improvement, public goods and social interaction, can bring about both

TABLE 1 Value judgements, forms, aspects, and factors of obsolescence particular to ecclesiastic architecture. Source: Adapted from [Wilkinson \(2011\)](#).

Form of obsolescence	Aspects	Factors	Erosion of Value(s)
Physical (structural)	Structural stability	Structure failure	Architectural and Symbolic Value
	Weather tightness	Deterioration	
	Overall performance	Dilapidation	
	Envelope quality	Urban blight	
Functional (locational)	Fulfillment of purpose	Decreased utility	Spiritual Values
	Degree of use	Inadequacy	
	Technological adequacy	Incapacity	
	Contextual fit	Errors and omissions in the building's layout and form	
Economic (financial)		Technical advances	Economic Value
	Cost effectiveness	Rental income levels	
	Rate of return	Capital value <i>versus</i> adaptation value	
	Depreciation	Oversupply or drop in demand	
	Economic rationale	Imbalance between costs and benefits	
Social (cultural)	Demand of services		Social and Emotional Values
	Satisfaction of human needs	Demographic trends and shifts	
	Cultural requirements	Changes in trends and society needs	
Legal (tenure)	Local expectations	Changes in expectancy levels	Political Values
	Compliance with statutory regulations	Changes in legislation or regulations	
		Changes in planning policies	
		Existing adverse legislation	
		Nuisances and hazards—dangerous buildings	
Aesthetic (visual)	Style of architecture is no longer modern	Disagreements between landlord and occupier	Historical and Aesthetic Values
	Outdated appearance	Buildings with additional parts dedicated to different times	
Environmental	Environmental stability	Lost original parts of the appearance	Environmental Value
Site	Environmental changes	Environmental changes	Economic Value (Residual site Value)
	Site value	Disbalance between site and building value	
Spiritual	Building value		Spiritual Values
	Religious/social identity	Diminished capacity to provide a religious/social identity and opportunities of intense socialization	
	Socialization		

tangible and intangible positive externalities to the neighbourhood ([Kee, 2019](#)).

Forms of ecclesiastical obsolescence and dimensions of adaptability

Obsolescence can be defined as “the state of becoming old-fashioned and no longer useful” ([Hornby, 2010, p. 1050](#)). Obsolete buildings negatively impact on the “sense of place” of urban/rural settlements, creating a downward pressure on social, cultural, environmental and economic values. Numerous literature sources deal with categorisation of the forms of obsolescence relating to cultural heritage, including Physical, Functional, Economic, Social, Legal, Aesthetic, Environmental,

and Site ([Williams, 1986](#); [Barras and Clark, 1996](#); [Wilkinson, 2011](#); [Wilkinson et al., 2014](#)).

Even though religious beliefs remain strong in contemporary society, religious behaviour is changing and this is happening on contradictory paths with church attendance declining and people increasingly describing their beliefs as “spiritual,” rather than “religious” ([Inglehart and Baker, 2000](#)). [Pinelli and Einstein \(2019\)](#) argue that these apparently contradictory trends can be reconciled through an examination of religion's ability to satisfy the need for socialization and social belonging. Further, they suggest that in modern society, religion has a diminishing capacity to provide social identity and opportunities of intense socialization. As such, religious heritage assets of many countries have lost their function. This process indicates the presence of a ‘Spiritual’ form of obsolescence for ecclesiastical heritage.

TABLE 2 Graphical presentation of case studies: New uses along with forms of obsolescence and dimensions of adaptability.

Nº	Project title	New use	Pre-adaptation form of obsolescence	Dimension of adaptability	Type of use interventions
1	Community Centre “De Petrus” (Vught, Netherlands)	Multifunctional centre: library, museum, bar, shops	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
2	Church of Santa Barbara—“Church Brigade” (Llanera, Spain)	Skate park	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Community and Institutional Uses
3	Church of a Former Military Hospital—Jane Restaurant (Antwerp, Netherlands)	Restaurant	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Commercial Post-Religious Use
4	St. Paul and St. George Church (Edinburgh, United Kingdom)	Place of worship with opportunities for flexible use	Economic Functional	Refitable	Extended Religious Use
5	Woonkapel—Chapel Residence (Utrecht, Netherlands)	Single-family house	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Residential Post-Religious Use
6	The Chapel on the Hill (Forest-In-Teesdale, United Kingdom)	Single-family house	Social Aesthetic Physical Spiritual	Convertible	Residential Post-Religious Use
7	Convent of Sant Francesc (Santpedor, Spain)	Auditorium, multipurpose cultural space	Physical Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
8	Nottingham Church Bar (Nottingham, United Kingdom)	Bar-restaurant	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Commercial Post-Religious Use
9	Selexyz Dominicanen (Maastricht, Netherlands)	Bookstore	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Commercial Post-Religious Use
10	Martin’s Patershof Hotel (Mechelen, Belgium)	Hotel	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Commercial Post-Religious Use
11	St. Sebastian Kindergarten (Munster, Germany)	Kindergarten	Social Economic Spiritual	Convertible	Community and Institutional Uses
12	National Marine Museum of Ireland (Dun Laoghaire, Ireland)	Marine museum	Social Economic Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
13	Repton Park Swimming Pool (Woodford, United Kingdom)	Swimming pool	Social Economic Spiritual	Convertible	Community and Institutional Uses
14	Gattopardo Milano (Milan, Italy)	Bar, disco	Social Economic Spiritual	Convertible	Commercial Post-Religious Use
15	Old Church of San Lorenzo (Venice, Italy)	Multipurpose cultural space	Social Physical Spiritual	Refitable	Art and Cultural Activities
16	Supercomputing Centre (Barcelona, Spain)	Office	Social Economic Spiritual	Convertible	Office Post-Religious Use
17	San Barnaba (Venice, Italy)	Exhibition centre	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
18	Fabrica (Brighton, United Kingdom)	Centre for contemporary art	Social Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities

(Continued on following page)

TABLE 2 (Continued) Graphical presentation of case studies: New uses along with forms of obsolescence and dimensions of adaptability.

Nº	Project title	New use	Pre-adaptation form of obsolescence	Dimension of adaptability	Type of use interventions
19	Church of San Sisto al Carrobbio (Milan, Italy)	Museum-studio of Francesco Messina	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
20	Church of Santa Teresa and Giuseppe (Milan, Italy)	Media library	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Community and Institutional Uses
21	Church of San Paolo Converso (Milan, Italy)	Office	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Office Post-Religious Use
22	Private House in a Church (Italy)	Single-family house	Social Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Residential Post-Religious Use
23	Church of San Carpoforo (Milan, Italy)	Multi-art centre of Brera Academy of fine arts	Social Spiritual	Refitable	Community and Institutional Uses
24	Church of Saint Simone and Guida (Milan, Italy)	Theatre school	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Community and Institutional Uses
25	St. Maximin's Abbey (Trier, Germany)	Concert hall, school gym	Aesthetic Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Community and Institutional Uses
26	Bethlehem-Kirche (Hamburg, Germany)	Kindergarten	Social Economic Spiritual	Convertible	Community and Institutional Uses
27	Cantonese Eatery Duddell's (London, United Kingdom)	Restaurant	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Commercial Post-Religious Use
28	Red Brick Building (Brussels, Belgium)	Office	Social Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Office Post-Religious Use
29	Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church (Berlin, Germany)	Church, museum, memorial complex	Physical	Refitable	Extended Religious Use
30	Carmo Convent (Lisbon, Portugal)	Museum	Physical Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
31	Rievaulx Abbey (Helmsley, United Kingdom)	Museum	Physical Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
32	Santa Maria de Vilanova de la Banca (Vilanova de la Banca, Spain)	Museum, multi-purpose space	Physical Spiritual	Refitable	Art and Cultural Activities
33	St. Martin-in-the-Fields (London, United Kingdom)	Parish church and concert venue	Economic Functional	Adjustable	Extended Religious Use
34	Stadtkirche Müncheberg (Muncheberg, Germany)	Parish church, library and venue place	Economic Functional	Adjustable	Extended Religious Use
35	Paul Street—EC2 (Shoreditch, United Kingdom)	Apartments, residential	Physical Spiritual	Scalable	Residential Post-Religious Use
36	The South River Vineyard (Shalersville was moved to Harpersfield, United States)	Winery	Social Physical Spiritual	Movable	Commercial Post-Religious Use
37	Children's Day School (San-Francisco, United States)	School	Social Economic Spiritual	Convertible	Community and Institutional Uses
38	Catalysis (Seattle, United States)	Office of marketing agency	Social Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Office Post-Religious Use

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TABLE 2 (Continued) Graphical presentation of case studies: New uses along with forms of obsolescence and dimensions of adaptability.

No	Project title	New use	Pre-adaptation form of obsolescence	Dimension of adaptability	Type of use interventions
39	Fremont Abbey (Seattle, United States)	Arts centre	Social Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
40	Transformazium (Braddock, United States)	Community centre	Social Functional Physical Spiritual	Convertible	Community and Institutional Uses
41	The Castle (Beloit, United States)	Multi-purpose venue space	Social Economic Spiritual	Refitable	Art and Cultural Activities
42	Sacred Heart (Augusta, United States)	Venue space, office	Social Economic Spiritual	Convertible	Office Post-Religious Use
43	McColl Centre (North Carolina, United States)	Visual arts museum	Social Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
44	Former Church in Surry Hills (Surry Hills, Australia)	Office	Economic Spiritual	Convertible	Office Post-Religious Use
45	Hospital Hotel (Tel Aviv, Israel)	Hotel	Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Commercial Post-Religious Use
46	Thomas Burgh House (Dublin, Ireland)	Office	Social Aesthetic Spiritual	Convertible	Office Post-Religious Use
47	Rush Library (Rush, Ireland)	Library	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Community and Institutional Uses
48	All Saints Church (Hereford, United Kingdom)	Parish church, community centre and a cafe	Economic Functional	Adjustable	Extended Religious Use
49	The 'Waterdog' (Limburg, Belgium)	Workplace	Social Aesthetic Spiritual	Convertible	Office Post-Religious Use
50	The Cathedral of Liverpool (Liverpool, United Kingdom)	Parish church and exhibition space	Functional	Versatile	Extended Religious Use
51	Pearse Lyons Distillery (Dublin, Ireland)	Distillery	Social Economic Aesthetic Spiritual	Convertible	Commercial Post-Religious Use
52	Smock Alley Theatre (Dublin, Ireland)	Theatre	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
53	The Holy Cross Church and Parish Centre (Dundrum, Ireland)	Parish church and parish centre	Functional	Adjustable	Extended Religious Use
54	The Church (Former St. Mary's Church) (Dublin, Ireland)	Restaurant	Social Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Commercial Post-Religious Use
55	Medieval Mile Museum (Kilkenny, Ireland)	Museum	Social Functional Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities

(Continued on following page)

TABLE 2 (Continued) Graphical presentation of case studies: New uses along with forms of obsolescence and dimensions of adaptability.

No	Project title	New use	Pre-adaptation form of obsolescence	Dimension of adaptability	Type of use interventions
56	St. Laurence's Chapel, Grangegorman (Dublin, Ireland)	Multi-purpose venue space	Social Functional Economic Spiritual	Refitable	Community and Institutional Uses
57	St. Andrew's Church (Dublin, Ireland)	Design and exhibition centre with café and offices	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Commercial Post-Religious Use
58	St. George's Church (Dublin, Ireland)	Office	Social Economic Spiritual	Convertible	Office Post-Religious Use
59	Scots Presbyterian Church (Dublin, Ireland)	Office	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Office Post-Religious Use
60	St. Kevin's Church (Dublin, Ireland)	Apartments, residential	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Residential Post-Religious Use
61	Cahernorry Church (Ballyneety, Ireland)	Single-family house	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Residential Post-Religious Use
62	Franciscan Church (Drogheda, Ireland)	Exhibition space	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
63	St. Aidan's Church (Brookline, United States)	Apartments, residential	Social Spiritual	Convertible	Residential Post-Religious Use
64	The Church of St. Peter Chesil (Winchester, United Kingdom)	Theatre	Social Physical Spiritual	Convertible	Art and Cultural Activities
65	St. Nicholas Collegiate Church (Galway, Ireland)	Shared place of worship	Functional	Adjustable	Extended Religious Use

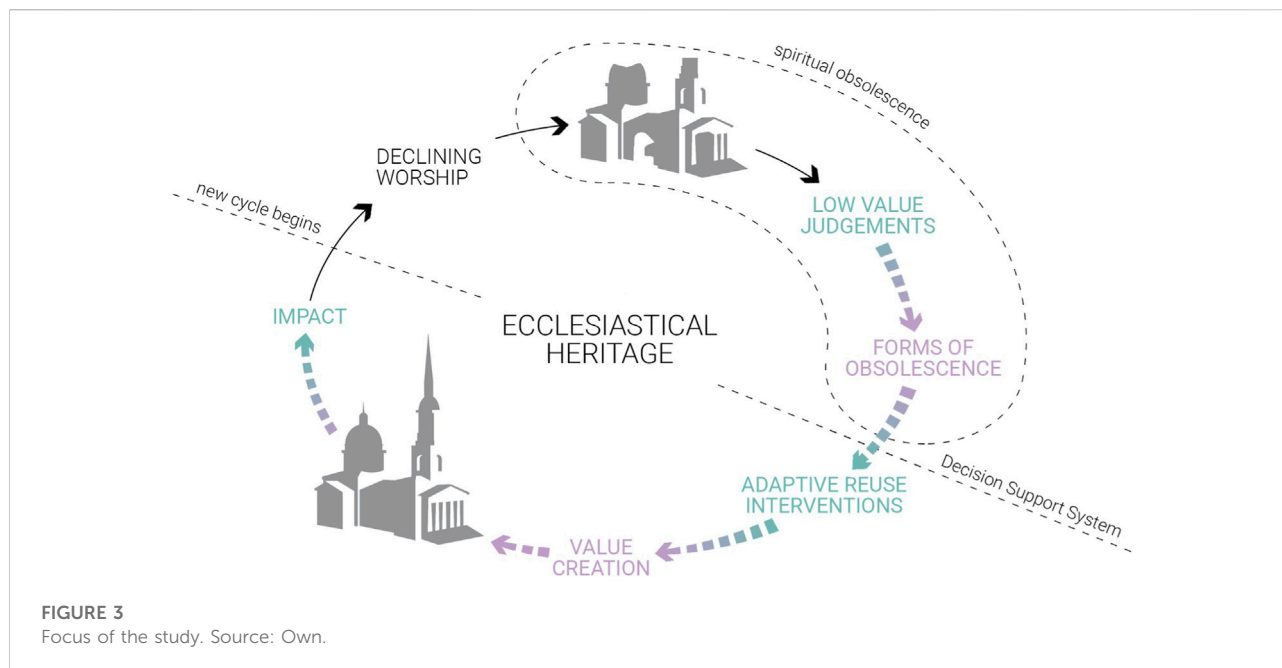
Value Judgements, Forms, Aspects, and Factors of Obsolescence particular to ecclesiastic architecture are presented in Table 1.

To draw some broad observations: a decline in architectural and symbolic values can result in the development of physical obsolescence. Low or declining spiritual (religious) values lead to the development of functional forms of obsolescence. Altered perceptions by communities of the social value of ecclesiastic heritage impact social obsolescence, while disembodiment of political value can potentially provoke every form of obsolescence. As the economic (market) value of abandoned religious structures (bricks and mortar) declines over time due to obsolescence, the residual site value (alternative development market value of the land beneath the building) will increase until the marketplace may dictate demolition of the historic structure, unless it is protected by heritage legislation.

Dimensions of Adaptability indicate what types of changes can potentially be applied to a building to overcome its obsolescence. This research paper utilizes six general cultural heritage dimensions of adaptability—Adjustable, Versatile, Refitable, Convertible, Scalable and Movable, identified by Heidrich et al. (2017), which have been adapted in religious context.

In religious context,

- Adjustable dimension of adaptability indicates a “change of tasks” by users on a daily/monthly basis. “Change of tasks” means having a multi-purpose space inside a former church, ready to be used for multiple tasks with no/few adjustments. For instance, dividing space with movable walls to ensure the change of tasks.
- Versatile dimension of adaptability indicates a “change of space” and location of services by users on a daily/monthly basis. This may be possible through using movable furniture and equipment.
- Refitable dimension of adaptability indicates a “change of performance” that can be achieved by improving the performance of one or more components, without the need for replacing the entire system (Heidrich et al., 2017).
- Convertible dimension of adaptability indicates a “change of function,” which may be achieved through adaptive reuse of a church.
- Scalable dimension of adaptability indicates a “change of capacity,” such as being able to increase/decrease surfaces and volumes of a church without major effort.



- Movable dimension of adaptability indicates “change of the location in the urban fabric,” which means being able to move the entire building, which is usually possible only when adapting wooden log churches.

Relationship patterns between stakeholder perceptions of value and obsolescence

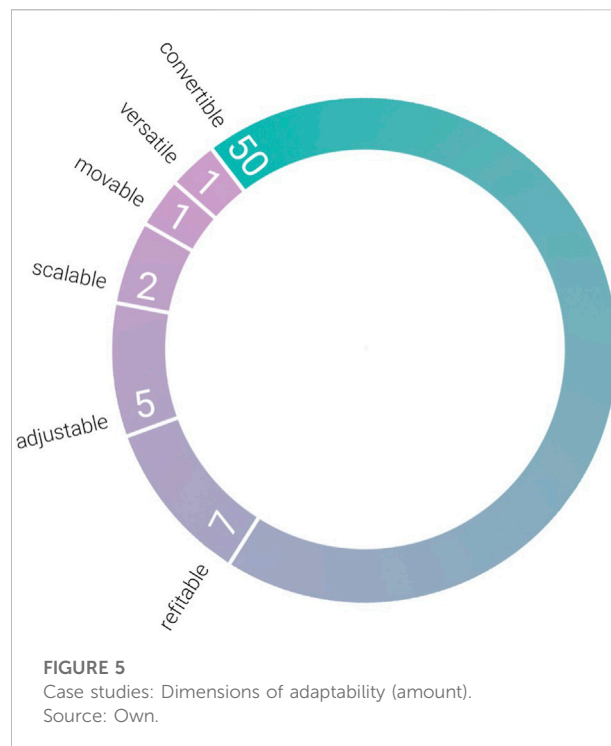
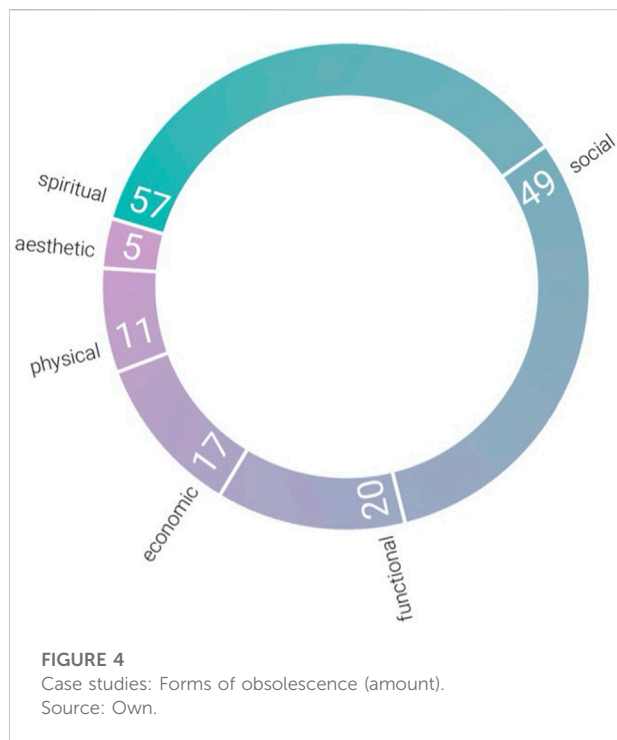
Stakeholder perceptions of obsolescence and related loss in value in relation to abandoned ecclesiastical built heritage has the potential to combine into a vicious downward spiral which takes momentum as the years pass by. Each form of obsolescence is the result of a decrease of a particular value, which further influences the presence of obsolescence and leads to further erosion of ecclesiastic value. The relationship between “nomadic” perceptions of value and the resultant impact on various forms of obsolescence have a complex and essentially reciprocal nature, although connections between given values of ecclesiastic cultural heritage and forms of obsolescence are not static as human perceptions change over time. While it is evident that observations on the relationship between value and obsolescence cannot be ranked in order nor are the relationships mutually exclusive, the following observations provide a general idea of the complex relationship between value judgements and forms of obsolescence. Essentially, erosion of a combination of cultural, social, environmental, and economic values in different proportions impacts on spiritual forms of obsolescence, depending on the variables of each case.

Methods

Sixty-five international adaptive reuse case studies have been collated and analysed to establish connections between ecclesiastical values, forms of obsolescence, new uses, value creation, impact and sustainable development. Based on the study of the types of Values and Forms of Obsolescence attributed to religious heritage, the authors study 1) the presence of different pre-adaptation Forms of Obsolescence of the case studies; 2) What Use Interventions can potentially be applied to heritage with such obsolescence; 3) What added value can be created after the adaptation applying reuse Interventions; 4) What impact can be generated once the religious heritage is adapted. These aspects and their connections with each other, which will be observed among the case studies of this paper, are highlighted in Figure 3. Dimensions of Adaptability indicate what types of changes can potentially be applied to a building to overcome its obsolescence. This research paper utilizes six general cultural heritage dimensions of adaptability, which were explained in more detail in the previous section, — Adjustable, Versatile, Refitable, Convertible, Scalable and Movable, identified by Heidrich et al. (2017), which have been adapted in religious context.

The forms of obsolescence, new uses and use interventions among case studies

In previous eras, cultural and political factors were the predominate forces at work behind some of the more notable



adaptations of religious heritage projects (Ahn 2007). Today, there are a wide range of solutions that have been generated for adaptation of churches (Kiley 2004) exhibiting various Forms of Obsolescence; and it is notable that a building may be characterized by several Forms at the same time. This research studies what kinds of adaptation solutions were generated based on different Forms of Obsolescence and Dimensions of Adaptability in 65 selected Case Studies from Europe, the United States, Australia, and Asia (see Table 2). The case studies were selected based on open data published on the Internet. The Author selected the cases which, in her opinion, are pieces of high-quality architecture. The Forms of Obsolescence (pre-adaptation) were established based on the observations by the authors, while the decision on the Dimension of Adaptability particular to each Case Study was based on the type of new use.

New uses applied to the case studies are categorised into different types of Use Interventions, as they indicate different types of changes applied to a religious building and are divided into Extended Religious Use and/or Functional Conversion. Extended Religious Use means shared use, in time or in space, of a church for religious and non-religious purposes. Functional conversion means adaptive reuse to a single or mixed non-religious use that is further categorised as Arts and Cultural Activities, Community and Institutional Uses, Commercial Post-Religious Use (retail, hotel, restaurants), Residential Post-Religious Use, and Office Post-Religious Use.

Results

The ratios for Forms of Obsolescence represented in Figure 4 illustrate that the majority of Case Studies (88%) primarily exhibit Spiritual Form of Obsolescence (57 out of 65 cases), while zero cases indicate any Legal Obsolescence. All case studies exhibiting Spiritual Form of Obsolescence underwent a change of “function” indicating “Convertible” Dimension of Adaptability. Thus, the Authors observe that adaptive reuse of religious architecture involving a change of function (Convertible) to a new non-religious use followed a period of Spiritual Obsolescence where the ecclesiastical resources concerned irrevocably lost their ability to remain a place for worship and socialization.

The ratios for Dimensions of Adaptability for each Case Study are represented in Figure 5, resulting in 50 out of 65 cases exhibiting primarily convertibility (Convertible Dimension of Adaptability), meaning that the feasibility of the original function change is centred around the change of spaces and services.

Generally, the assessment of Impact on ecclesiastical cultural heritage rests on four interrelated pillars of sustainable development (Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental), serving as a sustainable base for the assessment of cultural heritage impact (CHCfE, 2015).

Case study observations on the reciprocal relationship between Use Interventions, Forms of Obsolescence and Dimensions of Adaptability are as follows:

TABLE 3 The potential areas of the impact of the adaptation of ecclesiastic heritage^a. Source: own. The methodology was adapted from [CHCfE \(2015\)](#).

The domains	The sub-domains	A	B	C	D	Positive impact	Negative impact	Affected stakeholders
Built Heritage and Real Estate Market	Real Estate Market	o			o	- High demand to live in a neighborhood of the historical church	- Heritage status of a church can bring restrictions and difficulties in the neighborhood	The Church, the Investor, the Developer, the Community, the Public
	Regional Competitiveness	o	o		o		- restrictions for owners regarding the use and adaptation	
	Regional Attractiveness	o	o		o	- an increase of property prices	- increase of property prices CHCfE (2015)	
Labour Market	-	o	o			- direct and indirect creation of jobs	- part-time jobs - a need to train and educate workers	The Investor, the Developer, the Community, the Public
Economic Capital	Gross Value Added (GVA)	o				- generator of tax revenue for public authorities, both from the economic activities of heritage-related sectors and indirect or induced activities	- weak sustainable development when solely economic capital is considered CHCfE (2015)	The Church, the Investor, the Developer
	Return of Investment	o				- spillovers from heritage-oriented projects leading to further investment		
	Tax Income	o				- track record on good return on investment CHCfE (2015)		
	Tax Reductions	o						
	Social Programs Funding	o	o					
Sense of a Place	Place Branding	o	o			- preservation of traditions	- replacing history with a beautiful “image” of cultural heritage	The Community
	Image and Symbols Creation			o		- attractive impact on people’s sense of identity	- visitors congestion	
	Creativity and Innovation			o		- attractive image of a building	- loss of personal affiliation to cultural heritage	
	Visual Comfort	o		o	o	- attractive image of cities, districts		
	Place-Making		o		o			
	Magnet Effect		o					
Religious Identity	Religious Architecture Language			o	o	- creation of intangible value	- social exclusion	The Church, the Community
	Sense of Religious Place		o	o	o	- symbolic value	- the study of vernacular knowledge may need time and human resources	
	Vernacular Knowledge			o	o	- spiritual value		
	Knowledge of Tradition	o	o	o		- preservation of traditions		
	National Identity		o	o		- creation of “vernacular” jobs		
	“Collective Memory”		o	o				
	Respect of The House Of God		o	o				
	Community Identity		o					
Environmental Sustainability	Historic Cultural Landscape			o	o	- sustainable management of cultural heritage stock	- high consumption of resources	The Public
	Reducing Urban Sprawl	o			o	- reducing demolition and rebuilding	- low ecological index of buildings	
	Life Cycle Prolongation				o	- prolongation of the physical life of buildings		
	Structural Resistance				o	- influence on demographic change		

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TABLE 3 (Continued) The potential areas of the impact of the adaptation of ecclesiastic heritage^a. Source: own. The methodology was adapted from CHCfE (2015).

The domains	The sub-domains	A	B	C	D	Positive impact	Negative impact	Affected stakeholders
Community Participation	Education	o	o	o		- social inclusion	- disintegration of “native” users	The Church, the Community
	Engagement							
	Sport Engagement	o	o			- sense of civic pride	- social exclusion	
	Art Engagement	o	o	o		- creation of inclusive environments		
	Social Wellbeing		o			- community engagement		
	Tourism	o	o	o		- gaining knowledge and skills		
Community Interest	Experience		o	o		- personal development		The Church, the Investor, the Developer, the Community, the Public
						- basis for community cooperation		
	Social Cohesion		o			- basis for community cooperation	- “Not in My Backyard” attitudes CHCfE (2015)	
	Community Involvement		o			- satisfaction of social wants		
	Continuity of Social Life		o			- local enterprises		
	Public Interest	o	o			- interests of all stakeholders		
	Private Interest	o						

^aNames of the columns: A—Economic aspect; B—Social aspect; C—Cultural aspect; D—Environmental aspect.

- Based on the observation of case studies, Extended Religious Use is a means of adaptive reuse for ecclesiastic heritage with Economic or Functional Forms of Obsolescence. The religious heritage assets suitable for this type of Use Intervention should have Refitable or Adjustable Dimension of Adaptability.
- The use for Arts and Cultural Activities was successfully applied for cultural heritage with Spiritual, Social, Physical, Economic, or Functional Forms of Obsolescence; and Convertible or Refitable Dimension of Adaptability.
- Community and Institutional Uses were applied to ecclesiastic heritage with Spiritual, Social, Economic, Aesthetic, Functional, and Physical Forms of Obsolescence; and Convertible or Refitable Dimension of Adaptability.
- Commercial Post-Religious Use was applied to buildings with Spiritual, Social, Economic, Physical, Aesthetic, and Functional Forms of Obsolescence; and Convertible or Movable Dimension of Adaptability.
- Residential Post-Religious Use was applied to religious buildings with Spiritual, Social, Aesthetic, Physical, and Functional Forms of Obsolescence; and Convertible or Scalable Dimension of Adaptability.
- Office Post-Religious Use was applied to buildings with Spiritual, Social, Economic, Functional, and Aesthetic Forms of Obsolescence; and only Convertible Dimension of Adaptability.

Case study observations on the reciprocal relationship between Use Interventions and Value Creation are as follows:

- Considering the fact that particular Forms of Obsolescence follow the decrease of correspondent Value judgements by society, each type of Use Interventions is intended to support Value Creation for ecclesiastical cultural heritage.
- The adaptation of ecclesiastic heritage to Extended Religious Use can overcome the lack of Economic, Cultural and Spiritual values. As such, Extended Religious Use generates Economic and Cultural (spiritual) value.
- The adaptation to Arts and Cultural Activities can overcome the lack of given Social, Cultural (architectural, symbolic, spiritual) and Economic values. As such, Arts and Cultural Activities generate Social, Architectural, Symbolic, Economic, and Spiritual values.
- Adaptation reuse to Community and Institutional Uses and Commercial Post-Religious Use can overcome the lack of Social, Economic, Cultural (architectural, symbolic, historical, aesthetic, and spiritual) values. As such, Community and Institutional Uses and Commercial Post-Religious Use generate Social, Economic, and Cultural (architectural, symbolic, historical, aesthetic and spiritual) value.
- The adaptation to Residential Post-Religious Use can overcome the lack of Social and Cultural (historical, aesthetic, architectural, symbolic and spiritual) values. As such, Residential Post-Religious Use generates Social and Cultural (historical, aesthetic, architectural, symbolic and spiritual) values.
- The adaptation to Office Post-Religious Use can overcome the lack of Social, Economic, and Cultural (spiritual, historical, aesthetic) values of obsolete and abandoned religious assets. As such, Office Post-Religious Use

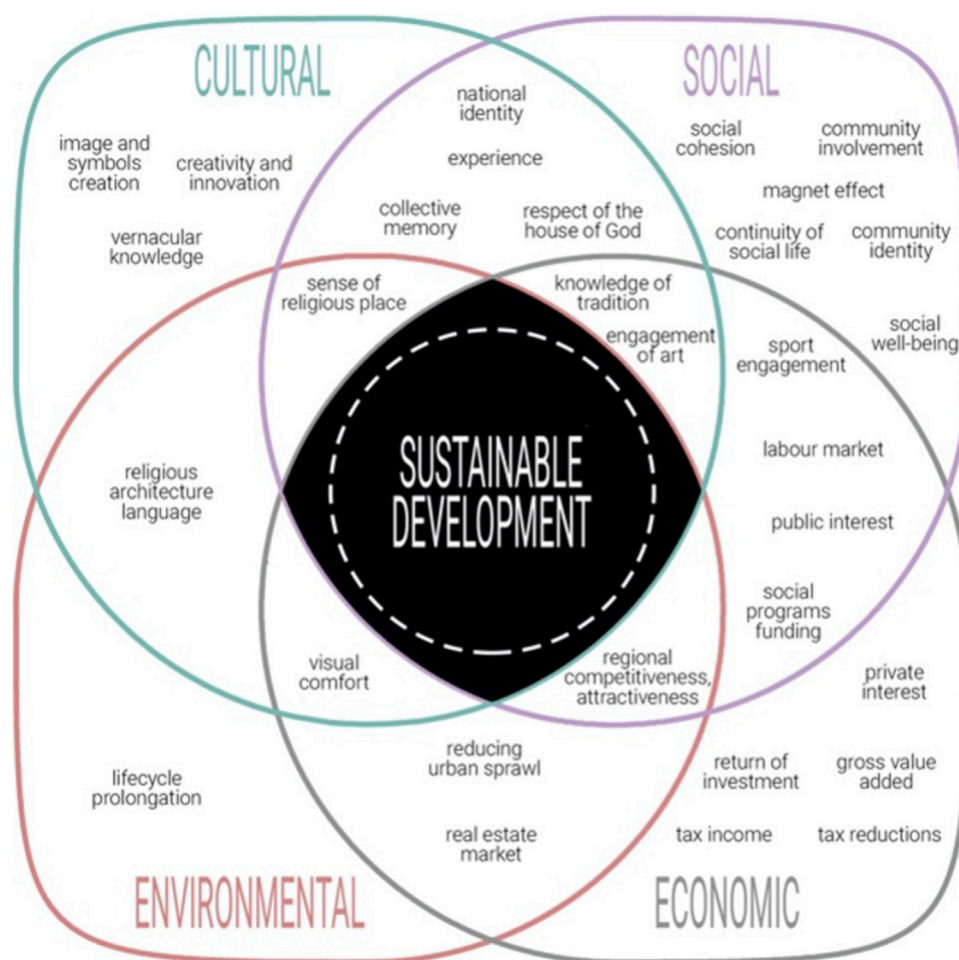


FIGURE 6

Four impacts of the adaptation of religious built cultural heritage as four pillars of sustainable development. Source: own. The methodology was adapted from [CHCFE \(2015\)](#).

generates Social, Economic, and Cultural (spiritual, historical, aesthetic) values.

[Table 3](#) highlights the potential areas of impact following the adaptive reuse of ecclesiastic heritage.

The combination of Impacts (economic, social, cultural, and environmental) forming a holistic landscape perspective and the categorization of Domains were provided by [CHCFE \(2015\)](#) and adapted for ecclesiastical Impact evaluation. The framework of Impact Domains of cultural heritage, and religious cultural heritage in particular, presented in [Table 3](#) serves as a sustainable base for the assessment of cultural heritage impact. The Domains presented in [Table 3](#) are the Domains of potential impact of adaptation. The four pillars of assessing the Impact of the adaptation of religious

buildings are economic, cultural, social, and environmental. Each pillar is the amalgamation of various Domains, with some of them attributable to two or three pillars at once, depending on the Domain (see [Figure 6](#)). The creation of sub-domains and the division into identified positive and negative ecclesiastical impacts were based on case study observations by the Author. Among the most valuable sub-domains (which contribute to three pillars of sustainable development at once) are the following: regional competitiveness, regional attractiveness, visual comfort, place-making, sense of religious space, knowledge of tradition, education engagement, art engagement, and tourism.

Ideally, impacts should reflect total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of said cultural heritage, level of

government (national, regional and local/municipal), type of expenditure (operating expenditure/investment) and type of private funding (donations in kind, private non-profit sector and sponsorship), as it indicates the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11 of SDGs (United Nations, 2015).

Each impact is presented according to affected stakeholders, as it helps to understand how the adaptive reuse of ecclesiastic heritage impacts on society. The Church stakeholders include two of the main functional groups: the Archdiocesan organisation and parish, or ex-parish, which includes ex-believers who used to attend church services in the former church. The Investor consists of insurance companies, independent investors, professionals who have capital to invest, commercial banks, private equity firms, and real estate investment trusts (REITs). The Developer represents organisations that bring together investors, producers and marketeers during the adaptive reuse process. The Public incorporates policymakers and regulators, including government administrations, local authorities, fire and building surveyors. The Community, in the adaptive reuse of religious heritage, includes future users and local community who live in the district, non-profit organisations, and parishioners (or ex-parishioners).

The conducted analysis shows that every Domain incorporates several layers of inter-related impacts, and sometimes overlapping economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts. Some brief observations can be made in relation to the sixty-five international case studies:

- “Built Heritage and Real Estate Market” Domain generates lower social, and higher economic and environmental impacts with potential for social, economic and environmental value creation;
- “Labour Market” generates equally economic and social impacts with potential for economic and social value creation;
- “Economic Capital” generates higher economic and lower social impact with potential for economic and social value creation;
- “Sense of a Place” generates higher social and cultural impacts, and lower economic and environmental impacts with potential for social, cultural, economic and environmental value creation;
- “Religious Identity” generates higher social and cultural impacts, and lower economic and environmental impacts with potential for social, cultural, economic and environmental value creation;
- “Environmental Sustainability” generates higher environmental impacts, and lower economic and cultural impacts with potential environmental, economic and cultural value creation;
- “Community Participation” generates higher social impact, and lower economic and cultural impacts with potential for social, economic and cultural value creation;

- “Community Interest” generates higher social impact and lower economic impact with potential for social and economic value creation.

Discussion

Sixty-five (65) international case studies were examined to explore creative holistic solutions to re-integrating underutilised and disused religious assets back into contemporary urban and rural landscapes. Based on the case studies analysis, this paper explained different values, which can be generated by adaptive reuse of religious built cultural heritage. Value formation in spiritual context based on recognition of the social, cultural, and environmental values and also relying on the social, cultural, and environmental impacts leads to the sustainable development of obsolete churches. The weighting of the likely social, cultural, and environmental impacts of adaptive reuse directly influences the decisions to undertake adaptive reuse projects, based on the assessment of the social, cultural and environmental value judgements of religious objects. It is important to state that in the majority of Cases the economic impact based on the assessment of economic values can be very low, since religious structures are unique architectural objects and historically are not associated with economic (market) values. Throsby (2012) points out the necessity of remembering, when talking about former churches as market objects, that the cultural attributes of religious heritage must also be studied independently from the economic attributes it might possess. Having said that, the case studies indicate that in some instances, sensitive adaptive reuse to Post Religious Uses (Arts and Culture, Residential, Office) may open the door to positive inflows of investment capital with corresponding market impacts based on the economic values attached to new and extended uses.

The conducted analysis provides an insight into how adaptive reuse of abandoned ecclesiastical cultural heritage can be viewed within a circular economy (CE) holistic perspective, by highlighting the multidimensional relationships at play to better understand the potential contribution of a CE framework to achieve human-centred historic landscapes.

This analysis and dialogue on possible new forms of use for religious heritage is mindful of the necessity to respect and protect diverse cultural beliefs and the collective memories of past, present and future communities - worshipers and non-worshipers alike. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that creative adaptive reuse solutions for ecclesiastical heritage assets are not always directly transferable between regions and cultures due to differing traditional spiritual beliefs and value systems.

Supporting cultural diversity by reintegrating abandoned religious resources of all faiths (diverse ideas, beliefs, traditions and collective memory of the religious site) back into the contemporary urban fabric of communities has the potential to yield benefits that contribute to cultural capital.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.



OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 04 May 2022

ACCEPTED 01 December 2022

PUBLISHED 16 December 2022

CITATION

Dragičević Šešić M and Stefanović M (2022), Theatre production and cultural policy during the pandemic: Leadership and memory narratives. *Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic.* 12:11082. doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11082

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Theatre production and cultural policy during the pandemic: Leadership and memory narratives

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The pandemic showed that theatres are able to adapt, re-position and re-focus their work, through digital means and by using diverse social media tools, in order to stay present and active during periods in which their models of traditional production and existence are limited. The research explores the rationale behind so called “pandemic production,” digital narratives and main approaches of managers and leaders in the public theatres during the pandemic phase, while noting the lack of cultural policy leadership. The roles of theatre managers was of the most importance and the pace of adaptation depended on their skills and talent. For all stakeholders, the new reality caused by the pandemic opened the horizons of ethics and aesthetics of solidarity, empathy, care, and critical reflections (within theatres and among independent theatre practitioners), while cultural policymakers chose to act as bureaucrats, missing the opportunity to step in with more vision and leadership, which led to the downgrading of their role to pure administration.

KEYWORDS

institutional memory, leadership, memory policy, culture of solidarity, digital memory collection

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis disclosed many neglected aspects of theatre management, especially the relevance and importance of digital collections. This can be said for all cultural institutions, Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums (GLAM), Music Halls and Theatres, but also for festivals and different types of manifestations, which could find methods of operation using digital collections in the changed cultural realm during the pandemic. Festivals could offer to their audiences an overview of past editions, recordings of events, documentaries, and interviews with actors and critics¹, with some new digital products, created during pandemic, that would complement existing collections and offer

1 Festival “Nušićijada in exile” offered the festival on TV channel Nova S and on its own YouTube channel, where the audience could see documentaries from previous editions, discussions, stand-up comedians, etc. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65QMh_5aUKA.

at least in part the illusion that “the new edition” exists. GLAM institutions were in the heart of public attention, as media and audiences developed expectations of exploring their resources in a digital realm (Dragičević Šešić and Stefanović 2021). Thus, the institutions and organisations who did have policies regarding digital memory and archive practices were among the first to offer their audience primary products *via* different platforms, like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, etc.

Digital embodiment of institutional memory is a relatively recent phenomenon, as it mostly concerned with archiving art works and cultural products (research reports, books, analysis, photos) that cultural institutions had produced. Individual and collective memories were rarely part of digital institutional memory. The key thesis of this research is that the “pandemic production” relied on specific leadership and/or management approaches, while the digitalisation of institutional memory and narratives depends on present leadership of cultural institutions (or on the awareness of the importance of the present identity of the institution).

This research is partially based in organisational memory studies (OMS) that focus on the use of memory from a managerial point of view (Feldman and Feldman, 2006; Cohen 2014) and on cultural policies and its recommendations (Dragičević Šešić, 2013; Banks and O'Connor, 2020). It further explores research results from COURAGE (Courage, Horizon 2020 project) and (unpublished) results from the national research project Identity and memory (178012) that was finished just before the pandemic. Focus is on the digitalisation of cultural organisations' memories, (comprising digitalisation of art production, but not exclusively), analysis of structures of digital archives, practice and policies of its use and analysis of policies and methods of “pandemic production” and archiving during the recent crisis caused by global pandemic.

Some of these questions we have already researched (Dragičević Šešić and Stefanović 2013; 2017a; 2017b) will be discussed in this text also, such as organisational memory, leadership (Caust 2012, 2018), participative decision making, crisis management (Antonacopoulou and Zachary 2014), organisational cultures and learning (Argote, L. 1999), and programming and digitalisation policies (organisational mission and vision). Thus, this research will be a cross-disciplinary endeavour taking its notions and vocabulary from different disciplines (Wessel and Moulds, 2008), i.e., key terms of cultural memory studies (Connerton 1989, 2008; Assmann 2006, 2011) would be in “dialogue” with organisational memory studies (Casey 1997; Casey and Olivera 2011), cultural policy (Jancovich 2017; Dupin-Meynard and Négrier, 2020) and cultural/theatre management (Jancovich 2015; Bonet and Schargorodsky, 2018; King and Schramme, 2019; Durrer and Henze, 2020). Methods of research include semi-structured interviews with theatre leaders; narrative analysis of programs and pandemic production; content analysis of media texts dealing with theatre production. The research will focus on data related to the theatre work during pandemic, as well as to organisational memory policies and types of digitalisation

of institutional memory. The goal of the empirical research was to analyse structures and models of digital archives that theatre have, but also to investigate practices and policies of its use during the recent crisis caused by global pandemics. In addition, we tried to explore if changes in the policies of digitalisation of content and institutional memory preservation will be happening after the crisis and if the management has perceived the crisis as an opportunity to introduce some new policies or practices in the sphere of digitalization. Furthermore, we tried identifying approaches by the management teams or leaders, the priorities, the preferences, and models for reaching out to the audiences that could not be present in closed theatre spaces. New reality forced cultural stakeholders that cultural experience defined by directness of contact to explore and find possible ways to communicate and to stay alive without basic conditions: being in place—to create theatre experience “on demand” in the digital realm.

The research questions are directly linked to COVID-19 chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981): what are the models of production and narratives during the pandemic; what is the purpose for digitalisation of institutional cultural capital; what is the role of leadership or shared tea leadership in regards to practices of digitalisation and pandemic production; and would theatre leaders consider a need for digitalisation policies to be adapted or redefined after the COVID-19 crisis. The interviews were held in July and August 2020, with directors or top management of the following public theatres in Belgrade: Belgrade Drama Theatre, Atelje 212 and Bitef Theatre.

Thus, the theatres we selected for research are city theatres, diverse in their repertoire policy, but also different when it comes to organisational model, mission and the role they play in the Belgrade cultural scene. What is a common denominator, besides being funded by city of Belgrade, could be described as absolute focus on standard production and repertory policy as the key way of “theatre identification” within Belgrade, Serbian and regional cultural realm, keeping their profile in spite of managerial (politically induced) changes. However, all selected theatres have shown certain flexibility and offered its stage to different initiatives, ready to enter in partnerships with independent companies, to let their younger staff to experiment. Furthermore, they had certain approaches to digitalisation that went beyond just a video-taping of shows (i.e., Bitef digitalisation of BITEF theatre posters, interviews with former actors but also with cultural opinion leaders, etc.). On the other hand, it is important to note, that our research sample did not include children or youth city theatres, as well as Yugoslav Drama Theatre, not willing to be part of the research.

“Pandemic production” or what happens when show cannot go on

Before we discuss the pandemic and digital production during the crisis period, it is important to note several things

regarding the setting, and context in which public theatres operate. Even before the pandemic, the model of public theatres, inherited from socialist system that heavily supported and subsidised public culture, was not sustainable, and more or less, it was always in some state of crisis and transition: “the institutions are forced to turn towards the market, since they receive funds for their operating costs and funding for the new productions decreases. In addition to that, because of the imposed policy of non-employment in the public sector, public theatres must work with the “older” company members. Furthermore, there is no specific law on theatre, although the National Council on Culture asked the Ministry of Culture to start a public debate about this much needed law. This means that public theatres navigate between the various laws and regulations concerned with public institutions and administration” (Stefanović 2016: 8). Furthermore, many internal stakeholders claim the marginalisation of theatres was just a consequence of the state of democracy in Serbia, and social and political context that did not favour free speech and public criticism of different social phenomenon’s, political elites, etc.

All three selected theatres are “public theatres with in-house production,” and they all seek to achieve the following goals (Bonet and Schargorodsky, 2018: 51): offering a quality programme that facilitates access to the broadest diversity of citizens possible, regardless of their income level, following the cultural democratisation model (Belgrade Drama Theatre, Atelje 212); being the performing arts reference in its territory (Bitef Theatre); recovering and highlighting classical or national performing arts heritage (Atelje 212); providing opportunities for emerging performing arts professionals and offering the right conditions to professionals so that they can develop major projects while seeking artistic excellence (Bitef Theatre, Atelje 212).

Furthermore, if we use the orientation as a tool to define each one of the theatres, we can say that Belgrade Drama Theatre and Atelje 212 are both blend of customer orientation theatres and social prestige orientation: “aesthetic line, sometimes quite eclectic, is marked by the attending audiences, and the main aim is filling all the seats. They do not specifically seek to bring in revenue, though that is clearly beneficial, but to meet the demands of the theatre’s customers. They seek to incorporate recognised titles, productions of proven success as well as the participation of celebrity artists” (Bonet and Schargorodsky, 2018: 79). The social prestige orientation can be seen and described aimed both at cultivating their recognition as a social space (a meeting place for the elites) and at the earning of awards and of a reputation among the critics, while inviting artists of prestige.

On the other hand, Bitef Theatre, the orientation is artistic: “corresponds to theatres that present a programme that prioritises aesthetic exploration. Their management staff have close relationships with artistic schools and workshops. They assume risks in relation to the audience, which is mainly

composed of people with previous experience. As a general rule, their most daring programme features are presented at relatively small venues” (Bonet and Schargorodsky, 2018:78).

Thus, when the pandemic started, indoor theatres were in a specific position. Due to their organisational model, which includes having the audience present in a closed location (on average 450 seats), the only option was to close the doors and to cancel rehearsals for upcoming productions. After first weeks of shock and adaptation, when literally theatres stayed silent, the theatre management teams decided to offer performances that would be transmitted digitally, or those that would not include more than 10 persons in one physical spot. These models were in place during the lockdown and curfews that lasted for about 2 months.

Overall, during 5 months of having different measures of social and physical distancing, theatre managers offered mostly digital content as a temporary substitute for the core theatre products. Addressing cultural needs of the audience while keeping the theatre brands alive and present at least in a digital world was an ongoing task. The social media outlets that were used the most, with the biggest promotional impact were Instagram for announcements and spreading the word about timetable and online repertoire schedule, while YouTube channel was used for transmission. It is important to note, that a number of plays that had been available on YouTube, were on theatre’s YouTube profiles for many years. Thus, for some theatres, this practice was not new, but the promotion, scheduling and announcements was a new promotional instrument.

Thus, we classified types of “pandemic production” that has been offered by institutional theatres in Belgrade:

Video recordings of plays distributed via social media outlets in scheduled time

This model of distribution was easiest and the most obvious option that was offered by most theatres. Since most of the theatres had archives of recorded plays, each theatre created its own digital repertoire during the lockdown period. However, the technical quality of available recorded plays differed, and there were two types: professional recordings and recordings for internal use that were of poor quality. One other issue was raised by some managers as a problematic and source of administrative limits for distributing plays online; and it concerns intellectual property rights. When original plays were created, the contracts with artists (like composers, or writers) did not cover necessarily rights for transmission and distribution of artwork. Thus, during new circumstances, managers needed to cover this legal aspect, and to formally have additional agreements with artists or YouTube.

Two theatres, Belgrade Drama Theatre and Atelje 212, focused on transmitting recorded plays, with announcements

and promotion on social media platforms. Some of their digital contents were announced as “digital premiers,” although it was not the real case, but it was used in cases when such a digital transmission was offered exclusive timing, and whose digital transmission was for the first time announced.

Belgrade Drama Theatre had simple reasoning that determined the concept of online distribution and broadcasting of performances during curfews. Basically, the quality of recording was a primary criterion when choosing “online repertoire” from their digital repository. Afterwards, the second criteria was choosing plays that are not performed on stage anymore. Finally, the order of plays that was broadcasted was chronological. Thus, the first one was the oldest recorded play that Belgrade Drama Theatre has in its archive, from the sixties, until the plays from recent years. Only three plays that are still “alive” or performed nowadays were available on YouTube.

The communication with the audience was mainly through comments left *via* tools like the chat box, or *via* Instagram messages. The data about the audience was not possible to track, and the feedback was ranging from excitement to dissatisfaction with the quality of sound, as stated by the interviewed managers.

On the other hand, Atelje 212’s approach to broadcasting showed that did not have any specific criteria for selection of the plays, and, basically, this was decided based on the quality of the recorded material. Most of the plays were previously available on YouTube with a high number of views, especially iconic plays like “Radovan III” (one version on YouTube has more than 210.000 views). However, when broadcasting was announced *via* social media outlets, the audience recalled some of the iconic titles and were attracted again to follow plays in specific timings, especially at the beginning of the pandemics. Using plays that provoke nostalgia and feelings of unity, someone on Facebook also stated that it was Yugo-nostalgic part of the repertory, Atelje 212, maybe without intention, caused reactions that could be described as encouraging, positive, humoristic, and all those were needed during the lockdown.

Performances for smaller audiences

During the period when the main restriction measure was related to the number of people per square metre, Atelje 212 under the title “Lonely Planet”, offered series of joint reflections about the future of theatre under and after pandemic for the audience of 10 persons. Belgrade Drama Theatre, on the other hand, organised “live reading” or public rehearsal of the text “Reader”, whose premiere was planned for the 2020/2021 season. There were about 50 persons at the audience, respecting physical distance. However, due to the constant changes regarding the number of people allowed to

be gathered at one place, performances with limited numbers in the audience were difficult to plan and execute. When the measures were lifted, most of the theatres downsized the number of audiences present.

Online discussions and “in house” video productions

The Bitef Theatre focused on offering a platform for debate and discussion while sharing experiences about “new normal”. Both projects that Bitef Theatre implemented, “Philosophical Theatre” and “Extraordinary performing arts scene” had a form of online discussions. The audience for both projects included mainly professionals from the field of theatre. While “Philosophical Theatre” was a continuation of an independent project that were presented in some other theatres before, “Extraordinary performing arts scene” was the Bitef Theatre initiative.

The “Philosophical Theatre” started its digital version on April 9th, with discussion between Oliver Frlić the director, and Srećko Horvat philosopher, concluding that the corona crisis will not be the end of the theatres but rather a new start, questioning the concept of live performances and possibility of audience seating with at least 2 m distance. Frlić reflected about the phenomenon of YouTube plays, only as a bridge until live theatres will be possible again. He believes that the recordings of plays have another purpose, which is not to be a theatre as it should, and authentic and real experience, and underlined that the online theatre means that actors cannot look the audience in the eyes, while the “level of disinfection” in online versions is very high on many levels. The emigration to the online world, means also a high level of social control that would be difficult to size down, once the pandemic ends. Stefan Kaegi, Milo Rau, Anja Suša, were some of the other participants in the following editions. Thus, the Bitef theatre continued its online programme in May with debates focusing on contemporary dance issues. All debates are recorded for the theatre archive, possibly to be retrieved and later used again in a digital realm.

On the other hand, Belgrade Drama Theatre’s “Theatre Bards” project was initiated before the pandemic, and it presents an unusual initiative for an institutional theatre. The idea was to use an independent TV production for creating TV forms that would be offered to different cable operators. By restarting Theatre Bards, which was iconic TV show 20 years ago, the general manager of Belgrade Drama Theatre (since 2019) introduced “entrepreneurial” leadership style, that inclines towards the market-oriented practice with the narrative of visibility, accessibility and vicinity to the audience not residing in Belgrade. During pandemics, they broadcasted the old shows on its own YouTube channel.

Narratives during pandemic production

The managers usually perceive the difference between two types of narratives that are created in theatres: official ones and unofficial ones. Official or formal narratives that are chosen to present the wanted story of a theatre are created and nurtured, supported by promotion. The official theatre narratives are chosen to present a certain theatre in line with its repertoire concept, marketing approach and notion of how the theatre should be positioned in the future.

“Informal” or unofficial are created by theatre workers as individuals, that share among themselves their memories, and this process is un-curated and depends to a large extent from the self-identification of the theatre workers with the institution. Sometimes these narratives are not in line with the official story, and still are important for the identity of certain organisation.

Theatre narratives can be described twofold. One part was influenced by the feeling of betrayal by cultural policymakers and founders, and the other, dominant narrative was the narrative of adaptation, digitalisation and solidarity.

Atelje 212 has chosen adaptation to a “new normal” as its first reaction, which later was followed by the narrative of accessibility and solidarity. Solidarity was primarily with colleges that needed help, since the level of care for the others was higher than in normal circumstances. However, the concept of solidarity did not go beyond the care and help to direct stakeholders, and this situation did not cause wider debate about the model of institutional theatres, artists and cultural workers who do not have “jobs for life” as the ones who are part of the institutional system. The position of cultural workers without long term contracts in institutional theatres (or some other cultural organisations) is fragile and dependent on short term jobs.

On the other hand, Atelje 212 does not have recordings of all performances, so the pandemic accelerated the need for further digitalisation of content. Thus, Atelje 212 recently started the project, supported by the Ministry of Culture, that will digitise and make available all recorded plays. Systematization of data and knowledge for the institutional memory purposes does not exist in a structured way, and so far, it has been part of ad hoc decision making and short-term planning. Strategic approach would envisage specific knowledge, skills and manpower, which is not available at this moment for all theatres that were included in this analysis.

The Bitef theatre, after the period of “shock” started with tactics of transformation which included narrative of adaptation, in order to bridge the gap until after the pandemic. For Bitef Theatre, the narrative of adaptation meant offering relevant topics in a digital frame. This approach actually relates to the theatre’s recent announcement that they will be shifting and repositioning as a “platform for new theatrical tendencies” which will get them closer to the Bitef Festival. In that sense, offering new forms *via* their platform like Philosophical Theatre and

online discussions “Lets continue from the beginning,” were adequate choices.

Bitef theatre invested more thoughts in their archiving process—partially because due to the importance of the festival, they were aware of quality of their “documents”, and partially because Jovan Ćirilov as artistic director of the Festival, “imposed” that archiving practice also on Bitef Theatre, wishing to memorise in this way a significant contribution of Mira Trailović to Serbian culture. Bitef Theatre archive is deposited in the City Archive of Belgrade, and it encompasses different artefacts and memorabilia, from posters, photos and brochures, monographs to audio and video materials, all accessible *via* University Library platform. In the last 10 years, all production has been recorded, however, that was not the practice before that period. The institutional memory underlines important dates like anniversaries (30 years of the Bitef theatre was celebrated) and the main tool for keeping memories are (interactive) exhibitions and printed materials like monographs.

Belgrade Drama Theatre concept and narrative was the continuity, and fulfilling the plans regarding co-productions, festivals and tours across the region as soon as the lockdown ended. Furthermore, solidarity with associates who did not have long term contracts with theatre, was preserved. The numbers show that for 40 plays, BDT relied on 35 actors with permanent contract (theatre ensemble), 32 associates and 180 visiting actors. This number for visiting actors was drastically lowered, while they tried keeping the associates. Although the official narrative was solidarity, in practice this could not be fulfilled completely. The funding of public theatres was scarce even before the pandemic, and fundraising during the pandemic was not a realistic option. Besides the narrative of solidarity, Belgrade Drama Theatre has chosen the narrative of availability, accessibility, and digital possibilities. With developing plans on how to offer plays with “pay per view”, this theatre is looking beyond the pandemic, and choosing commercial and market approaches for the coming period.

Belgrade Drama Theatre does not have a special archiving policy. Its archive is partially at the theatre, while the part is held at the Theatre Museum of Serbia. The process of archiving started around 2010, and managers realized that plays and data from the first years were more carefully saved, comparing to the plays from the nineties.

Disconnect between cultural policymakers and leadership (or how the crisis showed the level of readiness to adapt and lead)—missed opportunity

Digitisation as part of the cultural policy and institutional memory policies, has been already for 10 years on the agenda of

the Ministry of Culture and Media and the Government of Serbia. Museums and libraries had been at the forefront of these actions, as they had both inner motivation and outside (governmental) attention and support, willing to use digitised artefacts in the cultural and digital diplomacy (Dragičević Šešić and Stefanović 2021). In theatres, the situation has been a little bit different. The inner motivation was present, while the support was partial, and for some theatres, like Atelje 212, the support came just during the pandemic when the need was urgent and obvious.

The Ministry of Culture and city secretariat for culture seemed to be very inactive during the pandemic, offering no instructions, consultancy, training, or any kind of help to management or staff. The cultural institutions “obeyed” general regulations that were imposed for all organisations in the public sector (i.e., work from home for monthly income). The Ministry of Culture and Media did not have any written or verbal instructions with cultural policy guidance—except weekly distribution of masks and gloves through the Ministry of Culture and Media for “National” institutions. Altogether, it seems that pandemic period was not used by the cultural policy creators to develop discussions about future policies and (common) practices and developmental strategies, and that the policy and decision makers did not approach institutions proactively with any kind of assistance and help in regard to the continuation of core activities.

However, The Ministry of Culture and Media initiated “Digital solidarity” platform—webpage <https://www.digitalnasolidarnost.gov.rs/#digitalnasolidarnost> with the intention of collecting and gathering all information about different cultural products that have been accessible for free, from free books, movies, music, theatre plays, etc. Solidarity here was meant to be solidarity with the population, but not solidarity with artists that stayed without possibilities to work (especially it was traumatic for performing artists that are part of collective artistic expressions). After all, for the wider audiences, the technical and visual experience for most of the webpage links offered is non-inspiring, on the contrary. It seems the investment in digitalisation of cultural products in order to make them attractive needs to be developed, since the customer experience should offer something that could substitute the excitement of life theatre dynamics.

The other initiative in which actors from public theatres participated, was a social awareness campaign about the pandemic and the need to “stay home.” The campaign was initiated by the Regional Government of Vojvodina.

In June 2020, when it seemed the epidemiological situation got better, and it was announced that the virus is under control, Belgrade city managers decided to open performances to public and to offer to city theatres the summer stage at Tašmajdan (public venue and park). All public theatres were invited to perform on that stage. The “summer repertoire” started with musical “Mama Mia” by the Terazije Theatre, but after two

performances that were attended by more than thousand people, actors publicly stated that they feel unsafe and that the number of people at one location, even outside, presents a health risk for all. Actually, this request coincided with the rise of the number of people diagnosed with COVID-19. Thus, after two more performances by Belgrade Drama Theatre (about 300 persons in the audience), the decision was to stop with performances in the summer stage until further notice.

As mentioned, the founder (city government and Secretariat for culture) of analysed theatres during a pandemic did not have an active approach towards the theatres, and that its role was purely administrative—controlling. All recommendations imposed to the theatres were related to the security of staff and health standards while the content, or production work was not part of the official or unofficial communications and discussions. Theatre leaders and managers were left to themselves to decide and to implement, if possible, any kind of content. On one hand, this was beneficial for theatres because they had an opportunity to act independently and to adapt according to their values, mission, and assessment of the situation and sources available. On the other hand, the founder missed the opportunity to facilitate, to lead and to create better conditions for the theatre stakeholders, by offering new venues, models, new tools and additional support for creation and distribution of cultural products.

Cultural policies, leadership and governance paradoxes (instead of a conclusion)

Even cultural policies during the crisis lacked leadership. The Minister of Culture and Media, as well as the City secretary for the Culture were pretty invisible during first few months of the pandemic, and, what is more important, missed to use the crises as an opportunity for the development of integrative public policy (Dragičević Šešić 2006), at least on the city level. It was a bottom-up cultural policy that started to be developed through different solidarity and advocacy actions, led by the Association of Drama Artists of Serbia and the Association Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia, as well by other actors within civil society, that were questioning reasons of the lack or huge delay of cultural policy measures². However, public discourse and debate during the COVID-19 crisis was directed towards the medical issues and support to medical workers, thus overall, the cultural sector did not receive much of an attention or support.

2 On 27th May the NGO Creative Serbia had organised a debate at Dorćol plac, “Culture after COVID-19,” addressing a public appeal to the Prime Minister, as it seemed that all previous appeals to the Ministry of Culture had not have any results. <https://antivirus.in.rs/debata-u-dorcol-placu-i-pismo-intelektulaca-ani-brnabic/>.

Leadership during crises is at numerous challenges (Antonacopoulou and Zachary, 2014; Caust 2018), as it has to concentrate on solving immediate problems, to focus on issues that demand urgent reactions and for whom there are no procedures or routines. It both reflects internal organisation of the working process as well as repertory policies—ways of relating to stakeholders and audiences.

Thus, when we observed and analysed the leadership during this pandemic crisis, in most of interviews and other data (collected from daily press), it was clear that the director (who has a lot of authority according to the Law on Culture, 2011), had to initiate a process of reflections and decision making during the pandemic phase in an unusual way, as regular meetings and procedures had been cancelled. But, most of boards of cultural organisations did not meet during the pandemic. It is obvious that boards in Serbia are seen as (Dragičević-Šešić and Mihaljinac, 2019) formal, representative bodies, appointed by the founder, that are gathering once or maximum twice a year for their regular duties (approving the report for previous and the plan for the next year), and that management of cultural organisations, including theatres, had not thought about their possible role in the situation of crisis. There were no attempts to include users in a reflection, even less in a decision-making process (Jancovich 2015, 2017), or to engage its own staff, stakeholders or other relevant opinion-makers in the cultural realm, to identify possible ideas or solutions to continue its work in a digital realm. This COVID-19 chronotope offered the unique opportunity to test intersectoral partnership with IT companies and companies active in the creative industries, what was done within the civil and private sector, but public cultural institutions have not tried to make any new entrepreneurial move.

Having in mind that the orientation of two theatres, described as blend of customer oriented and social prestige, it was also expected to have immediate policies that would first try to answer main customer needs and interests. Second goal was again to show capability to fast adapting and to draw a picture of a theatre that is keeping social prestige in the digital sphere as well.

The theatre with artistic orientation kept an “artistic” approach by creating critical thinking programs and projects, only in digital form.

All leaders needed to find a balance between fulfilling prescribed administrative measures and substituting shows that could not go on for now. But, from institution to institution the rules have been different and the level of self-initiative, engagement and responsibility of the employees have been different. In all previous cases of pandemic production, it appears that team spirit prevailed and influenced the decision making, and that the “leaders” delegated adapting approaches to the higher management. The crisis reunited teams who were quite small (two to five people) and that joint reflections and reasoning influenced the final decision on pandemic modalities of production, and the narrative creation.

But the announcement of the Belgrade city secretariat initiative of joint stage (in Tašmajdan park) had prevented each theatre to develop its own, specific response, and to use its own resources, such as squares in front of theatres and courtyards that some of them are having. There were no stimulants to explore cultural heritage sites and parks for performances, or encouragements to work in ateliers (workshops) on specific projects of applied or community theatre. It seems that evident advantage of having systemic and complex digital theatre archive had not inspired leadership to create new digital theatre projects, from those related to memory digitalization, gathering individual memories, artefacts till more complex experiments that would engage artistic ensemble in story-telling productions, or experimental digital theatre projects that predominated within independent theatre collectives.

Large dissatisfaction of cultural operators working for the public sector throughout Serbia, represents the biggest challenge for each new director that comes in the organisation. This can be solved only with very innovative and different approach of the manager, that is capable to fundraise outside the public sector in Serbia (to attract European projects, etc.), developing intersectoral partnership projects, thus finding way to raise income, but also to help continuous professional education that unfortunately is completely lacking as a system in Serbia (no funds, or foreseen free days for that), to open space for inner initiatives and creativity. Digital learning tools and innovative work in a digital realm, might be a partial response to that, as well as an initiative to use digital tools for best individual stories about the history of the institution.

This research had shown that the key problem in the present theatre realm in Serbia is related to undefined cultural and theatre policy, lack of autonomy of public cultural institutions, weak leadership that feels threatened by illiberalism—partocratic political system that demands servility, introduces elements of populist communication and populist reasoning even in cultural field. Despite having excellent artistic and technical teams within theatres, their artistic, technical and intellectual capacities stayed unused—and all activities were held on minimum, while independent organisations used this period for continuous professional development, digital archiving and digital production. However, in both sectors pandemic stimulated a culture of solidarity to be developed and implemented. Thus, the long-term impact of COVID-19 crisis is yet to be evaluated and measured in the public sector in Serbia.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 19 May 2022

ACCEPTED 01 December 2022

PUBLISHED 19 December 2022

CITATION

Molina A and Garduño B (2022), Work strategies developed by creative workers in Mexico City: Enhanced precarity and adjustments during pandemic social distancing periods. *Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic.* 12:11087. doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11087

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Work strategies developed by creative workers in Mexico City: Enhanced precarity and adjustments during pandemic social distancing periods

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The 2020 COVID pandemic has been a major challenge for Mexican creative workers, whose working conditions were already precarious since before the world crisis. Through qualitative analysis of conversational interviews, we identified a series of adjustments and professional decisions made in the context of social distancing. Our findings show that precarious working conditions in which they already worked were aggravated during the pandemic social distancing periods to even threaten their possibilities to keep their place in the creative sector. We identified five different earning strategies with which they navigated uncertainty during the pandemic. Finally, we discussed the inequalities they face while trying to earn an income through multiple activities and, at the same time, updating their knowledge and capabilities to adjust their creative work to the new realities.

KEYWORDS

Creative workers, work strategies, precarity, cultural industries, pandemic adjustments

Introduction

This paper analyses the living and working conditions of a group of people in the metropolitan area of Mexico City's creative sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time in which live and public activities were forced to close following the social distancing measures imposed by the government to control the expansion of the virus. Based on previous data about the general state of the creative sector, our starting point is the assumption that their labour market has been historically characterized by informality, low incomes, lack of jobs, and precarity, but this is often perceived as a way of life instead of a problem.

This paper comes out of broader comparative research, funded and managed by the Australian Research Council, at the University of Technology Sydney, and Universidad Veracruzana for Mexico's case study. We approached a group of people whose main work is defined within what has been broadly called creative work and locate themselves on the edge of what could be defined as middle class. Because of the creative sector's fragility and

the lack of stability on their socioeconomic statuses, these group of subjects have experienced a hard shock on their incomes and household budgets, but must importantly on the possibility of continuing to work on their creative jobs as many of them have made a living out of performance or live arts that need public spaces and face-to-face interactions. They have had to adjust their working activities, their daily life habits, and how they foresee the coming future in these still uncertain times. With this in mind, we attempt to examine the specifics of the adjustments made to their jobs, what tools that they have had available for this transition, and what kind of strategies they have had in hand to navigate what is likely the most challenging period for the sector in many years.

This paper is structured in four sections. In the first one, we lay out the background for this research, which includes a brief description of Mexico City Metropolitan Area and some general data about its main features, an overview to the creative sector working conditions, and the current working conditions of our interviewees. In the second one, we acknowledge our theoretical and methodological approach which comes from our main project *No Longer Poor, Not Yet Middle Class, New Consumer Cultures in the Global South*. The third section offers an in-depth analysis of information we gathered in our fieldwork. To answer our main questions, we established the general characteristics of our interviewees, along with the professional activities they used to carry out before the social distancing mandate; as well as their current economic activities, how they pursued an income during 2020 and 2021 (during social distancing measures) and what sort of strategies and resources they have used to keep working/living under these circumstances.

To finalize, we discuss our findings, trying to articulate our qualitative approach to the narratives about their strategies to secure an income during the given period and to articulate an interpretative explanation on the transitions from pre-existing precarious living conditions to the impact of the pandemic crisis on their employment fragility, along with the coping strategies to make a living while their jobs were shut down, some of which we argue could lead to a rethinking of cultural policies concerning employment and working conditions for this workers.

Theoretical approaches

The labour within the artistic and cultural sector have got different definitions along the way depending different perspectives and context, as this has proved to be an evolving term. Florida (2002) gives a notion of creative class that gained importance as starting point to talk about cultural or creative industries, but we find disagreeable that creates an idea of development and integration of creative work to the neoliberalism economies as desirable. In the same line, in Mexico it is been debating the term Protected Industries by Copyright (Piedras, 2004), which claims creative work can be

define as activities based on authorship and monetization of copyrights; although is creators rights, these are concepts that guide creative work towards quantity production and profit focus. UNESCO (2010) also offer a broad definition and refers individuals and not to the institutions, as the ones who participate actively of an economic sector, without necessarily being part of a large consortium or at least not being employed in a permanent basis. This is a closer notion to what we observed in a field characterized by no full-time jobs or institutional structure.

We refer to creative work since it is a type of work that exist in a capitalist economic model (Comunian and England, 2020) that has allowed the development of an increasingly inequitable and unfair labour market that offers poor alternatives for creative workers with no social and cultural capital. Our sample of individuals who agreed to take part on our research project define themselves as part of a broader creative sector definition which includes arts and creativity based economic activities, such as advertising, architecture, arts and crafts, design, fashion design, audiovisual arts, performing arts, publishing, software creation, gaming, media, and content creators.

We agree with the argument that claims creative and artistic work has been traditionally seen a lifestyle more than a way to make a living, which frequently leads to an idealistic and false belief that creative people and artist are only dedicated to cultivating beauty and pleasure, which also translates into “the assumption that freedom and autonomy from social obligation is essential” (Lingo and Tepper, 2015). On the contrary, we strongly identify this group of people with the notion of creative workers tight to a critic perspective of precarity and disadvantageous working conditions resulting from neoliberal, meritocratic systems. A kind of workers that live in the edge of multiple economic activities, long work hours for low income, and most of them rarely related to creative or artistic influences from their family of origin. In other words, we are referring to a group of people that somehow and sorting a variety of difficulties, are making a living from their creativity lacking social and cultural capital that some could think about when speaking of artistic or cultural elites; as well as those lacking from institutional support such as Mexican strong but insufficient structures for education, creation, promotion, and distribution of arts and culture.

In this line of thinking, this paper embarks on the understanding of life and career decisions while facing the major global crisis our generations ever faced. To do it, our starting point is creative work as informal, freelance, self-employed based, which means low and unstable income, no social securities of access to healthcare, savings, or retirement plans. Nevertheless, it is a group of individuals highly educated on specialized professions-arts and creativity oriented. As a result this paper offers a classification of the two type of strategies and categories of activities our creative workers developed as a way to make a living, but most importantly, as their best effort to keep going on with their creative jobs.

TABLE 1 Monthly income per family.

Range	Mexican pesos	American dollars ^a
I	0–3,037	0–147.74
II	3,038–5,366	147.9–261.3
III	5,367–7,142	261.41–347.86
IV	7,143–8,898	347.9–433.39
V	8,899–10,772	433.08–524.23
VI	10,773–12,985	524.71–632.45
VII	12,986–15,755	632.5–767.36
VIII	15,756–19,618	767.4–955.5
IX	19,619–26,197	955.17–1,275.43
X	26,198–55,000	1,276–2,678.83

^aCurrency exchange rate from Mexican pesos to American dollars, 4th October 2021.

Source: INEGI, 2020, Encuesta Nacional de Ingresos y Gastos de los Hogares: <https://www.inegi.org.mx/temas/ingresoshog/>.

Metropolitan area of Mexico City socioeconomic context

Mexico City and the metropolitan area is the main economic, financial, political, and cultural capital of the country. It is estimated that the total area includes 7,866 km²-which represents almost 5 times the size of Greater London. Within the region of Latin America this metropolitan area is among the four most populated urban developments along with Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. That makes an approximate total population of 23,500 million, equivalent to 17% of the national population (OECD, 2015, p.5).

In terms of GDP, it is considered that the metropolitan area produces almost a fourth to the national total, becoming the most important pole of attraction for investment and migration because of employment opportunities, and quality of life it offers (OECD, 2015, p.5). As the main urban center, it gathers a lot of the cultural infrastructure of the country, such as museums, theaters, cultural centers, cultural industries, and professional art schools, which tends to centralize job offers and for creative professions in what some authors call creative clusters (Mercado and Moreno, 2011).

On average, the city has a medium wage of 7,253 pesos, which is related to range IV of an income scale calculated by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information, as shown in Table 1. However, CONEVAL (2012) acknowledges that a person should receive around 32,000 pesos per month to cover comfortably their monthly expenses, and to stay out of economic vulnerability and social security, hence, to be considered middle class in terms living conditions instead of income measurements (Teruel et al., 2018). Therefore, this calculation leaves out some estimations that claim 90% of the total population would be within middle class segments (Ríos, 2020).

Since 20th March 2020, World Health Organization declaration of a world pandemic, Mexico's government imposed social distancing measures which included closing any public event and non-essential activities. One of the most damaged economic sectors were the living arts. More than 722 theaters, 10,407 museums, and above 2,060 cultural centers closed their doors for almost a year (b22 Secretaría de Cultura, 2021). The artistic and cultural sectors were highly impacted from the very beginning of the lockdown, and they have not fully recovered after more than 2 years from its beginning. As we stated before, working conditions for creative workers have been precarious for a long time, therefore the pandemic has been especially hard that were already precarious became even more irregular despite individual attempts to innovate and keep their creative jobs going through different strategies.

When the hiatus of public activities came by April 2020 it was not planned to last long, no further than a couple of weeks, therefore it was not considered that logistic adaptations were necessary to adjust the live and creative activities. However, as the time went by, and the isolation conditions remained present, it was clear that a different form of being present among the public was necessary, also important, and urgent to make an income as the creative activity would not resume soon.

With notorious delay, universities, and cultural institutions of all levels of government produced some strategies to be present in their communities and to somehow keep their contracts with workers already. But it turned out to be very difficult in the long run. Most of their strategies to keep them active were to transfer their creatives processes and products to digital platforms and free access through social media, but also to paid platforms. However, their technological availability and literacy was a challenge as they hardly have had the necessary equipment, good connectivity and most of all, the capabilities to use devices and produce creative products with good quality, attractive and engaging for the audiences.

Methodology and general data

This paper comes out of an ongoing comparative research project that investigates people's everyday consumption practices, economic histories, and plans in four urban areas of the Global South: Philippines, China, Brazil and Mexico to provide elements to understanding of how globalized economic growth is transforming lives among low-income urban communities today. The project's central proposition is that in emerging economies, sectors of the urban poor are undergoing an economic transition that has consequences not only for material wellbeing, but also for social status, identity formation and belonging. The world's emerging economies appear to be producing new kinds of urban low-income cultures, which fit neither of the older social categories of

“urban poor” nor “middle class.” Economic emergence is producing cultural changes: new economic opportunities, longer periods of residence in cities, more secure forms of housing, increased access to credit, and a deeper integration into mass consumer practices have become characteristics of some communities, which no longer fit comfortably into standard models of urban poverty developed by social scientists and policymakers in previous decades. However, existing research has not established whether people engaging in these new urban lifestyles are actually escaping from poverty, or whether urban poverty is taking on new cultural forms.

To date, investigation of these changes has rested largely upon the work of market researchers, economists, and policy-oriented sociologists whose quantitative data tells that national economic transition, family and labour migration and access to new forms of credit are enabling such households to become increasingly consumer-rich. Many members of the former urban poor increasingly live in ways that until recently were locally read as “middle class.”

Our chosen methodologies were based on qualitative approaches to analyse documents on multidimensional poverty indexes, and to read a broad assortment of realities and multidiscipline takes over the data. Besides, we went further a patchwork ethnography by understanding that “home” and “field” limits were totally diffused and mixed together during our pandemic fieldwork (Günel and Varma, 2020). For our research project it was the only way to understand our subjects’ work, reality and experiences. It included a process of texting, videocalling, visual material exchanging, subject descriptions and short and individual ethnographic visits that allowed us to approach our subjects’ lives. We planned a strategy that kept changing on the go, partly because the pandemic challenges, partly because of the many challenges our interviewees were facing, which we actively tried to avoid being a burden for them; but also, as researchers with academic, working, and social responsibilities, we as a team tried to go with the flow by being opened and prepared with alternative techniques to achieve our field work goals.

The fieldwork where this data was gathered took place between March and August 2021. The total sample included 15 interviews to independent creative workers. On average both groups find themselves in the VI range of income which represents a range between 524.1 and 632 USD dollars per month. So, in general terms, we planned to reach a group of people with jobs within the creative sector, considered somewhere within the low edge to middle class. The selected group includes six women and nine men.

The table below details the subjects of the sample and their creative jobs. Five of them do visual arts, five more work in performing arts, two of them do musical arts, two more dedicate to cultural management, and the last one to literary arts. As we move on to the data, we analyse their activities before the pandemic and how they managed to adapt to the

circumstances created due to the pandemic, taking in account that none of them have family background on arts, cultural capital, or social networks in the creative and arts sector, and all of them describe their main source of income, or at least a good part of it, as freelance or self-employment work. In other words, these are creative workers defining precarious work, living an scenario that was already unthinkable but certainly showing that it could always get worse. Table 2 shows details on the subjects and their creative jobs. Five of them do visual arts, five more work in performing arts, two of them do musical arts, two more dedicate to cultural management, and the last one to literary arts. As we move on to the data, we analyse their activities before the pandemic and how they managed to adapt to the circumstances created due to the pandemic, taking in account that none of them have family background on arts, cultural capital, or social networks in the creative and arts sector, and all of them describe their main source of income, or at least a good part of it, as freelance or self-employment work. In other words, these are creative workers defining precarious work, living in a scenario that was already unthinkable but certainly showing that it could always get worse.

Before social distancing times

Our group of interviewees had jobs in very different creative activities, from street clowns to graphic designers, writers, dancers, and musicians. It is important to notice that 14 of them have professional degrees, and four of them have pursued postgraduate studies. All of them have pursued creative activities for a long time and work hard on making their creative jobs the main income source; however, five of them have had to turn to teaching at any level to make ends meet often enough. Plus, another three of them would use their artistic/technical skills professionally in other fields, one as a reporter for a political party and the second one as a consultant for a cognitive communication company. There is also the case of a third person who has some training as a business administrator, yet he plays music professionally and has combined this endeavor with jobs as cultural manager. Also, before the pandemic two of the youngest participants of our study group were students at the end of their programs in Literature and in Dance, it was basically during the pandemic that they had to begin working in the artistic or another field.

This is a common trend going on even before the pandemic began, “[...] the workers develop in very unstable working conditions that do not offer what was considered as acceptable working conditions in previous decades. Benefits such as pensions, social security and stability are characteristics that hardly appear in creative industries jobs and are less frequently considered as real options for the students in these professions” (Castañeda and Garduño, 2017: 121).

TABLE 2 Interviewees.

Alias—gender—age	Occupation	Educational attainment	Type of employment	Monthly family income range
Antonio—M 23 years	Journalist	Bachelor of arts (Literature)	Freelance	VI
Adriana—F 27 years	Cultural Manager	Bachelor of Dance Master's in production PhD on production	Freelance, self employed	X
Carolina—F 29 years	Graphic communication	Bachelor of Visual Graphic communication	Freelance	IX
Fernando—M 30 years	Dancer	Bachelor of Dance	Freelance	III
Edith—F 30 years	Photographer	Bachelor of Communication Science Master on Arts and Design	Freelance, part time job	X
Gustavo—M 31 years	Graphic designer (employee)	Bachelor of Graphic Design	Freelance	V
Omar—M 31 years	Dance student	Bachelor of Dance	Self employed	VI
Alberto—M 35 years	Musician	Bachelor of Business Administration	Freelance	III
Santiago—M 36 years	Cultural Manager	Bachelor of Cultural Management Master of Communication and Politics Postgraduate student PhD in Humanities	Self employed	IX
Carmen—F 37 years	Children's Entertainer	High School	Freelance, self employed	IV
Ernesto—M 38 years	Musician	Bachelor on Musical Instrument	Freelance	I
Celeste—F 39 years	Graphic designer	Postgraduate student in Master of Design and visual communication	Freelance	VI
Federico—M 45 years	Street artist	Bachelor of communication	Freelance	V
Mariana—F 53 years	Theatre actress	Bachelor of Theatre Arts	Freelance	VI
Ramón—M 37 years	Graphic designer	Master studies in Design and visual communication	Freelance	VII

Source: Own elaboration with data from project's interviews.

Only two of the cases had the possibility to fulfill their household needs with their income coming from creative jobs, one on a PhD full-time scholarship, and another one working as a graphic designer for a large marketing company. This is a prevailing situation even before to the pandemic crisis, but the crisis certainly challenged even more their ways to earn their income and their turn to other activities to survive.

"I have a CONACYT grant, so [the pandemic] did not cause me too much of a struggle, because prior to this I was getting my masters. Then well, this is a steady income, in contrast with people who lost their jobs or had to change their sources of income. Well, honestly it was not much of a blow to me, because I also had savings. So, this has not really got me into trouble" (Santiago, April 2021).

In this first case, becoming a full-time student of a highly recognized postgraduate program has given him financial stability over the past few years. Therefore, in these circumstances, the pandemic has not affected him directly. In a second case, Ramon talks about how he has improved his working conditions by learning how to move around the field, also getting some recognition that has put him in a better place than before, when he did not know how to run the business.

"Now I have the luck to have found good jobs that have allowed me to improve my quality of life, more steadily. Besides, they gave me the chance to keep studying all the time." (Ramón, April 2021).

On the contrary, most of our interviewees referred to the fact that their earnings decreased during the last year moving them downwards the national income ranges. Before the pandemic began, their income oscillated between range III and range X many of them having an earning closer to range VII. This has notably changed for the worst, as some of them even have gone unemployed and left with no income at all:

"Before the pandemic, I was in a X (income range), and now, we are on the bottom, like between IV and V. But, before the pandemic I was comfortably in X." (Federico, August 2021).

They complement their income by teaching in formal or informal ways. Many times, this is a steady and reliable source of income, which tends to support their creative endeavors: "I'm a professional dancer and a teacher on the side" (Fernando, March 2021). Celeste claims: "When I was not teaching, I was working as a freelance illustrator" (April 2021). Some other had experienced precarious conditions before the pandemic and they refer to that as well:



FIGURE 1
Work and earning income strategies.

"I've been lucky. I am a freelance designer, I have worked for agencies and have had the advantage of constantly having money on my pocket. Three years ago, it was very complicated for me, and now with the pandemic, I started to get better projects... I think I have been lucky, but 3 years ago, I would say it was very complicated. It depends a lot on the job I have." (Ramón, April 2021).

But there are also cases that have been struggling for a while, before 2020: "The pandemic did not change anything for me. Nothing at all, my hardest year, financially, was 2019, when I had health problems." (Carolina, March 2021).

When the pandemic arrived

An important indicator is that the number of self-employed individuals increased to 10 of them during the pandemic, some of them were laid out, many of them had to combine their creative jobs with teaching, and had to abandon the creative sector, at least temporarily. As it was already mentioned, face-to-face interactions were severely restricted. Among the activities affected profoundly by this decision were the live arts, leaving these workers without much to do to adjust their jobs. As Carmen mentions here:

"My husband was employed in a restaurant. He is a clown and was working on his show as a clown, magician, and balloon twisting. He had a salary, besides his tips. When all the restaurants closed, he went unemployed." (Carmen, March 2021).

Within weeks, many of them found that the work they had planned for 2020 had disappeared almost entirely, especially when it had to do with live presentations in festivals, stage seasons, and other live shows.

"Now all of us are looking where we can get some income. Now we are not able to put an income together. We are frustrated, because now our gigs are stuck, and there is no support at all, no one, absolutely no one is supporting us, they do not even have any considerations for us." (Ernesto, August 2021).

"As the schools closed, I did not have any classes left to teach. The same happened with performances, as the theaters closed, I did not have any more performances. Not even in the [dancing] companies I collaborate, it all stopped." (Fernando, March 2021).

In general, income decreased and those who initially had considered themselves as middle class or at least being able to easily cover their expenses went into uncertainty, month by month, while the hope of reopening places, venues or any kind of public activity were being held for a long time.

Work and earning strategies to navigate the pandemic

Among the challenges that COVID-19 threw at people were earning an income in spite of having their main income sources limited or fully reduced by mandate. We observe two types of

strategies on which they seem to rely frequently and then six categories in which we can classify their main economic activities during difficult times. First type would be every activity related to trying to keep doing their creative jobs and staying in the creative field, such as digital technologies adaptations; collective creative work initiatives; grants and government funds applications; and multiple small jobs within creative fields. By doing this type of strategies their main goal is partly to have enough income, but most importantly to not abandon the field, because leaving, even only for a short period could threaten their achievements or worst-case scenario would make them leave permanently. Second type refers to every activity related to gather an income no matter it is outside the creative field. This type groups multiple jobs they have been doing explicitly to make a living; some of them hoping to get back to their latter jobs, but some other consciously facing the increasing possibility of leaving the field perhaps permanently. We can consider the family support or social ties (Paugam, 2012) that can be found in different ways and shapes as the most privileged strategy; and again, a variety of multiple jobs but completely out of the field. Figure 1 represents two types of strategies and economic activities creative workers relied on during pandemic social distancing periods.

Creative work-related strategies

Online work adaptations were one of the first strategies back in March 2020, when the pandemic was supposed to last a few weeks at the most, their first response was to transition their usual activities to virtual formats, which had mixed up results. Visual artists, who were more familiar with working from a computer, had less issues adapting their activities to a digital mode. Some of them have already worked online or with digital platforms and devices, which made them more capable to go through social distancing times.

A graphic designer describes:

“At the beginning of the pandemic I worked from home, now I must go to the filming studio to work. I have done both. In my home is only the internet and my cell phone. My bill is only for the internet connection charge, I do not use a landline phone” (Ramón, Graphic Designer, April 2021).

But for others, the transition has not been as smooth. Many of them were not used to deal with digital technology every day, at least not to do their jobs, especially those dedicated to live arts:

“I was not interested in digital technology for a very long time because I took a chance and opted to be in face-to-face contact with people. The virtual world has swept me off my feet during the pandemic” (Federico, street clown, August 2021).

“I think next year, when all this situation of the pandemic would have already finished, or at least improved, I might invest a little in digital technologies, maybe getting a better the computer, or a

laptop. Whatever I used to use, and my technology standards have changed a lot now, and now I've become a little more demanding” (Omar, folklore dancer, March 2021).

As a consequence of transitioning to digital technologies, most of them have modified their activities and adapted to their new tools, which many of them attempted to do with some success as they had little knowledge on how to use them, and more than that, they had not enough tools to get online because their internet connections and digital literacy was very limited.

“Last year, I bought some speakers, because I had a grant from FONCA. I need them to work, because now all is online, then as I knew I needed the equipment to be able to work online, well, then I used that money for it. But meanwhile, there is nothing, because it is hard, there is nothing, there are no concerts, no gigs, I had a few coming, but I got COVID, so the whole month of July I was confined to home” (Ernesto, pop musician, August 2021).

There is another case that found the way to turn the crisis, the digital transition, and his home confinement conditions into some earning strategy as a game streamer. It interesting that this kind of activity it is not putting a strain on his creative work, although it's not related it keeps him doing another job in the limits of the creative field:

“I began to stream my games; it is where I play, and I get donations. I have not done that before. It was because of that extra time that I had. I do it regularly, two or three times a week” (Alberto, country musician and cultural manager, July 2021).

About getting small and multiple jobs within the creative field, Mariana is used to it, she is being pursuing her creative based career by jumping from project to project, but the pandemic enhanced the precarious working conditions she was already blinded to. This is a very common phenomenon in which creative workers appreciate their autonomy and freedom to create under their own schedules, but pandemic made them face the precarity of their careers. They have found themselves jobless, stressful for illness threaten and powerless with no health insurances or savings to go through the crisis. Nonetheless, Mariana has a long trajectory and was able to get to teach private classes:

“Well, I guess I have gotten some tiny projects here and there, and less frequently, but I have gotten some. I cannot complain. I also have gotten some voiceover projects. Besides, last year, I got some face-to-face classes in June, I took them with all the precautions, and we completed four classes in June. This year I got eight more, four on Monday which was face-to-face, and 4 more on Tuesday which was online classes. I also got a tv commercial... very short,

morning shooting, like 4–5 h, I got Covid tested at the beginning of the shooting, we waited for a little while, started shooting, and that was it” (Mariana, actress and broadcaster, September 2021).

Before, but especially during the pandemic, we identified another source of income followed by their consolidation in the creative field, which is applying and eventually winning grants and prizes for their creative careers. Over the past 3 years, five of them have been nominated to earn a prize or grant, one of them winning in the dance field; one of them was granted a community project in his area of residence. One more was awarded by an international children literature festival outside the country, along with some mentions in other festivals; also winning a small grant during the pandemic to produce music for the National Secretariat of Culture and an award for his thesis on promoting the eradication of violence and discrimination in the city.

Although these grants are somehow large amounts of money, and some of them have a positive impact in their careers, they hardly get to improve their working conditions in the long run. Symbolic advantages are also present, like consolidating their statuses as creators and getting legitimacy and recognition within the field. It also means potential contracts in the future, projects, and good opportunities to keep creating and working on the creative sector. On that respect Roman claims: “a revision of the Mexican cultural policies shows that there is a void and disdain for the artist, that generates many of the cultural products that the country wants to protect. So, since the creation of FONCA in 1994, the artists can make a career through the grants, scholarships and funds for production, creativity development, education and training, research, and promotion are actions for the short term” (Román, 2013: 220).

Finally, we had the chance to acknowledge collective organization experiences as a result of insufficient political actions and State intervention to support the field during social distancing and creative work extreme limitations. At least two of our interviewees referred to have been working with self-management collectives that either generate work projects or incorporate political pressure as one of their core values. This kind of collective organizations are doing a laudable work. We consider this is one of the civil society actions that are very promising in the short term and look forward to following them closely.

“So, I am part of a group called ‘Ink Society,’ we are a group of creative women. We got together at the invitation of one of us and we started talking and realized that there was a series of problems we face as illustrators. . . We usually share project calls on our page, we review them because we do not want to share the kind of calls where you are paid only with recognition (and no money).” (Carolina, illustrator, March 2021).

Earning income-related strategies

Meanwhile, other ones had to look out for other economic activities to survive, as the social distancing measures closed live

and public events. The stage artists of our group found alternative sources of income that came from social ties such as family support, family-based business or some other earnings coming from their family assets. This way they could cover monthly rent payments, food, and basic expenses.

“It took us a good while to stabilize ourselves because of the pandemic, we sold a lot of things, we sold a car, my brother’s house in Veracruz was put on rent, all we could sell was sold. Before watching for ourselves, we were watching for the people who were working with us, it was very complicated.” (Adriana, cultural manager and folklore dancer, March 2021)

Many of them turned to start selling highly demanded products that were vital to live under a pandemic, such as groceries from local sources, homemade food, sanitizers, surgical gowns, and COVID-19 face masks.

“And now since the pandemic began, I am starting to sell some products of a brand called LIFE PLUS, that also has a toothpaste without fluor. Then, with the earnings from these sales I am starting to buy more products, LIFE PLUS, because now I sell them.” (Ernesto, pop musician, August 2021).

“I used to have a [financial] cushion. At the beginning of the pandemic, I had enough savings to live for a few months comfortably. Then I started selling protection masks and I made enough for another year. It is only now that I am noticing some shortages” (Federico, street clown, August 2021).

Another very important source of support that comes in different shapes and forms is the one provided by parents, siblings, partners and ex-partners, and it proved to be very reliable. In 13 of the 15 cases, we identified constant help from their communities to sort out their financial situation. The recurrent ways to help them out, are through housing, paying medical bills or providing some cash to cover extraordinary expenses or even regular ones; sometimes, the income coming from their social ties is used to support their creative projects. Some of these strategies are present in the following narratives.

“I bought this apartment and was paying for it by myself; it was a very good opportunity that is why I went for it. Now honestly, I am getting my family support to pay the installments. At the beginning I used to think I would not be able to keep paying. That was my concern. But I have managed to pay it for a while. And then, when I enrolled to my master’s program, I got my family support.” (Celeste, graphic designer and part time lecturer, April 2021).

“I used to rent an apartment with roommates before, but the pandemic made me go back my parents’ home” (Gustavo, graphic designer, March 2021).

"I get private medical insurance through my mother. She told me: 'Look, I am paying for your father's insurance and mine, and I can include yours too.' Our thought was that I am freelance designer, and I do not have social security." (Ramón, illustrator, April 2021).

"I work on the show business, and my dad is my partner. He is the investor" (Adriana, cultural manager and folklore dancer, March 2021).

"We have been a couple for ten years, although we are not living together. Unlike many of my colleagues, I'm lucky he helps me out. He never lost his job, he never stopped working and he is helping me out with a monthly stipend. I have zero earnings; I am not receiving anything at all from acting." (Mariana, actress and broadcaster, September 2021)

Conclusion

As it is possible to observe, the pandemic had a real negative impact in the life of these creative workers as their income decreased importantly. Their previous situation was already precarious, even before the pandemic arrived in Mexico. Therefore, their different ways to gather an income is a very important aspect of their biography and professional career that can explain how they navigate the COVID-19 storm. Although most of them already had to be creative not only because their jobs are based on creative occupations but because it is an economic sector that is distinguished for the precarity of its employment offers, especially to the younger generations as to those who have had less exposure to the creative sector market and therefore have less skills to navigate the circumstances. Therefore, their strategies to make a living out of their creative careers even before the pandemic were already to do multiple jobs on different fields, but the current global economic situation has worsened the scenario, their employment options, and their status in the creative sector labour market. The current conditions have created even more avert living conditions and disparity than before. The important increase of the self-employment points out to further precarity, which also enhances the already existing inequality bridges, with no better conditions in the years to come.

This situation had an impact in their chances to be employed in creative activities during this period and in some cases almost entirely deviated them from their creative pursuits, making even more real the fact that they are part of an economic sector characterized by the fragmentation and precarity of the labour market offers and the working conditions. Thus, multiple jobs strategies make a permanent alternative and not temporary as the would desire; it has become even more evident and necessary to them.

Something that is evident is that they have employed more hours of their work to achieve the same number of results or even less given their lack of digital technology literacy or the lack of

good enough equipment and connectivity to make their creative work more viable and improve their quality. In some cases, they do not seem to be catching up with the fast-changing digital technologies, if anything this seems to be creating greater disparities between those who can afford and have the ability to access updated devices, platforms and software.

The uncertainty on what the future will bring, on how and when the health conditions will improve locally also have an impact in their work, because they cannot really plan in advance and produce good conditions to foresee new creative projects in due course. This situation has an impact on their pocket but also in their way of thinking of creative jobs and their vulnerable presence in the field. Although this is only an explorative approach to a small group of interviewees, this research shows how the creative expressions have been hit and decreased possibilities to growth their importance and legitimacy on the labour market; on the contrary, working and living conditions for the creative workers are not expected to improve in the short term. It seems highly likely that many of them will not be able to go back to the creative and artistic sector, at least not on the same terms, doing what they know best, what they are passionate about, and what they have imagined as their life plan and career.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Acknowledgments

For the development of this paper, we would like to thank the Australian Research Council, Western Sydney University and University of Technology Sydney for providing and managing the funds for the research project. We thank Dr. Anna Cristina Pertierra (University of Technology Sydney) who invited us to join the team. Also, we appreciate Maribel Montufar and Manuel Acevedo's hard work on putting this paper together.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 08 August 2022

ACCEPTED 06 December 2022

PUBLISHED 20 December 2022

CITATION

Dibattista I (2022), Building a collective ecological identity: A multidisciplinary reflection.
Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 12:11106.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11106

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Building a collective ecological identity: A multidisciplinary reflection

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In this article, collective ecological identity will be theoretically investigated, with the aim to understand the role of public opinion and policy in driving action. In recent years, awareness towards environmental issues is increasing; however, environmental targets set by political agendas are yet to be reached. Hilgartner and Bosk's "The Rise and Fall of Social Problems" (1988) offers an insight into the mismatch between public opinion and action, suggesting that public attention towards certain social issues depends on interconnected public arenas that produce a feedback effect, worsening the social problem. From this point of view, public opinion on a social problem does not engender collective action. However, according to Schudson (1989), the resonance and institutionalisation of a certain cultural object is fundamental to its inclusion in the culture of a given community, making cultural policy a necessary condition to change a society.

KEYWORDS

public opinion, cultural policies, collective ecological identity, multidisciplinary, environmental issues

Introduction

"(...) To acquire a political meaning | you don't even have to be human. | Raw material will do, | or protein feed, or crude oil, (...)." ¹

These lines highlight how every natural element can acquire a political meaning, in a society where every human action or word, even those without political origins, has consequences on the community.

The author of the poem is Wislawa Szymborska. She was a Polish poet and the recipient of the Nobel prize in literature in 1996. She lived in times when freedom of thought and expression were difficult: she was born in Poland in 1923, and her first book, which was supposed to be published in 1949, was rejected because of non-compliance with socialist standards.

¹ Wislawa Szymborska (1923–2012): Children of Our Age, 1993, from People on the Bridge, 1986, in Poems New and Collected (1988), translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh.

Unsurprisingly, after an initial period of ideological proximity to socialist realism, she realised she did not identify with it anymore, coming to reject her own early career works. As stated by [Gammaitoni \(2018\)](#), the poet shifted from hymning her communist companions as heroes for building a social collective identity, to promoting individual subjectivity against collectivist thinking. In a regime there is no room for intermediate nuances. However, the aim of this paper is not to start a debate on totalitarian regimes, but to reflect on how strong the interconnection between individual action and society is. Whether this is seen as a critique, a fatality, or a hope, it is an “unquestionable fact”² (borrowing the poet’s words).

“Man as an individual, in the meaning of being an exception with respect to the world, can, according to Szyborska, learn from the mistakes of history and not cause suffering to others, while the general problems which bind us are the development of a shared awareness by human society.” ([Gammaitoni, 2018: 34](#))

Nevertheless, it seems that humankind has not learned from the mistakes of history, despite having developed a shared awareness of many issues. One of those issues is environmental sustainability: the recent efforts of international policies towards a more sustainable world (see [UN General Assembly, 2015](#)) appear to be well-known; however, the current environmental crisis is still severe because of the inconsistency of collective action beyond societal roles. Let us take an example from Italy, which shows how awareness of environmental sustainability has increased enormously in the recent years, without concrete actions taken. In [ASSIRM, 2019](#) (an association that brings together firms specialising in market and social research and opinion polls) launched an Observatory on Sustainability (*Osservatorio sulla Sostenibilità*), with the aim of monitoring the sensitivity and commitment of both Italian citizens and firms to environmental, social, and economic sustainability. To do so, the Observatory conducted research that consisted of two waves, one in 2019 ([ASSIRM, 2019](#)), and the second in 2020 ([ASSIRM, 2020](#)) on a representative sample of Italian consumers. The two resulting reports outlined attitudes towards (environmental, economic, and social) sustainability, main areas/topics of interest, perceived interest, commitment, and perceived level of information on sustainability issues. Compared with the 2019 report, the 2020 report presented a deeper awareness of environmental issues, but also dissatisfaction regarding the perceived interest and commitment of society towards these topics, most likely due to the high expectations set by Fridays for Future and other recent environmental movements.³

This creates a paradox. On one side, public opinion is currently focused on environmental issues and the public are aware and prepared; on the other side, there is a lack of action, which is not only perceived by people but also validated by data: an ISTAT (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) report on Sustainable Development Goals ([ISTAT, 2019](#)) shows that the active progress we are making is still not enough to reach Agenda 2030 objectives.

The current literature on behavioural science and social movements identifies both awareness and the formation of a collective identity as a basis to prompt collective action ([Melucci, 1989](#); [Melucci, 1996](#); [Talyor and Whittier, 1992](#); [Polletta and James, 2001](#); [Holland et al., 2008](#); [Ackland and O’Neil, 2011](#)). Moreover, in a political context, the relevance of culture and identity in supporting human development is rising: the 2030 Agenda integrates, for the first time, culture in a development program ([Kaymas, 2019](#)). For these reasons, establishing the fact that a collective ecological identity is actually spreading could be of paramount importance to support ecological transition and to transform awareness into action. Notwithstanding this, accumulated knowledge on collective ecological identity is fragmented, with a gap in the literature concerning the shared and overarching theoretical articulation of this phenomenon.

Bearing in mind these considerations, this paper serves as a steppingstone to fill this gap. It aims to theorise on the process of building an ecological collective identity, reflects on the role of public policies, opinion, and arenas as tools of dissemination in this cultural climate changing process, and assesses whether those tools act as lock-ins or levers of collective action. This may serve as a foundation to explain how masses can be coherently and meaningfully mobilised, based on a shared social reality ([David and Bar-Tal, 2009](#)).

Therefore, the research question is: is a collective ecological identity arising? To answer this, the article is structured as follows: in the first section, definitions, drivers, and challenges of the general concept of collective identity are outlined; in the second section, insights on collective ecological identity are provided; and in the third section, the role of public policy and opinion in the building of a collective ecological identity is more specifically analysed.

The approach used in this paper is multidisciplinary and draws theories from different bodies of knowledge such as social, psychological, philosophical, political, and communication sciences. This is done because of the need to integrate different points of view in order to allow a holistic and meaningful understanding of both environmentalism and collective identity.

Collective identity

The dualism between individual and collective identity has always been the subject of reflection and study for humankind.

2 From the poem “Metaphysics”, by Wislawa Szymborska. <http://www.ashokkarra.com/2008/07/wislawa-szymborska-metaphysics/> (Last visited 31 January 2020).

3 https://www.assirm.it/osservatorio-sulla-sostenibilit-assirm_att78.htm (Last visited 31 January 2020).

From the ancient Heraclitus' disciples, who wondered how immobile identity could exist in a world where "everything flows," to the nineteenth-century French sociologist Durkheim, who described the homo duplex as the individual stretched between individualism and social being, to the contemporary Italian Galimberti, who stated "*l'identità è un dono sociale*" (identity is a social gift), the impossibility of defining individuality as separated from social, cultural, and natural contexts is evident.

Socio-antropological insights on collective identities

The dichotomy between individual and social identity may be explained through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986). This theory distinguishes between a personal identity, concerning the unique features of an individual, and a social identity, derived from the knowledge, perception, value, and emotional meaning that an individual experiences upon membership of one or more social groups. The latter develops from two processes: a cognitive process, consisting of the categorisation and attribution of meaning to both self-made groups and external groups; and a motivational process, consisting of the desire to distinguish between her/his own group and other groups. The consequence is a systematic preference for the values, norms, and behaviours of her/his group over those of external groups. Occasionally, this may lead to a process of depersonalisation, explained by the Self-categorisation theory (Turner, 1991; Turner, 1999), in which individuals may define elements of a social category as replaceable and interchangeable, instead of as unique personalities, depending on the intensity of self-categorisation in a specific situation.

The above micro-individual psychological explanation on how social identity functions within an individual serves as a means to explain what occurs at a macro-socio-psychological level in collective identity formation. In this paper, the definition by Holland et al. (2008), as opposed to other definitions provided in the literature, is used, because of the authors' approach, which goes against the idea of movements as unified actors, and emphasises the cultural and anthropological aspects of social movement, seen as a decentred and dialogic phenomenon.

More specifically, the authors define the collective identity of a social movement as "participants' shared sense of the movement as a collective actor—as a dynamic force for change—that they identify with and are inspired to support in their own actions. Elaborating more fully, a collective identity develops within an imagined world (e.g., Wofford In Press)—or, to use another term, a figured world (Holland et al., 1998)—which is a realm of interpretation and action generated by the participants of a movement through their shared activities and commitments that imagines the terrain of struggle, the powers of opponents, and the possibilities of a changed world." Further, in a

note, it is specified that "[...] non-participants are important in forming this sense as well."

From this definition, it is possible to identify the importance of the following elements:

- (1) The identification with, or belonging to, beliefs and ideals that underlie a particular group.
- (2) The presence of an action.
- (3) The existence of an imagined or figured world, with shared activities, commitment, but also forecasts and hopes.
- (4) The existence of non-participants.

In other words, to resume the concept used previously, collective identity indicates a common recognition that members of a certain group share the same social identity (David and Bar-Tal, 2009). Beyond the listed features, one of the most relevant points outlined in the work of Holland et al., (2008) is that collective identity formation, as in all other cultural phenomena, is fundamentally dialogic. This means that collective identities are continually emerging and changing among people and groups as well as in multiple places of discussion. Identities are built in dialogues concerning the movement, between two or more actors, and result in new cultural forms of knowledge that will be subsequently absorbed and used in further interactions. Thus, it is important to analyse the so-called "places of discussion" when studying the formation of a collective identity.

One common element in this and in other definitions of collective identity detectable in the anthropological and sociological literature, is the importance of diversity: it is possible to group people under one (or more) distinctive element, allowing discernment of that group from the totality or from other groups. This may well be a "double-edged sword" (Saunders, 2008) in the building of a collective identity, and presents several challenges, outlined below, particularly when the overall objective is to create global shared knowledge and action; as in the case of ecological transition.

Firstly, a collective identity cannot be absolute because it requires, by definition, the existence of non-participants. This is already in contrast with the entirety of the aforementioned goal, and may create discrimination instead of unification (Saunders, 2008). Secondly, current society is extremely complex and rapidly changing, therefore, it is likely that individuals identify only partially with a group (Alcantud and De Andres, 2016). It is more likely that they identify with more groups (Chafetz et al., 1998), which can either intersect with one another in some aspects, or lead to completely opposite ideal positions in other aspects. This may cause confusion, not only over the sense of belonging, but also over the consequent actions, leading to an impasse or a step backwards. Finally, according to van Zoonen (2013), most cultural and social theories consider identity to be multiple, dynamic, and volatile. Moreover, the most recent developments in these theories underline how identity may be interpreted as a flexible outcome of specific social and cultural

acts. Instead of being a positive factor, van Zoonen states that this “fragmented self” may in fact hinder the definition of “real selves” and increase inauthenticity (as in the case of whitewashing and greenwashing).

The interconnection among collective identity, culture, and policies

The interaction between collective identity and policies is a relevant aspect to consider when discussing identity formation. In the previous section, identity was depicted as multiple and dynamic. This dynamicity causes significant theoretical and political implications, since, as stated by Chafetz et al. (1998: xvii), an inter-influence between norms (or policies) and identities exists.

Public policy is articulated within the framework of a state that has the political legitimacy to enforce it (Duxbury et al., 2017). Therefore, policies are imposed by an authority that has a double function: legitimacy and coercion (Ruggie 1983). In other words, the authority can legitimise a certain norm and can sanction actors who do not respect it. These functions have a social impact, and can influence collective identity and action, either by identification with, or opposition to, the policies imposed. Policies set standards and guidelines to follow, and for this reason, according to Kantner (2006), political communities develop powerful institutions to defend social roles and to enhance citizen identification with those roles. However, these roles and policies may change as a result of repeated interactions: “Relatively rapid, traumatic events can lead an individual or collective entity to add new identities, or reorder the salience of existing ones. States suddenly thrust into new roles or new environments may radically reorder their priorities. Such sudden policy changes, however, are rare. A greater appreciation for identity can help explain state policies.” (Chafetz et al., 1998: xiii). This is, on the other hand, how identities can influence policies. As also suggested by Ramus (2018), social pressure can result in the creation of new policies that, in turn, lead to the institutionalisation of a certain norm, reinforcing the spread of a cultural trait.

In the specific case of policies concerning a strong ethical function in a given society, collective identification is an essential variable according to the Integration Theory (Keohane and Hoffmann, 1991), because without a real change in identity, it is possible to obtain behavioural cooperation by incentivising self-interested actors, but not possible to create a community (Wendt, 1994). Cultural policies are a topical example of how policies can interact, and are interwoven, with collective identities, together fostering collective action towards human development.

The following section takes a closer look at the ecological field, aiming to theoretically detect the main features of collective identity in an environmental movement, and drawing practical

examples from the political context in order to explain the relationships between cultural policies and ecological collective identity and action.

Collective ecological identity

Although this terminology has been used extensively, no unambiguous definition is provided in the literature. According to the state-of-the-art, scholars have mostly focused on individual ecological identity, as in the case of Walton and Jones (2018), who developed a measurement scale for detecting ecological identity in individuals. Alternatively, several groups have analysed collective identity in specific green movements (Ackland and O’Neil, 2011; Reisinezhad, 2014; Escalera-Reyes, 2020; Ulug et al., 2021).

“What is an ecological identity?”

A major contribution to a more theoretical social interpretation of this topic has been provided by Light (2000) in his article “What is an Ecological Identity?”. He analysed environmentalism from a political point of view: the article is less culture-based than the theories considered up until his writing; however, it offers some insights that could help ontologically reflecting on, and practically coping with, the challenges mentioned in the previous section. Even though he does not use the term “collective,” he refers to the social identity underlying the environmental social movement. More particularly, he tried to determine whether environmentalism could be considered as a form of identity politics, similar to feminism or race-based politics, at the core of new social movements.

Identity politics is a form of politics “where agents ground their self-conception as political agents in some aspect of their identities” (2007: 60). It often has a negative connotation attached, because the possessed identity trait is clearly distinguishable, treated differently, and is, more precisely, the subject of oppression. In other words, a certain form of identity politics can arise in resistance to a specific form of oppression. Based on this assumption, the author wonders what is the constitutive profile of ecological identity, or in other words, the characteristic trait that explains and encompasses that identity. For example, the constitutive profile of feminism is being a woman subject to oppression from patriarchal society. Environmentalism is not so simple: its constitutive profile is identified by empathy towards the mistreatment (or oppression) of nature, and not by politicisation of a personal identity trait.

This complexity has led several authors (Young, 1990; Aronowitz, 1994; Sandilands, 1995) to different answers: while Aronowitz (1994) and Sandilands (1995) related environmentalism to other identity politics and new social

movements, Young (1990) had a different point of view. She divides new social movements into three main categories: movements challenging hegemony and the power of decision-makers (she inserts environmental movement here); movements organising independent services (for example, self-help organisations for ethnic minorities); and movements of cultural identity (for example, contemporary feminism) (Young, 1990: 83). According to Light (2000), the third category describes what Aronowitz means by identity politics in general, and, even though Young (1990) does not include environmentalism in this category, this supports the idea that it is possible to consider it a form of identity politics, because “part of the core of environmentalism is a cultural stance” (Light, 2000: 61).

This classification problem is due to the fact that a gap exists between the subjectivity of the politicised trait and the object of identity politics itself, different from the situation in race-based identity politics, where there is no difference between the subject and the object. However, Light (2000) uses the example of male feminism to show that identity politics is chosen rather than internally or externally imposed: a man can decide to be a feminist because of empathy, or to fight the empowered decision-making structures.

Therefore, this subject-object gap can be filled in two ways: 1) a person embraces the radical ideal that humans are indistinguishable from nature, like deep ecologists and radical ecofeminists do. However, this is sometimes criticised because it could lead to ecofascism and 2) since identity politics is chosen and not imposed, a person may decide to embrace some fights for empathy or other types of drivers. The author believes that these two cases (which he calls “attached ecological identity” and “detached ecological identity or environmental liberalism,” 2007: 67) create two different types of environmental identity politics, which may have different views on political actions to be taken.

The considerations made thus far may be easily related to the challenges mentioned in the previous section (discrimination instead of unification in the same social movement, confusion regarding the sense of belonging, and inauthenticity deriving from fragmentation). However, as stated by Light (2007: 68), “the characterization of an ecological identity does not mean that all forms of environmental theory or activism are identity-based. As the analysis and encouragement of a broad-based movement requires [*sic*] an understanding of all of its manifestations, an understanding of an empathy with nature based in personal identity is also required as one manifestation of environmentalism. Wanting as many descriptions as possible of the political ground of environmentalism serves a kind of practical pluralism which may be necessary for achieving a broad-based movement. Providing a more thorough description of an ecological identity ensures that part of that movement will have a coherent basis.”

The author concludes that environmentalism may be classified as identity politics; it must cope with conceptual and

political problems, but at the same time has many pros. The first pro is that environmentalism could create coalitions with other identity positions in order to be more successful against anti-progressive forces (Light, 2000: 76). The second pro is that environmentalism can overcome the barriers that challenge the formation of a broader ecological collective identity; not only from a political perspective, but also from a more cultural and social perspective.

Since environmentalism has been identified as a social movement, it is thus theoretically proven that it may possess the characteristics listed by Holland et al., (2008): it is undeniable that the complexity of environmentalism is difficult to handle; however, it may arise globally, under the similar umbrella concept of collective ecological identity, as a decentral and place-based movement that depends on the cultural identities, discourses, and practices of a specific group. Thus, fraudulent actions such as greenwashing (third challenge) do not depend on the fragmented self of the ecological identity, but on the intentions of the people that act.

Cultural policies to foster “ecological citizenship”

Policies may catalyse ecological collective action. As mentioned in the Introduction, cultural policies are gaining importance for the regulation of sustainable development (including ecological commitment) and are redefining the role of culture in the European political context. A framework on how cultural policies can serve sustainable development is provided by Duxbury et al. (2017), who identified four key strategic paths for cultural policies in relation to sustainability: the fourth objective is “to foster ‘ecological citizenship’” (Duxbury et al., 2017: 222) and is the motivation for this article.

Analysis of the literature shows that the main approach used to define collective identities and public cultural policies is national (Chafetz et al., 1998; Anderson, 1983; Kantner, 2006; Wendt, 1994; Kaymas, 2019; Pascual, 2018); however, according to some authors among those listed, there is a need to shift from a national to an international (or global) concept of state in order to support human development, concerning issues shared by all of humanity, for example, environmental degradation. More specifically, Anderson (1983), for instance, states that cultural policy can create an “imagined community,”⁴ able to push global citizenship to address sustainability as a global issue. However, while Anderson referred to the nation when speaking about imagined community, Duxbury et al. (2017) highlight the need for a paradigm shift in cultural policies that aim to reinforce

4 This terminology leads back to the definition of collective identity by Holland, Fox and, Daro (2008).

national identities instead of creating a sense of humanity as a whole.

Pascual (2018) took a more local approach, stating that the starting point is at the international or national level; there is a need to narrow down the implementation area of cultural policies to a local level so that they can truly impact society.

In recent years many international initiatives have promoted the link between cultural identities, policies, and sustainable development. UNESCO is the main promoter of the fundamental role of cultural change to support ecological transition: a practical example is the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO, 2005), which recognises cultural rights as the basis of sustainable development, and makes explicit the connection between identity, communities, culture, and sustainability. “Reshaping Cultural Policies” is monitoring the implementation of this convention. This is one of many policy documents published by UNESCO, together with high level events organised by the UNO⁵—mentioning objectives that “Highlight the connection between culture and biological diversity with particular relation to local solutions to climate change and environmental challenges”⁶—or actions implemented by the European Culture Foundation,⁶ setting culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development.⁷

These political efforts are not in vain, and a study by Pappalardo et al. (2022), on the effect of the UNESCO designation of the dry-stone walls in Mt. Etna (Sicily-Italy) as a World Heritage, demonstrates the societal impact of cultural policies. The study shows that this designation affected Sicilian consumers’ willingness to pay (WTP) to preserve cultural sites, and that the designation sufficiently compensated farmers for the loss of income derived from maintaining the dry-stone walls. As stated by the authors, their findings underline the importance of cultural policy and its effect on environmental values, at least on that specific population.

Public arenas as places for discussion of collective ecological identity

Since dialogue is at the centre of collective identity formation, in this section, some theoretical insights from communication and social studies are used to analyse the role of public opinion

and communication in the formation of a collective ecological identity.

As demonstrated in several studies, information and communication have a strong influence on pro-environmental behaviour. For example, the research by Han and Xu (2020) focuses on demonstrating that interpersonal communication, traditional media, and social media have a positive influence on stimulating pro-environmental action (that is, a fundamental element witnessing the existence of a collective identity).

However, as stated in our Introduction, the mismatch between awareness and action leads to a paradox. The paradox exists because, without public arenas such as social media or the news, people cannot know that this knowledge is so shared; conversely, at the same time, knowing it leads to higher expectations that are not always satisfied by the real world, consequently generating disillusionment and lack of motivation.

“The Rise and Fall of Social Problems” (1988) by Hilgartner and Bosk offers an insight into the mismatch between public opinion and action. Treating an environmental crisis as a social problem, the authors’ model suggests that public attention towards certain social issues depends on interconnected public arenas (such as the media) that produce a feedback effect, worsening the social problem. The magnitude of the social problem is stemmed by the finite carrying capacities of public arenas and is driven by the competition among them as well as by the need for sustained drama to attract consumers. From this point of view, it transpires that public opinion on a social problem is not necessarily related to collective action. However, according to Schudson (1989), the resonance of a certain cultural object is fundamental to its inclusion in the culture of a given community. He identifies a cultural object as the necessary operationalisation of culture: culture is not separable from social structure, economics, politics, or other features of human activity, but requires objectivisation in cultural objects that can be detected and observed.

To examine the power of a cultural object, Schudson measures five dimensions: retrievability, rhetorical force, resonance, institutional retention, and resolution (1989, 160). Retrievability refers to the reachability of the cultural object in space or time, either in the surrounding world or in the mind of a person through memory (1989, 161). Rhetorical force refers to how memorable and powerful the cultural object is (1989, 164–165). Resonance refers to the degree with which a cultural object echoes in the life of the audience (1989, 167). Institutional retention refers to how highly intertwined the considered cultural object is with institutions (1989, 170). Finally, resolution refers to the capability of cultural objects to influence actions (1989, 171).

Focusing on environmentalism, as may be inferred by Schudson’s theory, the spread of ecological knowledge is fundamental for the absorption of ecological culture, and,

5 See <https://www.un.org/pga/73/event/culture-and-sustainable-development/>.

6 <https://cultureactioneurope.org/files/2019/09/Implementing-Culture-in-Sustainable-Development-Goals-SDGs.pdf>.

7 This categorisation has been extensively analysed by Dessein et al. (2015).

consequently, for the development of a collective ecological identity that will lead to collective action.

Institutional retention requires specific focus, considering what has been revealed about the role of cultural policies in the previous section. The institutionalisation of a cultural object confers power and legitimacy to that object; applying this in the context of environmental behaviour, the institutionalisation of ecological commitment using policies is necessary (although not sufficient) to render environmentalism part of a culture. The study by Pappalardo et al. (2022) discussed in the previous section supports this theory.

Public arenas are drastically changing. The work by Hiltgartner and Bosk (1988) dates back to an age where the internet was not yet common and social media did not exist; therefore, their analysis requires revision considering the rise and capillarity of new information and communication technologies. As stated by Ackland and O'Neil (2011), information and communication technologies perfectly fit the ideological needs of social movements by enabling values such as informality, decentralisation, and diversity, rather than centralisation and hierarchy.

According to Han and Xu (2020), the most prominent factors that affect pro-environmental behaviour are: environmental risk perception, environmental knowledge, environmental concern, and a willingness to contribute to the environment. These have been analysed in relation to the main types of communication and information flow: interpersonal communication, traditional media, and social media. Han and Xu (2020) demonstrated that traditional media significantly influences environmental risk perception, whereas interpersonal communication has a stronger influence on the other factors. Social media seems to exhibit traits of both interpersonal communication and traditional media communication, creating a so-called “pseudo-environment” in which it is possible to present information at a personal level. This “pseudo-environment,” thanks to its feedback system (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988), encourages people to share and to demonstrate that they belong to a certain community (in this case the ecological community). This relates back to the “figured world” described by Holland et al., (2008), which discusses the definition of collective identity, making the existence of a collective ecological identity even more salient.

Conclusion

The main objective of this article was to begin a theoretical reflection on the definition and the creation of a collective ecological identity, as part of human culture. Although this reflection could be ascribed to a western and middle-class society (Light, 2000), it reinforces the body of literature that intends to understand how to create a cohesive collective action

that may support a transformative change towards an environmentally (and not only) sustainable global society. The research question that led to this theoretical analysis was “Is a collective ecological identity arising?” and, according to the theories considered from different bodies of knowledge, the answer may well be affirmative. However, this represents just a small step in a long and winding path.

Considering collective identity as a shared sense among a population of movement as a collective actor (Holland et al., (2008)), environmentalism seems to meet all the requirements set by the definition, and seems to cope with all the challenges that cultural objects (Schudson, 1989) should face. At the same time, an ecological collective identity may stress both differences and distance among people belonging to that particular social group as well as outsiders. According to Duxbury et al. (2017), in order to use cultural policy as an instrument to decrease this distance, a shift from a sense of national belonging to a sense of global belonging is required, subverting the self-segregating effect of identity politics in issues shared by all of humanity, such as environmentalism. In other words, the development of an ecological collective identity is positive, since this means that environmental concern is (once again) becoming part of the culture of some societies. However, the overall objective should be to reach a level where it is impossible to detect outsiders; where the culture is so absorbed that this is automatic and embedded in human life.

Concerning public opinion and policies, a strong link exists between global information society policies and cultural policies, with implications for technological convergence and change (Duxbury et al., 2017; Kaymas, 2019). This article supports the assertion that they serve more as a lever and an enabler of building a collective ecological identity than as a lock-in, although still not enough action is being taken. The inconsistencies of the intentions of humans is something that can also be detected in other fields, not only in environmental sustainability.

It is well-known that public opinion suffers from many biases and is treated as goods or a commodity by public arenas such as traditional and social media; however, at the same time, public opinion increases awareness and prompts action, which are the basis for building a collective ecological identity. Even though, as stated by Han and Xu (2020), the media may modify risk perceptions of certain phenomena, communication allows knowledge sharing, which is fundamental to developing a sense of urgency and collective action.

Lastly, a final thought on the transformation of a social identity and cultural evolution is worthy. Let us consider the example of the Italian education and university system, and draw a parallel with computer science and information technology. For example, the first information technology University departments in Italy were created in the 60s, and were sections of Mathematics and Physics departments. Only later, thanks to a larger theoretical basis and more literature, information

technology became more independent. The first computer science degree program was established in Pisa in 1969, and nowadays information technology courses are present in all universities.

Environmental sustainability has other antecedents, but is following a similar path: in the academic year 2022/2023 28 Italian institutes will establish the so-called “licei TED” (Transizione Ecologica e Digitale): high schools aimed at allowing students to support the Ecological and Digital Transition.

This article offers a number of insights on the issue but does not provide readers with certain answers. Further theoretical, bibliographic, and experimental research, should be conducted to better define the collective ecological identity phenomenon, and to use it as a foundation to support ecological transition to a point where “Raw material (...), or protein feed, or crude oil” (Szymborska, 1986) will no longer be perceived as political.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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RECEIVED 08 August 2022

ACCEPTED 01 December 2022

PUBLISHED 20 December 2022

CITATION

Molderez I, Branzila C, Lambrechts W and Maas P (2022), Discovering the culture-led regenerative transformation of a city. Walter Benjamin as an inspiration for the Eco-Flâneur. *Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic.* 12:11088. doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11088

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Discovering the culture-led regenerative transformation of a city. Walter Benjamin as an inspiration for the Eco-Flâneur

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Walter Benjamin developed the idea of the flâneur in 'Charles Baudelaire: A lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism'. He used the powerful figure of the flâneur, a familiar character in the nineteenth century, to analyze modernity. In this paper, a close reading of the literature on Walter Benjamin and the flâneur is provided with a highlight on its relevance for a critical reflection on sustainability for higher education in management. The concept of the flâneur is taken further to eco-flâneur, i.e., strollers as students and teachers who see what is happening and changing in the city and how street life is being transformed towards sustainability. As an eco-flâneur they do not only discover the regenerative transformation of a city, but also co-create it. The eco-flâneur is suggested as an alternative pedagogy to unite soul, eye and hand, three elements that are brought into connection by Walter Benjamin and that are vital for a sustainability mindset. The concept of the eco-flâneur is used as a metaphor to rethink education and to suggest ways for transformative learning.

KEYWORDS

Walter Benjamin, eco-flâneur, regenerative, cities, transformative learning, Brussels

Introduction

*Mein Flügel ist zum Schwung bereit,
ich kehrte gern zurück,
denn blieb ich auch lebendige Zeit,
ich hätte wenig Glück.*

(Gerhard Scholem, Gruss vom Angelus)

Greetings from Angelus was written by Walter Benjamin's close friend Gerhard Scholem (Hamburger, 1982). The poem takes a central role in Benjamin's essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, completed in 1940 and originally published in *Neue Rundschau* in 1950. It is the last essay in the volume *Illuminations* introduced by

Hannah Arendt in 1955. Writing private poetry was a long tradition between German philosophers. The aim was not to publish it, but just to send it to their intellectual friends (Constantine, 2018). The cover of the collection of Scholem's poetry, translated by Scholem (2018), is not by accident the *Angelus Novus*, an ink drawing by Paul Klee. This piece of art was bought by Walter Benjamin in 1921 and kept like a guardian angel (Farago, 2016; Jeffries, 2016; Sennett, 2018; Wolfe, 2020). When it was stuck in Berlin when Benjamin left Germany, it was brought to him in 1935. He could not take it with him while he had to flee Paris in 1940, trying to pass the France-Spain border. Benjamin tragically committed suicide to avoid arrest by the officers of Nazi-occupied France. Just before leaving Paris, his last writings and the angel were given to Georges Bataille who kept it safe until after the war. The writings were then passed on to Theodor Adorno and the *Angelus Novus* to Gershom Scholem who took care of it throughout his lifetime. Scholem's widow finally granted it to the Israel Museum in 1987.

The *Angelus Novus* was an inspiration for Walter Benjamin and he called it his most precious possession (Farago, 2016). The angel does not look like the traditionally imagined angel: "The angel stands suspended like a dummy or a marionette in a mucky yellow field; his wings are grand but inadequate, and he seems trapped between forward and backward motion" (Farago, 2016). Or as Benjamin (1955), p. 249 described the angel: "His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." The angel is confronted with a storm, i.e., progress, that it cannot stop (De Joya, 2014). Walter Benjamin (1955), p. 251 invites to think in a critical way about dogmatic believe in progress: "... the progress in the mastery of nature, not the retrogression of society ..." The angel is in-between two worlds, between a god and human, between past and future, between world A and world B, between the world we are living in now and the world we have left. The angel is also a wake-up call that there can be more than only a contemplating of what happened in the past. Like De Joya (2014) asks: "Are we, like the angel, hurled into the future against our will?"

Despite numerous and competing interpretations (Hope, 2020), in this article we want to use the spirit of the *Angelus Novus* as a call for critical reflection about the state of our contemporary society. Can we resist the exploitation of nature and man for the sake of growth or are the piles of debris hiding a new society that rises from its ashes? Higher education in

management plays an important role in the current sustainability challenges. The urgency to come up with transformations in what and how universities teach and how they create knowledge is recognised. Transgressing boundaries between disciplines is needed, but rare within higher education in management. In this article, literature is combined with a course on sustainable management. The aim of the paper is to highlight the relevance of Walter Benjamin and the flâneur for opening up the curriculum and encouraging business and management students to observe what is happening around them, to discover the regenerative transformation of a city and to co-create it accordingly. The article is structured as follows. In the second section the relationship between Walter Benjamin and sustainability is described. Then the analysis will be made about the meaning of the flâneur for the concept of the eco-flâneur. In the fourth section the pedagogical value of the (eco-)flâneur is explained with an illustration for higher education in management in the fifth section.

Walter Benjamin and sustainability

Walter Benjamin has a lot to offer in relation to sustainability. His *Angelus Novus* can be perceived as a sign of contemplation for the sustainability challenges we face nowadays. Is the storm of progress catapulting us towards the future, seeing the already massive debris growing, or will this work as a trigger for a transformation? Benjamin's (1955) emphasis on "the old co-ordination of the soul, the eye and the hand", referring to the French author and poet Paul Valéry, is similar to the emphasis on the combination of head, heart and hand which are often mentioned in relation with sustainability (Ivanaj et al., 2014). The four content areas of a sustainability mindset that Kassel et al. (2016) suggest, i.e., systems perspective, spiritual intelligence, ecological worldview and emotional intelligence, are made explicit according to thinking, being and doing, which are different ways of saying head, heart and hand (Molderez et al., 2021). To be able to stimulate regenerative transformations, the three are needed at the same time, although in education the emphasis is often only on acquiring knowledge in relation with sustainability.

Referring to Walter Benjamin as a source of inspiration for rethinking management education and integrating transformative learning is uncommon (Molderez, et al., 2021). His work has been included in the analysis of many postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers (Branzila, 2017). Walter Benjamin is often characterised as an "outsider", as Gerhard Scholem wrote (Hamburger, 1982) and as an "heterodox thinker about politics and art" (Farago, 2016). The enormous number of articles and essays that he wrote during his short life is impressive because of its depth and diversity (Eiland and Jennings, 2014). Thanks to Walter Benjamin and his friend Siegfried Kracauer popular culture was invented as an "object of serious study". Especially

his critical evaluation of modernity and the consumer society made him a forerunner of cultural studies. There is only one explanation that his work is still inevitable after more than seventy years and that is the “power of his ideas” according to Eiland and Jennings (2014, p. 3).

In his well-known text *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin (1955) makes a contrasting comparison between the doctor-surgeon and the healer-shaman. Using Baudelaire’s motifs, Benjamin introduces, as a metaphorical embodiment of the poet according to Baudelaire’s perspective, the figure of *the chiffonier*, the one who gathers urban waste and left-overs of the city, an occupation that brings him closer to Lévi-Strauss’ *bricoleur*. The occupations Baudelaire mentions: *flâneur*, *chirurgien*, *shaman*, *chiffonier* and *bricoleur* all resonate in Benjamin’s work, but there is a special focus on the first—the wanderer that drew the authors’ attention in this article. It also drew the attention of numerous celebrated authors like Janet Wolff, Griselda Pollock, Zygmunt Bauman, Gianpaolo Nuvolat who all regard *le flâneur* as an explorer of the city’s landscape and the ideology behind its representations. Bauman states: “It is the modern world which is the original *flâneur*, the Baudelaire/Benjamin human *flâneur* is but its mirror image, its imitation, the product of stocktaking, of forced adjustment and mimicry” (Bauman, 1994).

Benjamin’s (1999) Arcades Project also invites for a critical reflection on the contemporary state of cities. Only focussing on attractions and spectacles shows a superficial city. It increases the number of visitors, but at the same time shows its emptiness. When the action is over, people leave and have not taking anything else from it, like a deeper experience, a reflection on how the city and everybody who is part of it, is contributing to making it better than before. Raworth (2017) calls this “being generous”, i.e., “giving back to the living systems of which we are part.” Regeneration goes much further than restoring systems, but aims to bring them to “a better or higher state” (Du Plessis: 2022, p. 40). The speeding up of changes around us, like global warming, drought, floods, stress, poverty and biodiversity loss (Wilson, 2016; Wallace-Wells, 2019; IPCC, 2022; Roggema, 2022) can make us anxious and desperate, and especially the younger generation might lose hope. Particularly, cities will see the impact of this speed, but they also contain the seeds for transformation. The increasing negative impact shows that the stability of the past is making place for a growing uncertainty, instability. Instead of being afraid, perceiving uncertainty as part of life will become important and will emphasize that creativity is needed to think about and work on a world where planet and people flourish (Wahl, 2016). The destruction and collapse of existing systems can then be an opportunity for something new. Regenerative thinking focuses on the opportunity of creating new systems inspired by living systems (Reed, 2007; Du Plessis, 2022).

Applied to a city, regeneration does not only refer to materials and flows, but also to humans who must be taken

care of. Roggema (2022) touches upon the need for contemplation, for spaces that are left empty so that the city can become a mindful place. Empty “holes” must be created to be able to become “whole”. Public, physical and natural spaces invite people to wander and wonder, to reflect and to form a basis for transformative change. Transformative change is “a major alteration in the way that a person senses, perceives, or understands the world and the new internal representations of life and thought that he or she creates as a result of that seismic shift” (Holland, 2018, p.1, referring to Jack Mezirow, 2003). The transformation takes place through a process of learning, often called transformative learning. According to Sterling (2011) this is: “learning which touches our deeper levels of knowing and meaning, and, by so doing, then influences our immediate and concrete levels of knowing, perception and action”.

Transformative learning can be triggered by the climate change and its devastating impact on all living beings on Earth, but also by more aesthetic encounters such as art or poetry (Molderez and Ceulemans, 2018; Molderez et al., 2021). Little research has been carried out so far on the transformative learning impact (Michel et al., 2020) or on outdoor experiences in particular, Holland (2018) being an exception. Considering the need for transformational learning with regard to sustainable issues (Sterling, 2011; Michel et al., 2020) more research is needed on integrating experiences in the curriculum of higher management education that facilitate and encourage transformative change. Flannerism is perceived as an outdoor experience and its merits for transformative learning is the topic of the following sections.

From flâneur to eco-flâneur

Walter Benjamin did not invent the term *flâneur*, but is linked with it because he first evoked the figure in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire (Lauster, 2007; Hughes, 2017). The idea of the *flâneur* was particularly developed by Benjamin (1985, 2006) in “Charles Baudelaire: A lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism,” first published in English in 1973. The themes of Baudelaire’s poetry, as well as his artistic figure had a long-lasting impression on Benjamin, perhaps due to his interest in the society of the 19th century. The city of Paris and its newly-built arcades, fostering modernity and those wandering through it, observing and not only that, appear in more than one of Benjamin’s *reflections*.

There is a definite connection between Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire, as unlikely as this may seem considering one is German and the other French, one is a narrator and the other a poet and they led such dissimilar lives in very different periods of time. However, Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* is reflected in Benjamin’s work and untimely death, as well. He also translated several poems in German and wrote quite extensively on Baudelaire; his essays are considered revolutionary and shed a whole new light on the Romantic poet: “The Baudelaire who

steps forth from these pages is the *flâneur* who affixes images as he strolls through mercantile Paris . . . a complex object: a largely apolitical writer whose poetry we must nevertheless comprehend before we can formulate any responsible cultural politics of modernity” (Benjamin, 2006).

Le flâneur is very typically French—mentioned by other authors as well, for example Balzac or Victor Hugo in his monumental work *Les Misérables*, when he writes that “to walk is human; to flanner is Parisian.” “The flâneur, or street prowler and wanderer, is glorified in the work of Balzac and Alexandre Dumas, and only later, in a different tone, in the work of modernists such as Aragon and Baudelaire” (Shields, 1994). Baudelaire therefore echoes the nineteenth century’s character and imprints him in the collective memory. Benjamin takes it even further, offering to *le flâneur* a philosophical dimension. *Le flâneur* of Baudelaire and later Benjamin’s, walks around the city just to see—he is essentially an attentive observer who tastes the world by pacing and watching it. Unmistakably, *le flâneur* is accompanied by a turtle, the slowest of the walkers, symbolizing the slow pace in which the stroller-observer takes in the city. Baudelaire and Benjamin’s wanderer has become so much part of the collective memory that even a very modern publication like Financial Times mentions him and the definition resembles the one above: “A flâneur is just a noticer of things, or what Baudelaire called a *botanist of the pavement* . . . the idea of aimless urban strolling had taken on an elitist air . . . Using one’s waking hours to roam without direction or purpose also goes against a culture of productivity.” (Ganesh, 2022). Despite the rush and speed that dominate modern societies, there is an urgent need for slowing down, for *le flâneur* to be able to develop a sustainable mindset, our reflective system must be triggered to shift perspectives in doing, being and thinking. This is how transformative learning can be fostered as a way towards creating another system.

Walter Benjamin used the powerful figure of the flâneur, a familiar character in the nineteenth century to analyze modernity. As Schipper (2017) highlights, Benjamin introduced the concept of the flâneur into academia in 1929 and since then it has been a source of inspiration for many scholars (McDonough, 2002; Shaya, 2004; Dameron, 2000; Gluck, 2006; Featherstone, 1998; Picton and Roger, 2015; Hughes, 2017; Comay, 2017; Kula, 2018; Degen et al., 2020). Hughes (2017) describes Benjamin’s flâneur as someone who explores, enjoys and embraces the city. He strolls without a particular aim. Benjamin (2006, p. 68) writes: “. . . the street becomes a dwelling place for the flâneur; he is as much at home among house facades as a citizen is within his four walls . . . “Although Benjamin (2006) focused on 19th century Paris, the concept is still relevant for the 21st century. Like Hughes (2017), p. 71 explains it: “. . . the flâneur becomes a plastic figure who can be moulded and extrapolated . . . “The flâneur wanders and by wandering through the city, any city, he wonders without having the purpose of reflecting about something in particular. The *movement* of *wandering* comes close to becoming *moved* because of the *wonder*. It happens in

between. And this fits with understanding a flâneur “as a mode of being, pertaining to a particular gaze, one who is always on the cusp of modernity” (Hughes, 2017, p. 69). This cusp is very relevant because new things happen on the edge. The “freewheeling flâneur” (Hughes, 2017, p. 82) is reminiscent of Robert Pirsig’s (1989) *Zen and Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Pirsig (1989), p. 14 emphasizes that “the travelling is more important than arriving somewhere very specific.” Having no purpose does not mean that there is no end. On the contrary, the end will be there, but this is unclear from the beginning. The focus is on the process and this process will eventually lead to an outcome, and end. This allows for openness to whatever happens in the meantime. Similarities with serendipity also become clear. Horace Walpole coined the term when he was reading a Persian fairy tale in 1754, *The Travels and Adventures of Three Princes of Serendip*. The princes made several discoveries by chance and perspicacity. This inspired Walpole to describe this phenomenon as “serendipity”. It is now also used as a methodological approach to refer to the ability of discovering interesting and valuable cases, sites, items, that one was actually not looking for. As explained by Copeland (2019), p. 2386 “serendipitous discovery is a process rather than an event and can be marked by several interactions of chance and wisdom that enable the valuable outcome.” It is precisely the context the individual is in and the interaction with it, that bring about this discovery. The flâneur strolls the streets in a serendipitous way which allows to detect what is happening in urban life.

Baudelaire describes *le flâneur* as a person with a special status, as only a privileged one could afford the luxury of strolling, unobserved, the arcades with shops from Paris, observing the mystery of the city and the crowds, without mixing with them: “a prince enjoying his incognito wherever he goes” (Baudelaire, 1970). Benjamin outlines *le flâneur* in a similar key, using Baudelaire’s *flâneur* to start an exploration of the mind in relation with the modernity of the city life, marking yet another affinity of thought between the two important writers. However, there are authors who see *le flâneur* as an activist, not just an idle wanderer of the city. Benjamin’s *flâneur* represents mainly his exploration of the modernity’s symbols, images and impressions, or as Kevin Milburn reads it: “the flâneur did not just observe urban life; but was, according to Benjamin, engaged in an “archaeological” process of unearthing the myths and “collective dreams” of modernity” (Milburn, 2010). Furthermore, authors like David Harvey, describe *le flâneur* as not only wondering idly, but walking with a mission: to map “the city’s terrain and evokes its living qualities” (Harvey, 2003), thus making the city accessible to the rest of the world. A similar perspective is encountered in the book of Shields—describing *le flâneur* as a figure of resistance to the “work-a-day pressure of the punchclock” (Shields, 1994), a character fighting his own individual fight against consumerism. Featherstone (1998) also discusses flannerism as “a methodology for uncovering the traces of social meaning embedded in the layered fabric of the city” (cited in Stevenson, 2003).

Walter Benjamin (2006), p. 99 contrasted two figures: the flâneur and the *badaud*: “In the flâneur, the joy of watching prevails over all. It can concentrate on observation; the result is the amateur detective. Or it can stagnate in the rubbernecker, then the flâneur has turned into a *badaud*.” A *badaud* is part of the public or of the crowd (Benjamin, 2006, p. 249) which means the flâneur is always in, but never of the public. The flâneur needs to observe the city he is in, to be open to the telling cases he might discover.

An “eco-flâneur” takes the romantic figure that was central in literary works by Poe, Joyce, Baudelaire, Döblin and Proust (Schipper, 2017) further. Being part of an era that puts sustainable challenges at the forefront, the “eco-flâneur” becomes the observer of the sustainable spectacles that emerge in the city. As much as the flâneur was essential for the streetlife in 19th Century Paris (Benjamin, 1969), the eco-flâneur can become a powerful symbol of the regenerative transformation of a city. The “eco-flâneur” is witnessing what is going on in the city and this witness makes him an active producer. By strolling in the city, the city invites the flâneur to reflect upon it. The eco-flâneurs are transformed into a “performative spectator” (Schipper, 2017, p. 193). The city then acts as a theatre and the eco-flâneurs are the artists, the co-producers of the city. They are not just detached observers, but by wandering and wondering they discover and become touched by their selection and interpretation of what is happening in the city. Writing as early as the beginning of the 20th century, Lewis Mumford advocated for progressive urban planning and discussed the city as “a theater of social action”. Flaneurism is an appropriate method of taking social action, from being environmentally friendly by walking instead of driving to discovering the city in a live interaction with the city itself and perhaps even modifying it for a better future. Also, the city is an appropriate stage for a flâneur—the very definition of the term involves walking as an observer, a spectator of the city life. As Mumford (1938), p. 4–6 puts it: “to embody these new possibilities in city life, which come to us not merely through better technical organization but through acuter sociological understanding, and to dramatize the activities themselves in appropriate individual and urban structures, forms the task of the coming generation.”

The eco-flâneur reminds of Robert Cooper’s (1983) interpretation of *Echo and Narcissus*, the Greek myth about Narcissus who rejected the affections of the nymph Echo. She eventually wasted away until only her voice remained. According to Cooper (1983), p. 202 this Greek myth is an allegory for the significance of the other: “As punishment for his inability to love others, the gods made Narcissus fall in love with his own reflection, which paradoxically he both possessed and yet could not possess. Narcissus rejected the life-giving structure of the outside society, mediated by other people. We know ourselves only through the echo of the Other.” Ec(h)o, as in ecology, is not something different from ourselves, but is more like a reflection of ourselves. It tells us something about ourselves and *vice versa*. The way we are also says something about how we

see ecology. It reminds us of our responsibility. Like in Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, the echo of the cry for help, with the ears of our body, the cells of our brain, the awareness of our mind, symbolizing the body, the head and the heart (Benjamin, 1955). We can never shirk responsibility, because we have heard.

The pedagogical value of the eco-flâneur

In this section, we further elaborate on Walter Benjamin’s work and the pedagogical value of the (eco-) flâneur in relation to management education. The general aim of education has been debated for centuries, and is still under discussion today. For many philosophers, like Aristotle, the aim of education was the flourishing of the individual, oriented towards leading a good life. For the later Stoics, the aim was to liberate individuals from customs and habits (Abicht and Opdebeeck, 2016). The discussion focuses on the aim of education as providing people with knowledge. According to Kitcher (2009) three types of knowledge are foreseen: 1) knowledge of particular propositions that have been explicitly taught; 2) habits and dispositions to judge and to act in private and in social contexts; 3) skills to acquire further knowledge of the first two types. Providing knowledge has a social aim, and according to Mill (2002, cited in Kitcher, 2009), the principal task of education is preparing people for their role of citizens in a democracy, i.e., the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions about matters of public policy. He presents four perspectives on education: 1) promoting individual flourishing; 2) producing citizens who will participate well in current democratic institutions; 3) expanding public knowledge; 4) fostering the advancement of human culture (Kitcher, 2009).

Especially John Dewey outlined the role of education in democratic societies, with a specific focus on enabling citizens to lead flourishing lives, and contributing to progressive improvement of society. Within this context, Dewey stressed the importance of critical thinking (Lambrechts et al., 2013; Lambrechts, 2020). Within the current context of sustainability issues in society, the fundamental questions regarding what needs to be taught, what kind of education is required, what needs to be revisited: what does individual flourishing mean in a society in light of sustainability issues? A critical view on traditional customs in society is essential, and education needs to enable citizens in a democracy to develop these critical thinking abilities (Nussbaum, 2011).

Martha Nussbaum stresses the importance of the arts in higher education, as a way to encourage broad development of the learner: “Leading business educators have long understood that a developed capacity to imagine is a keystone of a healthy business culture” (Nussbaum, 2011). While some initiatives have been exploring this role (e.g., Shrivastava et al., 2012; Molderez and Ceulemans, 2018; Molderez et al., 2021), today it seems

rather uncommon to introduce arts-based pedagogies in management education. It is within the context of critical thinking that the eco-flâneur proves its pedagogical value.

The notion of the eco-flâneur could serve as a way to open up the curriculum, and encourage students in business and management education to observe what happens around them. While the original flâneur was the aristocrate, detached, the gourmet of the street, the eco-flâneur might serve specifically as an observer of the regenerative transformation of a city. Benjamin's notions of connecting soul, eye and hand, could be connected with contemporary interpretations of sustainability mindsets and competencies, focusing on head, heart and hand (Molderez et al., 2021). Such individual sustainability competencies have been studied in the context of management education (e.g., Lambrechts et al., 2018). They have been conceptualised and defined, yet mainly with a focus on the knowledge component (i.e., head), thereby overlooking the importance of heart and hand. Recent developments in this field, such as the European sustainability competence framework "GreenComp" (Bianchi et al., 2022), outlines these competencies with focus on knowledge, attitudes and skills. These could be connected with head, heart and hand as well (Molderez et al., 2021). As such, the eco-flâneur, while observing, develops specific understanding of urban transformation and transition processes. While performing the act of strolling around the city, a more holistic development of sustainability competencies is encouraged, touching head, heart and hand.

Being an eco-flâneur in higher management education: Discovering regenerative transformations in Brussels

There are different ways of stimulating critical thinking abilities in higher management education. The concept of the flâneur is taken further to eco-flâneur, i.e., strollers as students and teachers who see and reflect upon what is happening and changing in the city and how street life is being transformed towards regeneration. The eco-flâneur is suggested as an alternative pedagogy to unite soul, eye and hand, three elements that are brought into connection by Walter Benjamin and that are vital for a sustainability mindset. Eco-flâneur is also used as a metaphor to rethink education and to suggest ways for transformative learning and education (Balsiger et al., 2017). A flâneur was the aristocrate, detached, the gourmet of the street, while the badaud was more associated with the working people, emotional, the gourmand (Shaya, 2004). Education should integrate both: the detached observer looking for knowledge and the one who is touched by what he observes. But there is more than image. Students can also be stimulated to become an eco-flâneur, i.e., one where hands, hearts and heads are united (Ivanaj et al., 2014). Inspired by

Paul Shrivastava's (2010) article "Pedagogy of Passion for Sustainability" we will elaborate on how to combine sustainable management with physical exercises. It also fits in the growing attention for slow experiences, like slow food, slow fashion, and in the importance of walking, not only to explore the beauty of nature (Somerville, 2022) or to protest in a peaceful way (Kumar, 2021), but because of its health effect (Hansen et al., 2017; Degen et al., 2020; O'Mara, 2021; Grant and Pollard, 2022) and transformational capacities (Warfield and Hetherington, 2018) even when it concerns urban walking (Herrmann-Lunecke, et al., 2020). Routine walking is conceptualised as a territory-making process. Mindful of the social context and bodily experience, walking offers insights into the possibilities of making points of connection with the performances of plants and animals (Grant and Pollard, 2022).

The eco-flâneur will be used as an alternative pedagogy to illustrate another way of discovering the regenerative transformation of a city while relying on different models of social entrepreneurship (Alter, 2003; Bruder, 2020; Klomp and Oosterwaal, 2021), named as "Sustainable Entrepreneurial Promenade." This is not just a promenade, but a discovery of what is going on in a city (Mahmoud et al., 2022). The method will give the participants the possibility to experience the city by themselves, i.e., to discover the regenerative aspects of the city, to see a city with different eyes and to be open for innovative initiatives that are regenerative.

In the article "Pedagogy of Passion for Sustainability," Paul Shrivastava (2010) listed possibilities that connect sustainable management with physical exercises. For example, he suggested strategic flexibility through yoga; competitive strategy through football or basketball; cooperative strategy through games and social activities that require cooperation such as dancing. Strolling like an eco-flâneur could be added to the list.

It might be a bit odd to focus on the city of Brussels for a promenade. Charles Baudelaire hated Brussels because there were "no shopwindows. Strolling—something that nations with imagination love—is impossible in Brussels. There is nothing to see and the streets are unusable" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 81). Since the time of Baudelaire a lot has been changed for the better. According to the Global Destination Index (GDS) Brussels ranks number 14 and this is mainly due to the large percentage (23%) of green areas such as forests, public gardens, parks and sportgrounds. Nevertheless, in the Top 20 Sustainable Smart Cities in the World, Brussels is not ranked. Yet, Brussels is not really known for its outstanding close concentration of sustainable examples. Strolling through the city as an eco-flâneur triggers within the stroller the possibility to see as a philosopher, as a critical thinker and discover how the city and its street life are transforming.

In line with the chronicle under the heading of "Promenade à Paris" of the early *Le Petit Journal* founded in 1863 (Shaya, 2004), the Sustainable Entrepreneurial Promenade (SEP) was created as

a tour for fresh news with respect to sustainable organisations. Shaya (2004), p. 51 refers to a chronicler who makes the purposes of the SEP explicit: “I am a flâneur, and even I am sometimes surprised at the strange sights that seem to rise out of the soil of this Paris that we think we have always known.” Streets are like an open book for the regenerative transformation of a city and ready to discover for an eco-flâneur.

Every city can be used as a case, but, since the Campus Brussels of the Faculty of Economics and Business is located in the city centre, it is rather obvious to start as a stroller here. However, students always look surprised when they are asked to put on walking shoes when the “Sustainable Entrepreneurial Promenade” (SEP) is announced. Studying sustainable business models by taking a walk through the city centre of Brussels is not an ordinary way of teaching a topic in a curriculum for Higher Education in Management. Nevertheless, in pedagogical articles related to sustainability, combining body and mind is strongly recommended. But doing it effectively is not so obvious. SEP has been part of the course on Sustainable Management since 2013. SEP was created in the spirit of the eco-flâneur. Because of the act of strolling with a sustainable gaze, participants are walking like an eco-flâneur: discovering things without knowing what this will be beforehand. Teaching the students to look with different eyes, to blur the boundary between knowing and experiencing, to be open for a different view of the city, the city enacts knowledge.

The students are free to walk any route from point A to point B. They are instructed to walk in silence to fully surrender to what the city has to offer. The starting point is at Brussels Campus and the ending point is at the Place du Jardin aux Fleurs (Bloemenhofplein). The square itself is an iconic example of how a public place can be transformed in a short period of time. Just by a few strategically placed flower boxes that counteract the traffic, the place flourished from a place of urban tragedy over traffic accidents and senseless violence to a meeting place for residents, school-age children and youth (Dhondt, 2022a). This is just one example of how the walk gives students the opportunity to zoom in on the city’s policies, such as the importance of the pedestrian zone, and to illustrate gentrification.

Formed harmony like at the Place du Jardin aux Fleurs is difficult to find in the middle of the city in Brussels, especially at the location of the KU Leuven Campus Brussel. Located close to the central station, the campus connects to the shopping district and the Queen’s Gallery, which is rather an ode to the consumer society. Nevertheless, the gallery gives plenty of opportunities to think about sustainable chocolate and the Fairtrade label. Other retail chains can also provide input for an eco-flâneur. For example, Dille and Kamille (2022) with their success story of almost 50 years of dedication towards zero plastic gives space to think about the use of natural materials. Yet the question is whether commercial institutions will prevail over public places and cultural institutions during the promenade.

Between long streets of commercial shops and eateries, numerous non-commercial institutions with a social interest

can be spotted as an eco-flâneur. For example, Cinema Nova (2022) which is right around the corner from the campus is dedicated to independently produced films. The street scene of the social venue indicates eccentricity and hints at the grind of the variety of different creative forms of expression. The cafe-bar also welcomes different disciplines to bring them together for meetings, debates, exhibits, installations, performances, workshops and concerts. Yet, only the eco-flâneurs who take it slow and stop in front of the venue notice that the letters Nova are made from old materials such as a wheel, a chair leg and a baseboard.

Cinema Nova’s goal is to explore alternative realities within the increasingly commercialized and polarised society. We notice the emergence of artistic platforms in Brussels that share similarities in their social values. The Kaaitheater (2022) devoted to the performing arts, wants to reflect the polyphony of Brussels society. They show their openness to the broad spectrum of artists and visitors with their motto “How to be many?” MAD Brussels (2022) aims to encourage creative minds to be innovative, sustainable and inclusive with their Centre for Fashion and Design. They support junior designers to develop their brand and label. Together they want to bring that creative aura to Brussels. A success story that blossomed from Brussels’ social initiatives is that of Siré Kaba. The Belgian fashion designer with Guinean roots wants to bridge the gap between Africa and Europe. By means of her clothing designs, she succeeds in contradicting the poor image people have of Africa. In a social workplace in Molenbeek, she makes her colorful and elegant wardrobe (BRUZZ, 2021a).

Close to the end location of the walk, the statue Zinneke Pis is located. The urinating dog is thematically related to one of Belgium’s most famous monuments, Manneken Pis. The fact that Zinneke is representing hybrid breeding, is symbolic of the cultural diversity within Brussels. In 2021, the city of Brussels registered 183 different nationalities (Flemish Community Commission, 2021). This means that Brussels is the most cosmopolitan city in Europe and therefore a laboratory for cultural diversity. According to the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (Government of the Brussels Capital Region, 2018), diverse populations contribute to Brussels’ identity and the city’s economic dynamism, social and cultural diversity and attractiveness on a Belgian and international level. Would anybody strolling by Zinneke make the connection with the multicultural city?

The dog’s name Zinneke is derived from the river Zenne that once flowed through Brussels. According to the mythical stories of the founding artist Tom Frantzen (2013), the dog was of a tough breed: it survived being thrown into this river. Next to this story, the river Zenne has an eventful past in Brussels. The river that once brought prosperity to Brussels and is an integral part of its development also has its cruelty. Periods of flooding, disease outbreak and bad odour prompted the construction of the Zenne Tunnel in 1886. The river that once had a large presence in

Brussels still flows in serenity through the centre today. Yet, only when searching for silence the underground river will show itself (BRUZZ, 2021b). On the Saint-Géry (Sint-Goriksplein) next to the brasserie Lion d'Or, there is a courtyard with a minuscule piece of flowing water—a water entity that follows the old trace of the Zenne. Stepping into the courtyard, a change of environment can be noticed. A shift from a surrounding of fast-paced life bustle of the city reigns to one where the calmness of flowing water can be seen, be heard, and perhaps even be felt. A humble island amongst a modern-day hectic setting where one can come to rest. There are more such sites in Brussels, but they will only show themselves during the process of discovery.

The route that the students stroll along starts from the lively city centre and goes in the direction of the canal. In many Western cities, a similarity can be seen: the Canal area is often known as the city's problem neighbourhood where poverty and violence are prevalent. This is no less true in Brussels. Yet, in recent years we have seen changes in the streetscape: old empty factories are being transformed into places where creativity and social initiatives can flourish. A good example is the former Citroën factory, a massive building resembling a cathedral of steel and glass. Its location, close to the historic centre and next to the canal, was in the 1930's the ideal place for Mr. Citroen to place the largest car factory of that time (Centre Pompidou, 2022). However, over the years, the dynamics and needs of the city have changed tremendously. Automation and the outsourcing of production made room for initiatives that can fulfil contemporary needs. The iconic factory building is rethought in a way that fits better in the Brussels of the 21st century: an international cultural centre. This way of integrating the old and the new is an illustration of how culture, wellbeing and sustainability are interrelated to one another.

As students walk towards the canal, they see more and more of the city's real character as a result of those transformations. Here are a lot of alternative organizational forms such as social enterprises and hybrid organizations that mix social and business goals. The Salvation Army is a good example. Service to the urban poor is supported by participation in the market. After all, clothing sales are held at regular intervals in which everyone can participate. The proceeds benefit their operation (Dhondt, 2022b).

Close to the Salvation Army, the brewery **Brussels Beer Project** (2022) can be found. Although the brewery has a standard business model of selling beer, they fit in the concept of a regenerative city. Metropolitan cities are known for having many people living on a small piece of land. Likewise, where a lot of people live, there are a lot of food surpluses. This makes circular initiatives within food processing indispensable in a regenerative city. Brussels Beer Project is the pioneer in making beer out of recycled bread and is known for its upcycling projects. The word "project" in their name reflects that they do not see themselves as a normal brewery but rather as a project built on collaboration, experimentation and positive impact. A project

that has been started with a few hundred crowd funders and almost 10 years later has grown to a community ten times the original size. A community that is constantly considering how to make a greater positive impact with the project. For this reason, the announcement was made that they will no longer export beer outside of Europe starting in 2023. This decision was made even though the expectation is that this negatively affects their revenue in the short term. However, the founders resist against short-term thinking and make choices that fit their long-term sustainable vision. This long-term vision aligns with their recently obtained American sustainability label B-Corp and their goal of becoming best in class in environmental impact and others (BRUZZ, 2022).

However, the discovery of alternative forms of organization becomes particularly interesting when the Canal is crossed to Molenbeek. **Atelier Groot Eiland** (2022) applies the "employment model" on a large scale. Their goal is to combat poverty by supporting as many Brussels' residents as possible in their search for work. Their projects are therefore very diverse: from a restaurant, to a joinery, to a city vegetable garden, and an organic shop where, through training courses and work experience, people once again believe in a different future. What all the projects have in common is the shared focus on sustainability, social entrepreneurship and alternative economic business models. As a "cooperative model," the Foodhub is one of their exemplary projects. In addition to organic products that often come directly from small and medium-sized producers, attention is paid to the participation of customers, employees and producers. Foodhub wants to pay a fair price to the producer and advertises how that price is structured. For example, as far as their olive oil in bulk is concerned, 69% of the final price goes to the producer and 3% to transport. And suddenly you wonder why not everything can be so transparent. Learning how to stroll therefore achieves its goal: thinking about surprisingly different alternative ways of doing business.

After 40 min of being an eco-flaneur, the students shared their experiences in the form of a reflection report. First, they described two elements of the city that fit in their view of a regenerative city, then their conception of a regenerative city and finally their reflections on the experience.

The urban elements that stood out to the students range from holistic concepts that involve a considerable amount of brainwork to the fine details that are only seen when standing still in the city. Most answers included urban biodiversity. For example, the number of different green walls shows that the students see nature in a regenerative city as indispensable. But even more creative solutions were noticed such as plants placed in hanging ashtrays, sidewalk tiles replaced with greenery and a hotel for insects. Also, the social initiatives were just as much noticed by the students. The elements range from small elements that make the city liveable for different groups such as wheelchair infrastructure to social initiatives to bring people together in a cafe run by volunteers or a community vegetable garden. Getting

around in a city also resonates with the students and various alternatives to the car and car-free zones have been named. Lastly, the students have a good eye for circular initiatives to reduce the pile of waste that city folk creates. Different R's derived from the European waste strategy towards a circular economy (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2022) are reflected in this: QR-codes to Refuse physical flyers, shops that only sell local products to Reduce transport emissions, Reusing items through a vintage store, entrepreneurs that upcycle items to Repurpose and garbage bags to Recycle paper.

The aspect that the students did not have to rush and that their goal was to wander around was considered pleasant. It gave them the opportunity to observe the elements that they pass by in everyday life. Also, for most it gave the feeling of calmness even though they were present in the big city. For others, the task of discovery actually brought a sense of enthusiasm by "seeing what others do not see." Surprisingly but profoundly positive, all the students indicated that they think it is appropriate to include such a promenade like the eco-flâneur in a management programme. Most students justified the positive response with the fact that they interacted with a different "mindset", "look", "perspective", "eye", "thinking", or "sense" with their surroundings. A few described that this active thinking creates a certain awareness. The awareness described ranges from the different ways of thinking to the creation of awareness for sustainability. The exercise required them to think deeply about how they view the concept of sustainability and the city provides a source of inspiration. Yet, the downside of the awareness is also reported: the negative side of the city also comes in harder like the number of unsustainable businesses, trash and bad odour. However, this is an opportunity for students to interact with the reality of the city and to reflect on how their mental concepts fit within reality. Students articulated the eco-flâneur as a possible bridge in the theory-practice gap in different ways such as "chance to bring theory to life," "real problems and solutions," "using the theoretical topics," "thinking about possibilities," and "it's not always easy to understand everything by only learning the theory." Some students even went a step further and theorized that the competencies used during the promenade would also be useful for their later careers: "you can get creative ideas to include in your organization" and "for the managers to think more out of the box." Although, a minor group of students kept their answers within the state of the moment and spoke about the promenade as a fun activity that was good for group cohesion and that the outdoor activity is good for their wellbeing.

In addition to the students' positive responses, they were also asked how the experience could be improved. Since the promenade is an exercise that students do not usually practice, finding regenerative aspects in the city was seen as a challenge. As a result, the majority of students felt that the activity was too short: they wanted more time to explore the city and reflect upon their thoughts. Others expressed a need for examples because they do not yet fully understand the concept of a regenerative city. Also, a need for guidance was expressed since

it was hard to "slow down the pass" or to find "the right thing." The students' overall conclusion was that "it takes some practice to really become an experienced eco-flâneur."

Conclusion

Transformative learning experiences can be facilitated according to Sterling (2011), but "by their nature" not guaranteed. The eco-flâneur was created for the purpose of stimulating transformative learning, although it is only a small element in a bigger curriculum of other courses that focuses on other types of learning. Nevertheless, being different in a landscape that is focussing much on "doing things better", and "doing better things", "seeing things differently" (Sidiropoulos, 2014; Michel et al., 2020), might have a better effect on the students than imagined.

In the same lines as Shields (1994), Harvey (2003), Milburn (2010) and Featherstone (1998) the concept of the Eco-Flâneur is attempting to assume the same role of an observer noting what is wrong, reading the landscape and the city in different keys and perhaps taking a stand against what spoils its face and what is not in accordance with the environment. Walter Benjamin was critical for progress. Progress leaves behind the vulnerable, the Earth and her inhabitants, including humans. A city should also be a heaven for them. The organisations that were discovered by the students and teachers during the experience of the eco-flâneur, showing this other side of a city, the roots of a city, they work for the common good and illuminate the seeds for a regenerative city. Benjamin's beloved Angel of History is then also a metaphor for faith in a different future, a regenerative one where we give more back than we take. The modern eco-flâneur is a responsible person, observing and at the same time aiming to make a difference. Modern times ask for action and re-action, especially in our endangered world, so perhaps *le flâneur* is now ready to step out of the Baudelarian pages and become an activist.

Students flâneuring the city of Brussels discover its cultural landmarks, and come up with new ideas for a more regenerative city, thus co-creating the city. They observed things to be improved, they came up with feasible ideas to make the city more regenerative. These conclusions can be afterwards put in practice by communicating them to the people in charge, for instance the mayor's house. Alternatively, they can be used in projects that would involve everyone working together and changing the face of the city for the better.

Not all cities are inclusive enough for all categories of people. The accessibility functions according to the principle: the city should fit and accommodate all, equally. The students-flâneurs can be an agent of change in this regard, too, by noticing where things can be improved for the less fortunate. After all, it is not enough for the public offices to make the city physically accessible, there is work to be done on people's mentality, to help them notice and think about the people with different abilities around them. The lack of

inclusiveness or solutions implemented incorrectly are as damaging as carelessness—the lack of empathy between people, the lack of awareness of those around us.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the community of the PhD Program in Environmental Sustainability and Wellbeing, Ferrara University, Italy; the participants at the workshop “Co-creative and transformative learning environments” organized by the Higher Education Summit in Hasselt in 2022; the students of the third Bachelor Environmental Health and Safety Management of the Faculty of Economics and Business, KU Leuven, Belgium.

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 02 July 2022

ACCEPTED 01 December 2022

PUBLISHED 23 December 2022

CITATION

Dalla Chiesa C and Alexopoulou A
(2022), Matchfunding goes digital: The
benefits of matching policymaking with
the crowd's wisdom.
Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 12:11090.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11090

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Matchfunding goes digital: The benefits of matching policymaking with the crowd's wisdom

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Markets and governments have been increasingly intertwined when it comes to funding for the arts. This is the case with matchfunding schemes in which governments explore the crowd's validation by providing funds to successful cultural projects. By matching public funds with the "crowd", four parties benefit from this process: the artists, the platform, the donors, and the public institutions. Artists benefit from accessing more funds and credibility signals for their projects; the platform benefits from enlarging the scope of funds given to artists; donors benefit from increasing the likelihood of project success; and public institutions benefit from granting part of the decision-making process on cultural budget to the crowd and cutting expenses on project management. This article conceptually explores the benefits, consequences, and the constraints of matchfunding mechanisms for policymaking. We argue that while matchfunding brings benefactors closer to policymaking and governments closer to novel funding models through online means, it also reduces the role of governments in elaborating cultural policy. It is vital to ponder the benefits and hindrances of this model given that matchfunding can potentially shift the structure of policymaking for the arts and culture.

KEYWORDS

political economy, crowdfunding, match-funding, cultural policy, online platforms

Introduction

The entanglement of polity and economy is a long-debated topic in economic and political theories. Within cultural industries, this debate typically conveys how public and private agents guide their actions towards constructing a fruitful environment for the arts to flourish. Other than evaluating the mechanisms that better contribute to the arts, a political economy view on policymaking assesses the extent to which agents promote the arts through a top-down or more laissez-faire approach (Frey, 2000; Hetherington, 2017). Although these two realms may be seen as contradictory, cultural policy has also evolved in the direction of entanglement of private and public initiatives when it comes to funding culture (Dekker and Rodrigues, 2019).

Arts funding has been part of policy-related discussions for at least a quarter-century (Wyszomirski, 2004). Typically, cultural policy involves using organizational strategies to

produce, disseminate, distribute, and consume the arts typically allocated within governmental budgeting (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005; Mulcahy, 2006). As such, common views of cultural policy attribute a special role to government decision-making in opposition to leaving decisions regarding the arts to be made by private actors (Frey, 2000). However, the state-led cultural policy tradition has been greatly marked by an increasing redistribution of authority, especially after major economic crises where a reduction of public funds brings more mixed funding strategies (Srakar and Čopič, 2012). One of the recent forms of combining policymaking with contemporary digital tools is the matchfunding strategy, in which a private or public institution donates additional funds to cultural projects, pre-approved by independent donors through small monetary contributions. This system is carried out *via* online crowdfunding platforms whose operations matchmake not only project creators with potential audiences, but also with institutional donors.

As this article shows, the digital matchfunding option ventured on online platforms is a powerful strategy whereby governments match third-party donors for specific causes such as charitable aid, arts-related programs, and support for early-stage businesses. Matchfunding supplements public subsidies by allowing additional private investment from other institutions (e.g., private funds, equity, other non-profit organizations or companies) combined with dispersed individuals, hereby called “the crowd.” The major difference between this novel form of matchfunding and any other mixed funding strategy widely used in public-private partnerships is that citizens pre-select their favorite campaigns *via* a “one-donation-one-vote” online mechanism, such as in typical crowdfunding campaigns (Belleflamme et al., 2014). By acknowledging the importance of different actors in budgetary decisions, governments open a rich avenue for collaboration of governments and citizens, within market-oriented platforms, thereby eroding the dichotomy of market-state initiatives.

A number of aspects are worth discussing in this case: 1) in digital matchfunding, both state and citizens make use of a private mechanism to support relevant fundraising campaigns. Unlike traditional (non-digital) mixed funding settings, the private party (an online platform) acts as an intermediary between the individual donor, the institutional donor, and the recipient; 2) as the crowdfunding “investor” consists of a plethora of individual dispersed donors, online matchfunding may dismiss critical views of “the market” interfering in policymaking¹; 3) as in other typical crowdfunding settings, donors express their views about which types of artistic projects they wish to see further implemented and governments thereby adhere to the public’s preferences by

respecting the crowd’s choice; 4) with a collection of dispersed donors² deciding the directions of budget allocation for culture, governments can test the acceptance of their programs, thus alleviating the management of policymaking. As the paper further outlines, this may provoke cultural policy as we know it (see, e.g., Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005; Mulcahy, 2006) to regress to earlier stages in which decision-making was restricted to simple budgetary allocation and was silent on the creation of coherent programs (Wyszomirski, 2004).

This new funding option poses several implications for all the actors involved and their respective incentives: the platform, the public institutions, and the donors. In order to discuss the benefits and constraints of this model to all parties involved, this article demonstrates the mechanisms of this funding model as well as its origins and main features. Secondly, this paper contributes to unveiling an emergent form of funding through which public actors and private individuals match incentives while replacing the figure of a single powerful patron. Third, the paper delineates avenues for further research related to the role of cultural policy and platform management when it comes to matchfunding options.

Mixed funding and the expansion of the private role

A long-lasting topic within the cultural policy is the shaping of programs that cater to diverse expressions, tastes, and preferences (Towse, 1994; Krebs and Pommerehne, 1995). Defining the optimal criteria to aggregate various preferences pays its tribute to early normative debates (Mazza, 2020) in which the allocation of funds is subject to value-judgement propositions (Sarel, 2000). Under direct or indirect mechanisms, funding allocation is more recently delivered *via* a set of coherent actions which we call “cultural policy” (Wyszomirski, 2004). The direct public support for culture entails the implementation of subsidies, awards, grants, and any other direct form of transferring funds to beneficiaries. Indirect public support, on the other hand, is typically based on legal mechanisms aiming to provide funds for culture *via* indirect means, such as tax benefits. As Srakar and Čopič (2012) observe, from a fiscal point of view, direct and indirect support are equal in their withdrawal from the state budget.

¹ See for example Miller and Yudice (2002), McGuigan (2004), and Gray (2007).

² Here we have used the word “donations” as matchfunding projects in the arts are often restricted to donation-based options with rewards offered in the form of memorabilia and public acknowledgement. Typically, crowdfunding campaigns in the arts select a “all-or-nothing” model, thereby implying that funds are only accessed by the project creator if the target goal is reached. For further comparisons between crowdfunding models, see Cummings et al. (2020).

Classical views regarding the role of cultural policies understand subsidies as tools for addressing the market failures in the arts (Fullerton, 1991; Peacock, 2000, Peacock, 2006). Subsidies are, thus, seen as consequences of either market failure or market inefficiencies (Austen-Smith, 1994). The state-centered view of funding for the arts typically deteriorates with subsequent economic crises, followed by a significant reduction of budget for cultural projects (Bonet and Donato, 2011; Čopić et al., 2011) and further re-evaluation of the worth of the arts (Bagwell et al., 2015). In these moments, governments may explore private support systems for cultural and creative industries (Srakar and Čopić, 2012), while cultural organizations explore alternative avenues for private support³. The private-based support system assumes various shapes: typically, donation, sponsorship in exchange for brand promotion, direct investment with capital returns, support from foundations, and contributions from individual citizens in exchange for tax exemption.

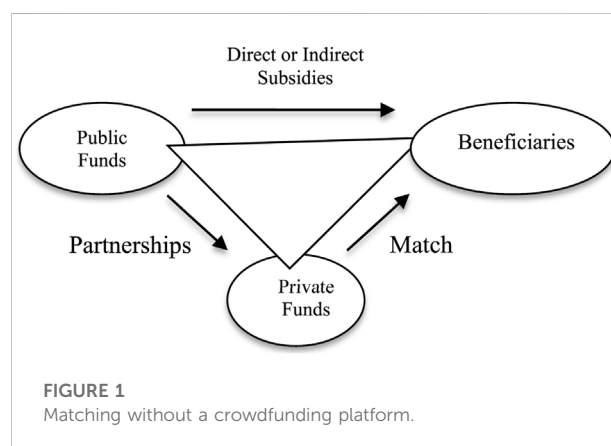
The excessive use of private support is often seen through critical lenses: culture thus becomes enacted as a commodified product under the guise of “neoliberal principles” (Miller and Yudice, 2002; Gray, 2007). In spite of these views, cultural policy approaches have increasingly welcomed different funding sources through public-private partnerships as they not only cover a funding gap, but also allow diverse ideas to flourish. Many of the recent developments towards understanding culture as a commercially driven activity essentially results from a dramatic change at the turn of the millenium when the term ‘creative industries’ became incorporated into the cultural policy lexicon worldwide (Granham, 2005; Marco-Serrano et al, 2014). Not surprisingly, the literature on arts entrepreneurship has also extensively grown since that period (Beckman and Essig, 2012; Chang and Wyszomirski, 2015). In other words, the elitist image of artists as purely intrinsically-motivated individuals with little regard for market mechanisms is replaced by an increasing incorporation within innovative and entrepreneurial domains.

In general, approaches to cultural policy - predominantly in Europe—changed to incorporate market-based forms of partnerships. The reinterpretation of what it means to carry out cultural policy is increasingly associated with creativity and innovation per definition (Hesmondalgh and Pratt, 2005). Policy papers such as the “Private Sector Policy for the Arts” (Art and Business, 2010) by DCMS and NESTA (UK) argue for building ambitious plans on matching grants and individual donations as

a way to enhance innovation (Stanziola, 2012). The artist is further re-interpreted as an innovator, a creative entrepreneur, whose business-like skills need to be developed for further financial growth. This landscape is a spillover of the funding structure of policymaking in the sense that novel products deserve novel means of funding and distribution.

Matchfunding is not a new topic in cultural policy debates⁴. Originally, the mix of private-public funds was used for national and international emergency aid. For example, in the UK Aid Match case, the British government doubled each charitable contribution for poverty relief. Over the past 10 years, alternative funding models gained attention in cultural policy circles, especially if governments are willing to support projects already scrutinized by the public (Baeck et al., 2017). More recently, a similar strategy was used to mitigate the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic for early-stage businesses (the “Future Fund” program in the UK). This option found great acceptance in contexts affected by the economic recession, as observed by Cacheda (2018)⁵.

In the arts, matched grants are currently incorporated within the crowdfunding model. In a report by (Baeck et al., 2017) commissioned by Nesta, DCMS⁶, and the Arts Council in England, matchfunding is announced as an innovative mechanism to fund cultural projects and provide long-term benefits to local communities. Online matchfunding is often suggested as a better method than indirect tax incentive strategies or direct lump sum benefits (Andreoni and Payne,



³ The decline of direct subsidies after 2008 for culture impacted small cultural entities and young professionals at the start of their careers. Independent and experimental projects then replaced staff with volunteers and further engaged in attracting private donors (Bonet and Donato, 2011). Nonetheless, this is not a universal rule. Norway, for example, has consistently increased its culture budget since 2005 (Mangset, 2020).

⁴ For example, since 2010 the DCMS discusses matching grants with third-party investors to increase funds and promote a private sector policy for the arts (Stanziola, 2012).

⁵ The authors show that the Spanish crowdfunding market has boomed after 2010 as a consequence of unemployment and recession. This explains the majority of solidarity campaigns in reward-based platforms in the country.

⁶ National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA); Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS).

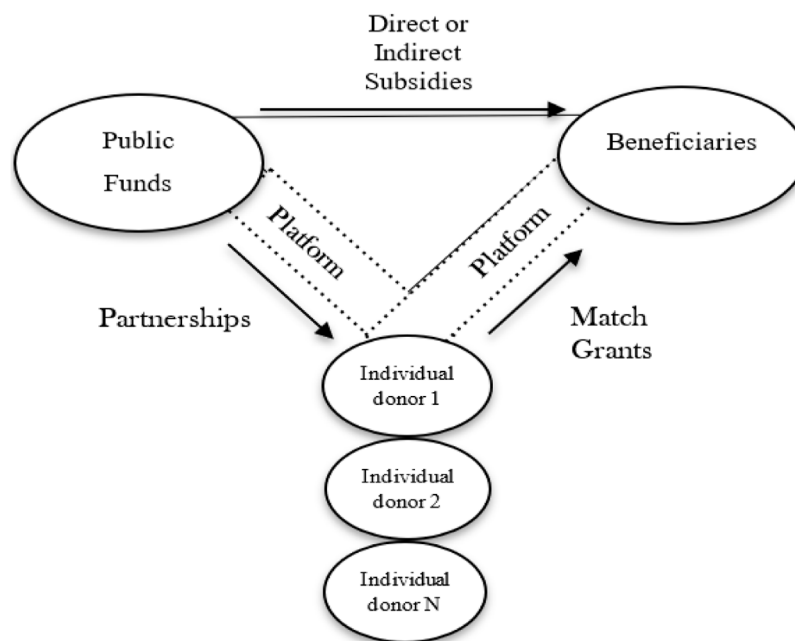


FIGURE 2
Matching with a crowdfunding platform.

2010). The work of Andreoni and Payne (2010), and Gong and Grundy (2019), for example, show that matching grants is a superior strategy over tax incentives since they tend to reduce inefficiencies in public funding in the long run. Although scarce, empirical studies also show that the number of donations and the donor base increase with the matching grants option (Rushton, 2008).

Figures 1, 2 simplify the direct and indirect forms of fund allocation by governments and the matching grants option based on two scenarios: 1) one in which a single public institution is responsible for providing the matching grants, 2) and a second scenario in which the private party (an online platform) acts as an intermediary to match with various independent non-institutionalized supporters. While the first scenario implies that top-down cultural policymaking is in control of the acceptance of the project and the donation strategy, the second scenario outsources both the decision and mechanism to two private parties: the dispersed individual donors and the online intermediary that organizes the distribution of funds and information.

Types of matchfunding and the incentive mechanism

The literature on the matchfunding model *via* crowdfunding platforms is still in its infancy. Recent studies demonstrate that

partnering with governments or other external funds tends to increase the success of crowdfunding calls (Montfort, Siebers and De Graaf, 2021). NESTA previously implemented a famous pilot study based on the platform Crowdfunder, whose results demonstrate how matchfunding calls are more likely to succeed compared to non-matchfunding calls within the crowdfunding system (Baeck et al., 2017). A study based on Goteo (a Spanish crowdfunding platform) also shows that: “campaigns with institutional support received on average 180% more from crowd donations than a campaign without institutional support. Other published compendiums also comprehensively summarized how public policies benefit from including online platforms in their funding initiatives and, ultimately, the crowd sponsoring model (Gajda et al., 2020). Also, the likelihood of success of crowdfunding projects backed by a combination of institutional partners and dispersed donors can be increased by up to 90%” (Baeck et al., 2017; 25). In this sense, the current literature, although limited in scope so far, provides overall positive outcomes when it comes to investing private or public funds to complete positively evaluated crowdfunding calls. In a recent study, Van Montfort et al. (2021) found that civic crowdfunding projects matched with extra funds by local governments does increase the chances of success.

A matchfunding initiative may adopt different strategies. According to Baeck et al. (2017), there are four matchfunding types currently in use by online crowdfunding platforms:

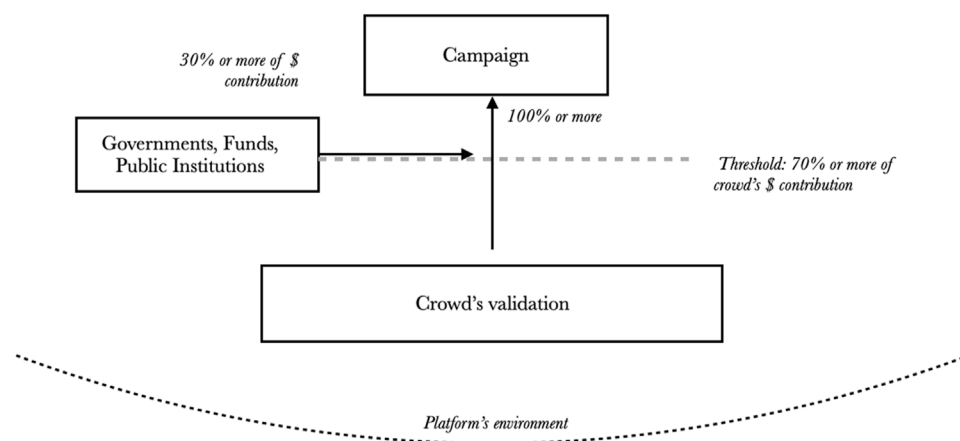


FIGURE 3

The online matchfunding mechanism.

- a) The “in first” model is initiated by a public or private institution that provides an advance investment to potential projects that still depend on the crowd’s approval. The independent supporters, thus, cover the remaining value through the platform. In this case, public institutions actively decide on favorite themes and further “screen” potential projects beforehand.⁷
- b) In the “top-up” model, public or private institutions provide funds after the crowdfunding campaign has collected a pre-determined percentage of the target amount. In this case, the institution has less control over the campaign themes as the first criteria is the pre-acceptance by the audience. Ultimately, reaching (or not) the minimum threshold depends on the “crowd’s” decision.
- c) Lastly, the “bridging” model incorporates the public or private institution contributions only after an initial amount is collected at the beginning of the campaign. Aiming to boost fundraising, this option is helpful to reward-based projects typically subject to the so-called “U-shape pattern” in which donations accumulate at the first and

last campaign stages but struggle to receive contributions in between these stages.⁸

Institutions can choose whichever strategy better fits their programming and intentions in consultation with crowdfunding platforms. However, rather often matchfunding follows the second type aforementioned in which “the crowd” remains the first decision-maker, thus followed by the public or private institution that hypothetically abides by the crowd’s choices. For arts policymaking, such a mechanism implies several consequences should this type of matchfunding become the norm in cultural budget allocation. In the case of public institutions, governments become less concerned with sectorial programs and specific public policies for culture as the final decision-making relies on the “wisdom of the crowd” (Mollick and Nanda, 2016). Ultimately, the making of coherent programs and funds for culture provisioning represents a state-driven initiative (Mangset, 2020) which significantly loses importance within matchfunding structure. In such cases, public funds are less an instrument of a deliberate choice by a committee of experts within governments, and more a result of the public’s choice [see, e.g., Mollick and Nanda (2016)]. If the public’s choice is geographically-constrained, class-restricted, or income-dependent, cultural policy under matchfunding is equally restricted. Solutions to this problem involve, on the one hand, the expansion of crowdfunding platforms towards a better

⁷ We refer “screening” to Akerlof (1970) in reference to economic agents screening the product’s quality signals upfront, hence attempting to reduce the information asymmetry between buyers and sellers. Nonetheless, whereas, the information asymmetry problem results from agents actively conveying relevant signals to potential buyers, in our case, the public or private institution in charge of the matched funds will most likely perform a secondary screening, since the “crowd’s validation” comes first. As such, the quality signal is not conveyed by the creator of the project directly to the institution but it is mediated by the individual donor. In other words, if the project lacks quality but is still accepted by the “crowd of donors,” this would be a sufficient criterion for the matched institution. This unfolds important.

⁸ The U-shape funding pattern shows that, especially in the reward-based model, contributions abound in the initial and later stages, but are considerably lacking in the development stage (Kuppuswamy and Bayus, 2017). Among other aspects, crowdfunding for the arts shows traces of high demand interdependence, close social networks (Dalla Chiesa and Dekker, 2021) and significant geographical proximity between funders and founders (Mendes da Silva et al., 2016).

representation of a nation's population, or the balancing of top-down and bottom-up cultural policy decision-making.

Figure 3 illustrates the basic matchfunding mechanism in which institutional intervention emerges as a consequence of the crowd's quality screening. In the illustration, the public or private institutions and the platform together agree that funds will be provided as soon as a minimum of 70% of funds⁹ is collected from the crowd of dispersed individual supporters.

Matching the incentives for all involved parties

Typically, matchfunding intertwines bottom-up participation with top-down decision-making, hence offering several incentives to the involved parties. The next items will be dedicated to exploring some of the incentives, benefits, and hindrances for establishing novel public-private partnerships for cultural policymaking.

Incentives for public institutions: Outsourcing screening

From a state-led point of view, the opening of funding calls for projects, followed by selection processes, and justifying choices often requires considerable time and transaction costs involved in the management of cultural programs. The costs of law-abiding management principles and hierarchical decision-making prevails (McGuigan, 2004). With matchfunding, the costly quality screening process can be outsourced to external parties (e.g., crowdfunding platforms and, ultimately, the crowd). In this situation, governments act less as decision-makers and more as facilitators of public demands *via* the crowd's validation.

We assume that all institutions (independent foundations, funds, lotteries, public-run organizations, and government bodies) may benefit from crowdfunding by means of 1) reducing communication costs, 2) allowing for a "hybrid democracy" rule in the use of cultural budget, 3) transferring the implementation of programs to a third party, and 4) outsourcing quality screening procedures. These benefits stem from the incentives that institutions have from outsourcing costly procedures and, consequently, relying on a "consumer sovereignty" doctrine thereby transforming the object of

policymaking into a subject (i.e., instead of passively being the recipient of public goods, citizens dispersedly become the active part in the decision-making process).

The hindrance of these incentives lies in the matchmaking mechanism itself and the implementation of the project, both distant from the government sphere of control. Once the decision-making about which project to select and implementation of it leave any centralized control, accountability and enforcement rules also become more dispersed. While prior to matchfunding only one party was accountable for the provisioning of cultural programs, now an assortment of private agents partakes in this process with similar voting power. The consequence is a welfare decreasing result for donors in case the crowdfunding campaign eventually fails to deliver its products and, subsequently, for public bodies whose goal is a fair provisioning of access to culture.

Incentives for platforms and project creators: External credible signals

The second actor is the new online intermediary: the platform that adopts a pilot matchfunding strategy. The central incentive involved in a matchfunding scheme is surely accessing extra monetary funds which is translated into higher income to platforms operating in a competitive environment. Next to the financial incentives, platforms increase their legitimacy by welcoming the credibility signal of established institutions with good public reputation (Senabre and Morell, 2018). Similar to the credibility signals expected of crowdfunding campaigns, platforms too are subject to the same quality judgement. In a context of high information asymmetry, typical of crowdfunding (Handke and Dalla Chiesa, 2022) and cultural sectors in general (Caves, 2000), platforms may adopt strategies to eliminate mistrust and, hence expand the pool of potential supporters and project creators. As previous studies show, the mistrust of potential donors on the campaign's products, or the platform's payment system can discourage crowdfunding participation in countries where crowdfunding is not yet widely adopted (Rodriguez-Ricardo et al., 2018). The transparency of crowdfunding procedures, detailed descriptions of projects, proximity, and constant updates are vital to build credibility towards the audience and increase success-rate of projects (Mollick, 2014; De Voldere and Zeko, 2017; Wehnert et al., 2019; Katseli and Boufounou, 2020; Moysidou and Hausberg, 2020).

From the platform's viewpoint, two main benefits apply: 1) higher success rates (Van Montfort et al., 2021), and 2) crowding-in effects resulting from external validation attributed to the platform by means of credibility signals (and, in extension, to creators). Contrary to a "crowding out" principle in which public funds would offer adverse incentives for private investment

⁹ In some platforms—described later in this paper - when a project reaches 80% of the funding target, external funds will add to the crowd-based sum (Mondriaan Fonds, AFK, Kunstloc Brabant, and others). Therefore, the 70% limit depicted in the figure is merely illustrative. Typically, the platform decides which percentage of collected funds allows projects to incorporate institutional funds from other third parties. These decisions are taken in an agreement between the institutional partner and the platform that intermediates the funding process.

(Frey, 2000), matchfunding offers a more sophisticated mechanism to invite private investment without crowding out participation. The risk associated with supporting unknown artists is also shared by various parties, which significantly decreases the negative consequences of managerial misconduct over the course of a project.

Both the platform and project founders benefit from positive credibility signals attached to its operations along with the guarantee of fairness from partnering with well-known institutions. Project creators (artists, managers, cultural workers, etc.) access similar incentives as credibility signals conveyed by the platform tend to spillover to projects themselves (Rykkja et al., 2020). Secondly, the possibility of bypassing the hierarchical decision-making process of subsidy demand, grants, and bank loans is vital to a dynamic entrepreneurial economy (Feder and Katz-Gerro, 2015).

The hindrances for platforms are more limited than those expected for governmental decision-making. We can expect shortcomings when it comes to guaranteeing the cultural product's delivery, or its quality. Typically, platforms are not liable for the quality or non-delivery of crowdfunded projects. However, fraud rates in crowdfunding have been historically low, while delay is a constant (Mollick, 2014). This may denote that the risks associated with reward-based crowdfunding are much more limited than those expected in equity based or profit-sharing options, thereby exempting platforms from extra quality control. Whilst this does not mean lower quality of projects, it can represent the limited skillset of project creators who often overestimate their capabilities or underestimate the costs involved with setting up a successful crowdfunding campaign (Agrawal et al., 2014; Mollick 2014).

For creators, shortcomings of this model are also limited since any additional funds are much welcome in a scenario of great online competition among cultural projects. Hindrances can be observed from a welfare perspective, rather than an individual one as, per definition, the more crowdfunding rules the mechanisms of arts provisioning, the less long-term policymaking becomes the norm. Ideally, artists and cultural creators should benefit from both long-run cultural policy strategies—in which the individual creator's role is a passive one—and short-run crowdfunding campaigns led by the crowd's validation. This way, cultural creators can benefit from both established top-down policies and, at the same time, act as active mobilizers of the projects they wish to see provided to their audiences whilst in direct contact with them *via* online platforms.

Incentives for donors and the non-use value

Extensive success-factor research shows that donors extract *non-use* value of crowdfunding for cultural projects (Boeuf et al., 2014; Cecere et al., 2017; Kuppaswamy and Bayus, 2017).

Within matchfunding, this finding is not different as projects' features remain the same. Most arts-related campaigns offer memorabilia and symbolic reward items expressing gratitude towards donors. These most often can be considered items of non-commercial use, non-market benefits and non-monetary. The higher success rates in these types of projects may demonstrate both that funders are more attracted to campaigns that display a public benefit, public good attributes, or community contributions (Davies, 2015), and that the risks associated with such projects are perceived as lower, which is reflected in low target goals, and hence higher success probability (Handke and Dalla Chiesa, 2022). One can argue that the "private party" involved in crowdfunding acts in a more public than private way.¹⁰ This means that backers increase their utility by helping a project thrive, exerting warm-glow benefits or altruism towards the arts. This way, matchfunding manages to partially solve the underfunding problem of artistic projects by welcoming several private partners whose intrinsic motivation exerts more public benefits and less use-value. Further research can address such issues empirically by making use of testable assumptions.

Although funders may face lower transaction costs of investment in crowdfunding platforms compared to traditional investment methods, they may not contribute to projects if there are lower chances of success (Chang, 2020; Handke and Dalla Chiesa, 2022). However, by guaranteeing extra funds from institutional supporters, donors perceive the signal that their investment is not in vain as the chances of success are higher. An example by a pilot project in the UK shows how donors would not have supported online campaigns if public institutions were not part of the matchfunding scheme (Baeck et al., 2017). One can, thus, expect that institutional funding within crowdfunding schemes for the arts tend to act as a *complement* rather than *substitute* to individual private donation. Furthermore, as the crowdfunding system becomes overall more credible and reliable through matchfunding, more users feel compelled to support such initiatives. In essence, the strengthening of this system benefits all parties, but more importantly, if donors mistrust the process all perceived institutional benefits are in vain.

A few matchfunding cases

Arguably, digital matchfunding cases have been at the forefront of the dissemination and reporting strategies undertaken by the British arts-related bodies such as the Arts

¹⁰ A similar argument is developed by Srakar and Čopić (2012) about the fact that many so-called "private interventions in policymaking" are considered to be more public than private since agents may be driven by the intrinsic values of the arts or not retrieve clear use-values of their contributions.

Council, DCMS, and reinforced by the European Commission (Odorovic et al., 2021). Other than the government directives, platforms may include the matchfunding option as a differential service to creators. To some extent, this sets them apart from other general-purpose crowdfunding platforms that do not offer a wide range of matchmaking options. Most crowdfunding platforms with a reward-based focus accept projects in the arts and wider creative industries (design, fashion, technology, and video games, for example).

Since 2010, in the Netherlands, Voordekunst allows the combination of funds from backers and other contributions partially or totally supported by governmental funds, such as the Amsterdam Funds for the Arts. Nowadays, Voordekunst creates partnerships with local funds (corresponding to each region in the Netherlands), which typically focus on specific themes: Prins Bernhard Culture funds, Province of Gelderland, Mondiaan Fund, BankGiro Loterij Fonds, etc. The platform Crowdfunder in the UK is, to this date, the most well-known example that has welcomed several governmental projects related to charity and business development. Also, in the Netherlands, some platforms emerge with a sectorial focus on matchfunding, which is the case of Cinecrowd which promotes crowdfunding projects for small local filmmaking productions. In Spain, Goteo largely welcomes projects with clear social, political, or cultural themes. Outside European borders, the case of Benfeitoria in Brazil emerged in the same period as the other platforms (2010–2011) with a focus on social innovation projects and major partnerships with private companies aiming to implement corporate social responsibility policies (CSR). In this case, matchfunding is dislocated from the governmental sphere, making this a unique case and relatively distant from this paper's analysis.

Interestingly, the abovementioned platforms are structured as non-profit-oriented foundations, differently from platforms such as Kickstarter which operate as a private company. Their funding structure, nevertheless, remains similar to all other reward-based platforms: the online platform charges a fixed fee over the total funds raised by the project creator. Because of their successful partnership and endorsement signals by third parties, platforms whose strategy includes matchfunding tend to reach higher success rates. This may result from strong local ties, higher success rates in specific project types (i.e., projects with low target goals, tend to reach success most frequently) or having closer advisory provided by the platform officers to the founders.¹¹

Regulations in crowdfunding vary greatly not only regarding different geographical areas (countries and regional blocs, such as

the European Union's regulations) but also when it comes to crowdfunding models¹² (Lazzaro and Noonan, 2020). As for matchfunding schemes (one type of crowdfunding), platforms typically establish their mechanisms together with cultural officers in governments or semi-public institutions. Table 1 explores current examples from different regions utilizing matchfunding options, their revenues as per their active websites, and annual reports made available online by the online crowdfunding platforms over the year 2019. Most examples are European based, except Benfeitoria, a Brazilian website, which we add for comparisons amongst different matchfunding models available worldwide.

The limits of matchfunding: A policymaking strategy?

It is worth noticing that the use of crowdfunding for artistic and cultural projects is still very limited in terms of its demographics and geographic outreach. Most users are rather young¹³ (both project creators and funders), highly educated and living in urban environments (Mollick, 2014; Breznitz and Noonan, 2020). This often represents a fraction of a nation's population, especially in less privileged areas. Furthermore, donors cannot always access tax benefits from their donations¹⁴, which implies that the overlapping of a state-led cultural budget with crowdfunding puts contributors on the spotlight as the main people responsible for arts-provisioning. First, as taxpayers; secondly, as supporters of crowdfunding initiatives. Such an effect is not as evident because the pool of supporters is not representative of the entire population in most countries where this option is available. As such, the power of a decentralized low-cost funding system does not entirely overrun the benefits of long-term policies dedicated to making the arts accessible to different social classes, ages, and regions within specific countries.

Secondly, one of the greatest benefits of crowdfunding is its low-entry barrier. Informal projects, semi-organized cultural creators, early-stage entrepreneurs, and product prototypes share the access to a highly decentralized, bottom-up system, similar to open source and crowdsourcing initiatives facilitated by online infrastructures (see Frischmann, 2014). Similar to the

11 To the best of our knowledge, studies on evaluating the impact of advisory officers or learning materials for success rates are lacking in the crowdfunding literature.

12 E.g., donation-based, reward-based, investment-based, and lending options. Each model provides different benefits to both creators and donors, hence different regulations apply.

13 Recent figures estimate that supporters' ages range from 14 to 35 years old (Fundly, 2020).

14 Cultural organizations typically request formal permission for their donations to be tax-exempt. This process varies in each country where applicable. Since most crowdfunding initiatives start informally, we can expect that most projects run at the margins of formally institutionalized cultural provisioning.

TABLE 1 Matchfunding examples

Name and country of origin	Voordekunst (Netherlands)	Cinecrowd (Netherlands)	Crowdfunder (UK)	Goteo (Spain)	Benfeitoria (Brazil)
Objectives and Mission	To stimulate entrepreneurs among creative initiators and cultural institutions. Increasing public support for arts and culture	Aims at the realization of films, starting from the idea to involve the crowd - the eventual audience of a film—to the intermediaries involved in the film industry	To tackle society's challenges and change the world through crowdfunding initiatives	To promote a more ethical and collaborative Internet where citizens take an active role in improving and advancing their communities in economic, environmental, educational, political, social and/or cultural terms, through cooperative processes	An innovation laboratory that was born to foster a more humane, collaborative, and fulfilling culture in Brazil
Foundation year	2010	2011	2011	2011	2011
Initiator	Amsterdam Funds for the Art	Private	Private	Platoniq	Private
Funding method	All or nothing	All or nothing	All or nothing and Keep It All	All or nothing and Keep It All	All or nothing
Legal entity	Foundation	Foundation	LTD. Company	Foundation	Foundation
Arts and Non-arts Categories	Arts and Culture: Visual Art, Music, Film, Photography, Media, Theatre, Dance, Publication, Design, Heritage	Cinema	Food and Drink, Music, Community, Environment, Film and Theatre, Creative and Arts, Publishing, Business, Technology, Sports, Schools, Politics, University, Social Enterprise, Charities, Heritage, Community Shares, Personal Causes, Transport, Retail, Hospitality, Leisure, Tourism, Travel, Entertainment, Health and Fitness	Social, Communications, Technological, Commercial, Educational, Cultural, Ecological, Scientific, Design	Cities, Science and Technology, Culture and Art, Education, Innovation, Entrepreneurship, Sports and Leisure, Social Inclusion, Health and Wellness, Sustainability, Collaborative Economy, Politics, Causes
Partnerships In 2019	19 partnerships (AFK, Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, Province of Gelderland, Mondriaan Fund, BankGiro Loterij Fonds etc.)	28 partnerships (AFK, Mondriaan Fund, Kunstloc Brabant, Cinemasia, BankGiro Loretij Fonds, the 48 h Film Project etc.)	70 partnerships (National and regional: United Kingdom, Scotland, England, North, Midlands, London, South)	N/A (Goteo Foundation, Barcelona City Council, Fiare Ethical Bank, University of Malaga, Europeana, etc.)	N/A (SITAWI, Yousers, Natura Cicades, Negras Potências, BNDES and others)
Outreach	Netherlands and Belgium	International	Great Britain	International	Brazil
Financing of the platform	Projects with institutional partners and crowdfunding fees applied to each crowdfunded call				
Donated in 2019	€4m	€659k	n/a	€2m	n/a
Funds received until 2019	€31m	€5,1m	€100m	€11m	€13m
No. of Projects in 2019	1,532	n/a	n/a	6,733	n/a
Success Rates in 2019	83%	84%	n/a	80%	70%
Weblink	voordekunst.nl	cinecrowd.com	crowdfunder.co.uk	en.goteo.org	benfeitoria.com

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

cultural commons governance (Ostrom and Hess, 2007) and local participatory systems (Michels and Graaf, 2010), crowdfunding's openness allows creators with limited access to financial markets to propose and implement projects of their choice as long as there's minimal acceptance from the

crowd. It is worth noticing that although its rationale is seen as more egalitarian and concerned with the democratization of access to funds and markets (Galuszka and Brzozowska, 2016), crowdfunding may reinforce superstar effects (Doshi, 2014; Barzilai et al., 2018), or concentration of funds in

specific categories (Brennitz and Noonan, 2020). Despite the benefits related to alleviating policy management and transaction costs through dispersed funding, one can rightfully question if crowdfunding reinforces unstructured initiatives overly based on consumer sovereignty principles, hence reducing government monopoly (Towse, 2005). In this case, a set of coherent cultural policy (as a set of programs for the arts) may partially lose its relevance. In crowdfunding, public choice becomes more dispersed than any centralized governmental mechanism, thereby promoting creative projects whose quality criteria and credibility signals are equally dispersed.

On the other hand, the profusion of cultural projects and art forms in crowdfunding is expected to be more diverse and, therefore, adherent to the population's interests. In the contexts of western democracies where cultural policies face legitimacy issues for failing to address diversity and new forms of organization in artistic fields (Mangset, 2020), one can question the extent to which centralized decision-making processes can deliver the goals of diversity in the arts. If sectorial policies remain restricted within institutional "iron cages" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991), one can expect the crowd's rule to rightfully open novel avenues for more diverse projects, and geographically-spread innovation in the cultural sectors.

The engagement of institutional supporters in private platforms does not mean that stable cultural policy is discarded. On the contrary, matchfunding is a powerful alternative for state-centric decision-making and over-dependence on "expert" positions regarding cultural decision-making (Mollick and Nanda, 2016). Ultimately, matchfunding is expected to work better in situations when the final decision remains with the crowd of independent donors whose small contributions resemble a democratic voting system (Mazza, 2020) and are combined with a centralized funding decision - either from a public or a private institution whose additional donations convey both credibility signals and extra monetary support to unknown creators. Yet, as previously explained, this assumption may be more of an expectation than an actual result of this online dispersed donation system.

Conclusion

Public and private initiatives have been historically entangled (Wagner, 2014; Wagner, 2016). It would be surprising if this phenomenon was absent in the contemporary platform economy. The matchfunding case exhibits a double-sided situation in which independent market actors and dispersed individual donors actively engage in making culture more widely available. In addition to that, public or private institutions (foundations, public sector, corporations) confer credible signals to both creators and the online platform

responsible for matchmaking all involved actors. This synergy demonstrates that economic agents are not isolated within their institutional domains. The traditional dichotomy between government and market is thus replaced by a more relational mechanism aided by online tools in which dispersed communities and individual citizens are actively included in decision-making.

Private initiatives may reveal more "public" attributes than expected, hence diminishing the power of anti-private narratives often found in cultural policy research (Srakar and Čopič, 2012). This seems to be the case with matchfunding as this sophisticated mechanism is fully equipped to allow one-citizen-one-vote strategy *via* monetary contributions with tax-exempt options—if conditions apply. Instead of interpreting matchfunding as a purely private alternative, we can better make sense of its relevance from its public good attributes enhanced by digitalization: low-entry barriers, low excludability and low rivalry for donors, creators, and the institutional donors. Paradoxically, this private-based mechanism may deliver what public initiatives are traditionally expected to deliver: a diverse pool of cultural projects representative of a diverse population. It remains to be seen if matchfunding can fulfill such promises as its barriers seem to be the overall access to crowdfunding platforms and the interest in partaking a model when citizens are already high-taxpaying contributors. Nevertheless, the strong demand-testing component and public good attributes of artistic projects in crowdfunding lead us to believe that, given sufficient conditions, matchfunding may become a powerful tool for cultural policymakers in areas where centralized decision-making is out of reach, namely, the direct opinions of citizens. Among all forms of mixed funding strategies, online matchfunding appears to be a harmless one, with low risks to all involved parties.

We unveiled the main benefits of matchfunding also from an informational perspective: it reduces the transaction costs involved in planning, deciding, and implementing policies. From the creator point of view, the costs involved with preparing a subsidy, loan and other traditional philanthropic demands are also reduced. The simplicity of this scheme is, however, often accompanied by a lack of clear thematic choice and a lack of long-term financial sustainability for the creator. This is the area where matchfunding deserves more attention: 1) for creators, the support for creating relevant, high-quality projects is vital; 2) for policymakers, the awareness of the funding criteria and best-practices is relevant to ensure that long-term policy planning is not overrun by contingencies; 3) for online platforms, the challenge remains to transcend its matchmaking vocation towards aiding interest parties to create long-run sustainable mechanisms to support the arts. This article leaves some open questions for further research, namely: 1) what are the criteria used by governments for choosing platforms and potential projects online? 2) what is

the current value of matchfunding in the scope of cultural budget and crowdfunding in general? and 3) how does the incorporation of a matchfunding budget in more extensive cultural policy directives come to being? This discussion yields various normative and positive debates not fully answered in this paper.

With the ever-growing crowdfunding model, we can assume that the future brings more matchfunding, hence demanding substantial scholarly attention to support practitioners in making this mechanism not only a short-term investment format, but part of thematic directives in the public sector. This is perhaps the biggest challenge, as thematic choices are restrictive in nature and, in contrast, crowdfunding projects vary enormously in their themes. The type of projects, the quality of creators and the purpose of projects must be ideally contrasted with pre-determined criteria which are yet to be established.

Finally, we questioned if matchfunding represents a consistent case for *cultural policy 2.0*: a policymaking strategy that is revamped by the crowd's choices, open to diversity and sufficiently dispersed in its decision-making process. Reasonably, it urges that scholars delve into this model and trace comparisons with traditional funding strategies, and with typical non-matched crowdfunding in order to further build up best-practices, and

case-based studies about the benefits and constraints of this model.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 02 May 2022

ACCEPTED 06 December 2022

PUBLISHED 28 December 2022

CITATION

Samuk S, Tonga Y, Pellegrini E and Catoni ML (2022), Developing a new cultural policy agenda for Pistoia: The current and projected role of artists and creative workers in the territory. *Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic.* 12:11105. doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11105

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Developing a new cultural policy agenda for Pistoia: The current and projected role of artists and creative workers in the territory

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This paper aims to promote an understanding of what cultural and creative industries in general, and valorisation of Pistoia's cultural life in particular, mean to the main stakeholders and how they establish the collaboration during this process of negotiation, fundraising and prioritising the cultural production/experience/consumption according to the strategic cultural plan in Pistoia. What are the needs, priorities and concerns of the artists and creative workers regarding the strategic plan? To what extent are the policymakers' aims and the ideas of the artists and creative workers parallel and divergent? Explorative process tracing that aims at semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted with local artists and other stakeholders in Pistoia to observe the planning and to determine the past and current obstacles. Furthermore, the researchers involved in the project are engaged in participant observation as they follow the developments on how the decision-making takes place regarding cultural policies in the city through the *Tavolo Permanente della Cultura*. We argue that the modality in which artists and policymakers think of collaboration might be diverse but there is ample room for collaboration in the future.

KEYWORDS

Pistoia, cultural policy, cultural policy agenda, artists, creative workers, Tavolo Permanente della Cultura Permanent Roundtable for Culture Strategic cultural plan

Introduction: Setting the frame for cultural policies

Cultural policy as a public policy involves many different actors with different interests. The government has a say in how cultural industry is shaped, how culture is represented, what kind of cultural messages are transmitted. As in most of the public policies, the experts, academics and other stakeholders take a part of the decision making. Hence, there are many questions involved in cultural policy-making: who, what, how and why? In this paper, our aim is to examine the cultural policy of Pistoia from bottom-up and top-down to compare, contrast and analyse the cultural valorisation process in this specific city considering the role of the public institutions and the local artists.

Policy is divided into five parts in a life cycle by [Cairney \(2012\)](#): agenda setting, policy formulation, legitimization, implementation, evaluation, and policy maintenance,

succession or termination. This division shows definitively that politics is closely related to the making of cultural policies as any other public policy is. Cultural policy can be attached to other public policies, which is called “policy attachment” by Gray (2004). In line with these remarks, Graham (2002, 1008) underlines that “heritage is simultaneously knowledge, a cultural product and a political resource”. Therefore, it is important to view different political dimensions of cultural policies such as the overlapping and diverging elements between the regional policy-making, and the local needs and public opinion regarding cultural valorisation, in the case of Pistoia, which are both equally valid in determining the cultural valorisation strategies.

Another dimension of the cultural policy would be cities and the role attributed to them in developing cultural plans. The cities are competing globally with other cities as both economic pioneers and culture promoters (Bell and Oakley, 2014). However, the economic interest and the cultural priorities might not be coinciding, which can create contestations between different actors regarding the cultural policy (ibid.). Hence, when understanding and analysing the cultural valorisation priorities of a city (whoever defines these priorities) the process of decision making shall be considered as well. Apart from the diversification of interests amongst different actors, there might be other factors that cause ambiguity regarding how a cultural policy is made and implemented. Accordingly, Gray (2015) emphasizes that “ambiguity is better than certainty in cultural policy so that the cultural policies are based on debate rather than consensus.”

In this paper, our aim is to understand the overlapping and diverging elements between the regional cultural policy-making in the case of Pistoia and the local participation into the decision making by its public institutions and artists. Pistoia was chosen as “capitale Italiana della Cultura” (Italian capital of culture) in 2017.¹ Following this event, one of the most important attempts has been to bring stakeholders (l'Associazione Teatrale Pistoiese, the municipality and the province of Pistoia, Regional Government of Tuscany, the Foundation of Cassa di Risparmio di Pistoia and Pescia, Dioecesi and CCIAA of Pistoia) together to enable the valorisation of cultural heritage in Pistoia using diverse strategies like a strategic plan, the regional public competition for funds (for restoration, conservation, and inventory depicted by the Provincia-Provincial Government-, Teatro Manzoni and IMT School for Advanced Studies, Lucca)

and enhancing collaboration *via* leadership and fundraising to forge the feeling of ownership for all actors involved.

There are hindering and fostering factors to success for an implementation of an efficient cultural policy and sustainability of the strategic plans involving the cities' cultural resources. One of the main hindering factors can be related to insufficient inclusion of the needs, thoughts and preferences of the city residents as there is the participatory turn even in cultural policy (Bonet and Negrier, 2018). In this paper, the citizens we are examining are artists. Therefore, we adopt a methodology in which we triangulate the aims of the policymakers and implementers for the cultural plan with the vision and desires of the local artists and those involved in the art scene in regards to the cultural heritage of the city. Are there any discrepancies and if there are, how can they be resolved?

This paper aims to understand what cultural heritage in general, and valorisation of Pistoia's cultural heritage in particular, mean to the stakeholders (indicated above) and how they establish the collaboration during this process of negotiation, fundraising and prioritising the cultural heritage in a strategic manner. The rationale for undertaking this research is that it presents a unique case study where stakeholder is used. In line with this objective, the research questions are: To what extent are the artists' and policymakers' ideas parallel and differing?

The paper is as follows: first, we have a brief literature review on “community engagement” in valorisation of cultural heritage that provides a brief overview of the gaps in the literature regarding scientific articles written on Pistoia, the case study. Third, we briefly look into the case of Pistoia. Fourth, methodology will follow. Fifth, we analyse the interview results. Sixth, we discuss the results in line with the stakeholder theory in the concluding remarks, whilst providing an agenda for future research and underlining the strengths and the limitations of this research.

Setting the context: A review of the literature

The case of Pistoia is intriguing as different actors emphasize different “capitals” (social, cultural and economic) (Bourdieu, 1985)² regarding the city. Therefore, this section of the paper which aims to provide a brief overview of the literature regarding entangled interests of different actors and community involvement in cultural valorisation and preservation. We harness the stakeholder theory with the participatory turn (Sacco, 2011; EU, 2018; Sokka et al., 2021). First, we explain stakeholder theory; second, we summarise the literature on participatory turn; third, we provide a brief introduction to the academic works on Pistoia, demonstrating

1 Hristova (2017, 9) details how the capitals of culture came to the fore: “Decision No. 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 established a Union action to select EU capitals of Culture for the years 2020–2023”. Similarly, Italy has aimed to follow the initiative with Italian capital of culture since 2015. The aims are also converging as the city with its culturally enriched programme attracts local and international tourists.

2 Recently, a fourth capital has been added: digital capital, in other words, technological capital (Ragnedda, 2018; Calderon Gomez, 2021).

that there is a research gap when these three categories (stakeholder theory, participatory turn and literature written on Pistoia's cultural heritage management) are considered together.

Stakeholder theory

"Built heritage management must be understood within specific economic and cultural-political contexts, shaped by local, national, and global political agendas" (Nyseth and Sognnaes, 2013, 70). Emerick (2014) focusses on "community engagement" in valorisation of cultural heritage whilst Nitzky (2013) underlines the importance of "shared authority" in decision making. Additionally, Nyseth and Sognnaes (2013, 75) claim that "we need to pay attention to local actors and actions in order to complement our knowledge of cultural economy and its role in heritage preservation." Therefore, cultural heritage is closely connected with the cultural economy as well as the element of "past" that creates a sense of community (Graham, 2002).

To create a sense of community is one of the roles of cultural heritage preservation despite the fact that the concept of "community" might be elusive (Abercrombie et al., 1988). In our paper, we define community as the residents and citizens of the city (in this case, in Pistoia). Amongst the residents and citizens, there are obviously the artists and the role they play to give authenticity to the cultural life of the city.

In this context, Elsorady (2012, 387) states: "although generic heritage conservation plans and policies provide a foundation for community improvement, historic areas may require a level of attention that addresses the community's needs and the physical, economic and social character of the area in question." In other words, if we look at the international context of cultural heritage preservation we notice that there is a significant focus on community engagement since there are many foundations in "culture" that creates, reintroduces and changes the "community" (Fiske 2008; Waterton and Watson 2013; Ripp and Rodwell 2018; Kim et al., 2020). Amongst the stakeholders that influence, restore and provide guidance on valorisation of the cultural heritage, it is highly important to recognise that the community at large as a part of the decision-making in cultural policies and cultural heritage valorisation.

The stakeholders' involvement in the valorisation of cultural heritage is the starting point to understand the evolution and evaluation of the cultural capital of a city.³ Why is it important to

understand the stakeholders? Adie and Amore (2020, 1) underline in their work that "there is a plethora of stakeholders, a variety of legal regulations, and conflicting governing styles which can be found within and across national contexts" and they suggest that "the stakeholders shall be studied and considered with their interests, aims and imagined future plans for cultural valorisation". However, one issue is that it is hard to calculate the total number of stakeholders (Tom et al., 2017) and to identify them (Reed, 1997). Within this process of decision making and determination of the main interests in cultural heritage valorisation it is important not to forget that stakeholder groups interact with each other to carry out certain tasks (Li 2007, p.378).

Previous researchers identified that stakeholder collaboration is of utmost importance when it comes to not only cultural heritage valorisation but also touristic attraction and cultural consumption. Aas et al. (2005, 29) suggest that "if a common ground between the different interested parties can be found, then heritage tourism can be developed in a way that preserves the resources of the local community and is beneficial to all." The collaborative approach between the stakeholders though, might not always be straightforward (Ladkin and Bertramini, 2002). Wang and Aoki (2019, 166) found that there might be a clash of interests at the local level, between the government-developer coalition and residents' function-based place-attachment and residents' heritage consciousness and immediate needs of the local population. Therefore, different interests, tensions, wishes and perspectives on cultural heritage valorisation need to be considered in order to explore the mechanism behind the making of the cultural policy decisions.

First of all, it is central to define the "stakeholder theory" and later, underline its importance for the theoretical premises of the paper. Stakeholder is defined as "who can affect or are affected by the achievement of an organization's purpose" (Freeman, 1984, p.49). The stakeholder approach notes that "a company's stakeholders can be classified as internal (employees, managers, owners) and external

TABLE 1 Potential issues in large cultural projects.

Area	Issues
Identification and involvement of key stakeholders	Involvement in the collaboration Representation: legitimacy and power Capacity to participate
Maintaining the collaboration	Power distribution among the convened stakeholders Need for consensus-based decision making Information sharing and dissemination Heterogeneity in governance structures and value systems Evolution of the roles of actors
Long term implementation of the collaborative outcomes	Long term outcomes and structuring of the collaboration process Unrealistic expectations

Source: Arnaboldi and Spiller (2011, p. 643).

³ Within these participatory models, we should add the cultural mapping of a city with its tangible and intangible resources. In the case study of Pistoia, the first thing that was achieved by the Tavolo Permanente della Cultura was to prepare an inventory of the cultural heritage (including public, private and religiously owned ones). It should be added that a creative way of doing cultural mapping is empathetic cultural mapping (Goopy et al., 2018) which involves citizens and residents' stories and narratives. This idea has not been adopted yet within the Piano Strategico della Cultura but it can be a great idea for future research projects.

(suppliers, society, government, creditors, shareholders, customers)” (Freeman, 1984; in Claudia Tom et al., 2017). Being one of the main tenets of cultural heritage ownership and valorisation, the local community has a great role to play in planning, design and implementation of cultural projects (Russo et al., 2001; Peng et al., 2016; Ferrari and Gilli 2018).

Furthermore, Arnaboldi and Spiller (2011, 643) draw attention to the incidental matters concerning collaboration of stakeholders, and issues that might arise within major cultural projects (see Table 1):

Participatory turn

A crucial line of literature is on participatory turn. Sacco’s (2011) paper on Culture 3.0 and participatory budgeting (De Sousa Santos, 1998; Beard et al., 2016) are quite central in the literature showing how participation can be managed within different contexts by a diverse range of participants that feel that they are equally contributing to the cultural scene. The idea is basically related to the participatory turn (Sacco, 2011, p.9) and Sacco’s theory on consumers who also become producers *via* different participatory channels (Sacco, 2011). In other words, there is a convergence between the consumer and the producer and the line between them is blurred (Jenkins, 2006). The idea that the consumer turns into the producer is (Bruns, 2008) very relevant for the cultural policies especially in the last two decades. The participatory turn therefore, would be in line with the stakeholder theory, where the participation is supposed to be bottom-up and interactional, but not only top-down (Porlezza, 2019, 2). While stakeholder theory focuses more on the power imbalances and inequalities, participatory turn provides more agency-centred approach to the literature.

In the recent years, cultural heritage has become a part of participatory governance theories (Voices of Culture, 2015; Hristova, 2017; EU, 2018). Biondi et al. (2020) focus on different aspects of participatory cultural initiatives (PCI) which are based on very interesting dimensions: governance and orchestration, participating, legitimacy and space. How these dimensions reveal themselves and how they are used by the participating networks, organisations, and cultural leaders are quite central to the discussion on participation, ownership, and the thin line between the consumer and the producer. However, Sokka et al. (2021) draws attention to the fact that one should be sceptical about these concepts as they suggest that there might be ideological impositions on the cultural assemblies and participatory organisations. Sokka et al. (2021, 9) notes that participation does not always mean that the people who participate are empowered. Sometimes one can feel more empowered by not participating as well. This view is in line with the fetishisation with bottom up approaches in contrast with top-down approaches (Richardson et al., 2019, 131). It is a type of

fetishization cause this view does not necessarily guarantee that the reality will conform to this duality (one vs. the other).

Sokka et al. (2021, 13) denotes that it is important not only to pay attention to output and effectiveness but also to include marginalised citizens to maintain the legitimacy of co-creative processes. The authors elaborate four processes of participation: governmental, corporatist, service-led and co-creative. Most important of all is that there will always be top-down policies as the EU will lead a top-down agenda, but this agenda can be combined with bottom-up movements integrating art and social activism (Hristova, 2017, 10).

Gaps in the literature regarding cultural management history of Pistoia

Within the last decade, the literature on Pistoia shows that the research regarding cultural policy and its connection with the local population is found to be scarce. The literature regarding the cultural heritage management and cultural policies in Pistoia mostly focus on the technical aspects of cultural heritage where the preservation methods via renovation, restoration and restructuration are at the centre of the main research themes. For instance, vulnerability assessment of the masonry churches by user reported data and modern internet of things (IoT) (Uva et al., 2018), importance of assessing the rate of decay as a tool for planning conservation actions in the case of *Servi Muti* (by Roberto Barni) examined by Bracci et al. (2016), the special case for the preservation of the Baptistery of San Giovanni in Corte in Pistoia *via* water repellent treatments for stone by Martelli et al. (2020). Veluzzi (2019) in his work concentrates on the historical formation of the city and building of the first religious monuments finding a geometric genesis and pattern in which there was a very specific reasoning behind the urban planning. On the other hand, when the historical importance of the city and art history considered, it is possible to find plenty of scholarly works (Tigler 2011; Matteuzzi 2016; Geltner 2020; Paradiso et al., 2020; Corio 2021).

As shown in literature review above, and after an examination of relevant scholarly articles regarding the cultural heritage in Pistoia, it is observed that there are gaps in the literature regarding national and regional cultural policies and their effects on the valorisation process for this specific city. Since the strategic cultural plan is very recent it is observed that most of the studies till now were concerned with the cultural heritage in technical, architectural and historical terms rather than exploring stakeholder collaboration based on legitimacy and power (Arnaboldi and Spiller, 2011). The research, therefore, requires an in-depth understanding of the role of the public stakeholders and those who are in the art scene, analysing power imbalances between them. In other words, this study takes these

reflections underlined in the literature review and further investigates the case of Pistoia through the concept of stakeholder theory.

Strategic cultural plan for Pistoia

One of the most important initiatives that have been taken by the *Provincia of Pistoia* was to establish the Tavolo Permanente della Cultura della Provincia di Pistoia (Permanent Round Table for Culture of the Pistoia Province) to improve the valorisation of cultural heritage. Accordingly, a list of all the culturally important edifices, in other words, an inventory of the architectonic and documented cultural heritage was prepared.

Roundtables take place every month (unless there is a public holiday), once a month. There are more than 30 participants from provinces, regional governments, local governments, NGOs and interested parties such as cultural assessors, curators, directors of the network of museums of Pistoia (which is also achieved by the Strategic Cultural Plan for Pistoia), funders and researchers (with diverse backgrounds such as cultural heritage, political science and law). The numbers of the people who join online meetings vary between 31 and 40. The solutions to restoration, conservation and documentation are implemented and progress is also followed by these roundtables. Members are adjourned about the calls of funding opportunities so that they can participate in the calls.

In the *Tavolo Permanente della Cultura della Provincia di Pistoia*, there are different stakeholders who represent diverse cultural enrichment such as museum and library directors. These meetings update all the public bodies working on cultural initiatives to determine the priorities of restoration, conservation and documentation of monuments of cultural heritage, including landscape. *Tavolo Permanente della Cultura della Provincia di Pistoia* has the adjective “permanent” as the collaboration between different institutions is supposed to continue even if the governors of the projects and the subjects change throughout time. The meetings are quite inclusive in regard to the public sphere. The process aims to tackle each question regarding cultural valorisation one by one starting with the solid structures of cultural significance such as churches, temples, archives, theatres, libraries, historical walls in the city and many more.

When we examine the documentation regarding the meetings of the Permanent Round Table for Culture in the Province of Pistoia, it is seen that there is a great effort to make an inventory of every monumental heritage in each district of Pistoia and to give priority to the restoration (if necessary) and revival process. The documents that are examined chronologically show the improvements in the

Strategic Plan for Culture in Pistoia.⁴ These documents mostly focus on the necessary collaboration between different municipalities of Pistoia and their focus is on the city centres, towns and villages in the province. What is important here is to note that in these documents a link between tourism and culture has been also reinforced. Therefore, valorisation of the cultural heritage is seen also as contributing to the touristic attraction of the city. The local governments’ approach to cultural valorisation has granted greater importance to the archives, libraries, historical walls, theatres, and churches. Apart from their restoration and conservation, problems regarding the lack of human resources in the libraries (if the human resources are sufficient or not) and archives (which archives need more maintenance and care) have become the main themes that the Permanent Roundtable for Culture has discussed till now. As a result of the collaborative works of the public institutions (province, municipalities and the civil society in Pistoia) diverse range of themes have been handled by these meetings based on cultural valorisation.

Again, one of the most important themes that required observation, research and action was the inventory of all the monumental cultural heritage in Pistoia including their evaluation to what extent they need restoration, to what extent they need funding for which purpose and the possibilities of intervention to those monuments who are managed especially *via* public institutions. Last but not least, the recent *Tavolo Permanente della Cultura* (Seduta Plenaria N. 25) five important themes: 1. Restoration and restructuration of the immovable goods in Pistoia 2. National plan for the regeneration of historical villages (linea A) 3. National plan for the regeneration of historical villages (linea B) 4. Restoration and valorisation of parks and historical gardens 5. Efficient energy use in the theatres and cinemas. All these themes were discussed one by one with possible state intervention in cultural policies that might resolve reoccurring problems regarding these initiatives.

Furthermore, Manzoni Theatre and Association of Pistoia Theatres have been paid central attention as the theatre needs to be restored and COVID-19 has affected the numbers of audience negatively. Not only fundraising activities have been planned but also ArtBonus, which is a way to collect private funds for the theatres all over Italy, is promoted and arranged within the Strategic Plan for Culture. The meetings do not exclude in-depth research regarding ArtBonus and how the state and private funds are used to support the cultural

⁴ There have been 28 meetings till now, the researchers are attending the meetings only in the last year. However, the post-meeting documents are available. It is not possible to examine all the documents in detail as there is a wide range of themes. However, in this section we provide a brief overview of the main themes discussed by the stakeholders to determine their priorities for the sake of the paper.

valorisation of the city. Therefore, it is possible to say that the Permanent Round Table for Culture in the Province of Pistoia is one of the good practices and is one of the most important cultural policy-making and decision-making arenas when the case of Pistoia is considered.

Methodology

The average interview (all online) lasted 45 min to 1 h and except one, they were all in Italian (see Table 2). There were slightly different two sets of questions for the Province of Pistoia and the artists (as well as gallery and art centre owners). The questions asked differed because of the nature of the actors involved.

These interviews were triangulated with document analysis. Hence, we surveyed the policy documents, strategic cultural plan(s), stakeholder meetings' policy briefs, and regulations since 2017 related to our case study of Pistoia; furthermore, we engaged in participant observation, following the development of the decision-making taking place in cultural policies at the regional and local levels.

Interview questions were designed using a theoretical interest approach (Corbin and Strauss, 2015), which in this case emanated from stakeholder theory, how participants interacted and decided on cultural policy, and how they prioritized the cultural, economic, and social capital embedded in the cultural heritage of Pistoia. The inclusion processes to cultural policies were asked to both artists and policymakers. Finally, their comments and criticisms were compared.

Regarding the methodological aspect, Elsorady (2012, 383) conducted similar research in which she interviewed stakeholders, "increasing the comparison of responses." Since the interviews were semi-structured, they paved the way for very interesting discussions which involved topics like heritage conservation (i.e., its importance, its role in the community and the contribution of the latter); physical, economic, and social revitalization (i.e., how heritage conservation affects

local business); new development (i.e., how it can be integrated with heritage areas, what works, what does not); the decision-making process (i.e., methods that might facilitate or improve the process); and the role of public participation (i.e., in planning and decision-making processes). These themes are extremely important and inspiring for the methodology and analysis.

This paper contributes to the knowledge gap in stakeholder theory regarding the process of the valorization of cultural heritage in cities through a case study of Pistoia. Nevertheless, several limitations should be noted: During the first phase, the study focused mostly on the roles and visions of local artists rather than the NGOs; consequently, the fieldwork was conducted only with three artists, three people actively involved in the art scene in Pistoia and three policymakers among the stakeholders, providing a limited perspective in the results. Not all policymakers could be interviewed, although almost all of those who are directly involved and informed were interviewed. Furthermore, the participants were mostly male and not having a balance between female and male participants is another limitation in this article. Thus, we aim to expand our fieldwork with the involvement of other stakeholder groups in future research and to triangulate the results and provide a wider perspective.

In the remainder of the paper, we analyse the interviews and findings, then offer possible links with the previous literature and a future agenda for research that links cultural heritage in cities with stakeholder theory and participatory turn.

Analysis of interviews: Artists' critical perspectives

Before delving into the analysis of the artists it is important to do a short introduction by defining what we mean by artists and the art scene in Pistoia. Later, the paper will commence on the analysis of the interviews.

TABLE 2 Interviews conducted.

	Place	Occupation	Date
Interview 1	Pistoia province	Coordinator	28 September 2021
Interview 2	Independent artist	Painter	4 October 2021
Interview 3	Private theatre	Actor and producer	5 October 2021
Interview 4	Independent worker	Art critic	5 October 2021
Interview 5	Gallery	Gallery owner	6 October 2021
Interview 6	Independent artist	Painter	7 October 2021
Interview 7	A centre for creative expression	Director	8 October 2021
Interview 8	Province of Pistoia	Coordinator	11 October 2021
Interview 9	Province of Pistoia	Director	26 October 2021

Source: Own elaboration.

Definitions of artists

The [Cambridge dictionary \(2022\)](#) defines artist as such: “someone who creates things with great skill and imagination.” It is important to understand that the use of “artists” in this paper includes musicians and actors besides painters. And the local artists, as used here, refers to the artists born in Pistoia. However, since art making has universal implications and artists are global and local at the same time, the artists interviewed for this paper do not all reside in Pistoia. It should also be added that the interviews also include gallery owners and the employees of the Pistoia province, who can be classified as the stakeholders in the arts and culture scene.

Since it is hard to define who is an artist and what we mean by artists in this paper, it is crucial to draw attention to the scholarly work. Accordingly, [Baldin and Bille \(2021, 528\)](#) say “the issue of who can be considered an artist, and of how to define the boundaries of the artists’ professions, is a contentious matter, and scholars have not yet achieved consensus on who should be included in these professions.” The same authors also underline that for empirical work the definition of the artist is a necessity. In this paper we keep the definition of the artist broader following the example of [Baldin and Bille \(2021, 529\)](#) conceptualising “the artistic force more broadly, by showing the heterogeneity among artists and proposing a definition of art as a profession, and thereby a distinction between professional artists and amateurs”. Having said that the profile of the artists included in this paper shows that they all perform art as the main profession although one of them is also involved in a secondary business. The common criteria between the artists in this paper is that they currently perform art (some of them have other professions besides as well) and the painters are graduates of art schools which is an included criterion in the previous works regarding artists ([Bille, 2012](#)).

Analysis of artists’ views

The interviews showed that artists were not sufficiently included in the process of cultural valorization in the context of the Strategic Plan for Culture in the city of Pistoia. The reasons for that vary; however, categorizing diverse reasons and diverse views among the artists may be impossible because not all are necessarily concerned with inclusion. They also saw the advantages of being independent and producing their own work. In the analytical section, we focus on various aspects, possibilities, and impossibilities involved in collaboration as well as their causes according to the local artists.

We saw that some artists could still be internationally recognized without collaborating with the local government in the city of Pistoia, so much so that their international recognition occurred before their local recognition. The first painter I interviewed eschewed working with galleries and museums

but instead remained independent, doing more artwork on the streets. He had been commissioned by Rome for his Olympic-themed works and also by the district of Pistoia to do a portrait of Angela Marcesini, whose name was given to the local library in the district of Agliana. About his expectations for collaboration, he said:

My involvement with art in Pistoia is not very direct because I travelled a lot. I grew up here, then I left for the USA just after my teenage years and then went to Australia for 2 years, then to Los Angeles and Nicaragua. Having been involved in so much (...) except in the last couple of years, I have been asked to join a group of artists—this was I think in 2017—a group of artists for the street art (...). It was street artists who were supposed to do a live painting spending an afternoon when Pistoia was the capital of culture, and basically the funds of the auction, where these paintings were to be sold, were earmarked for the art school in Pistoia. I was one of the six artists called in. This was just after I completed a mural for the Olympic Committee that honoured Federica Pellegrini. I did it in Rome, and it was inaugurated in June. And since then, I was commissioned here [for] a piece in Agliana for the city hall. Basically, now I guess that might mean the word is circulating, and they are seeing me. I have to say that I have not really done anything for my name to be seen in Pistoia or Agliana because I approach my art in a manner different from others.

He added that he had not been affected by the pandemic negatively because he was in the USA and also in Nicaragua, doing mostly open-air work, such as murals and the types of art more open to public—in open spaces mostly outdoors.

Whilst some of the artists were involved indirectly with the cultural policies of the city or implementation of the cultural policies, there were also those who were directly involved in the year 2017 when Pistoia was the cultural capital of Italy. Their collaboration also extended to being a participant of one of the central theatrical associations present in Pistoia. However, the first collaboration finished with the 2017 plans for the cultural city, while the latter did not become a long-lasting collaboration as the actors of the theatre wanted to establish their own company and do independent work from the association. Their views show that the interests of the artists can be different from the interests of the predominant “creative class” that can be defined and categorised diversely. According to a theatre actor and producer from Pistoia, theatre producers and actors collaborated with public institutions during the year of the Capitale Culturale Italiana:

We think that everything we do for the cultural policy of the city we do independently and privately and because we want to develop and create something valid here. But even from this point of view, nobody knows what dialogue, where and

with whom (...). In certain periods in the past, even when Pistoia was the cultural capital of Italy, some meetings and reunions were held by the Scientific and Cultural Committee, and we also took part in these meetings to develop projects. But when that experience ended, so did that kind of meeting.

However, in recent years, some artists have preferred private activity and independence after several collaborations. In line with this proposition, they suggested that they felt freer to engage with content because they were private entities. When working with the local institutions, however supportive they might be to the artists, the actor I interviewed noted limitations in terms of creative content for the plays because the state mostly considered numbers of plays. He said:

If there were a constant dialogue, the projects and objectives could in some cases coincide rather than diverge because otherwise certain choices are made exclusively by managers or by those who manage the offices and funding; and artists almost exclusively have to adapt to the frameworks or projects that are dropped from above. If you like them, OK; if not, nothing. On the other hand, if there were a possibility of constant communication, I would see nothing strange in that the politician is an elected citizen but still a citizen, so I have the right to talk to him and he has the right to listen to me as if he were another citizen. And what would be needed a bit of curiosity, thinking through choices that have to do with arousing curiosity among citizens, trying to involve them, trying to make them participate, stimulate them in this sense, too, not to bring the same event again and again to the table. Also, because the event comes and goes. A project stays, works, grows, evolves, and impacts the city and those who live in it. Artistic productions are often transferred in the form of numbers, and then they must be produced by the ministries, for calls, for projects, for funding while the content—what happens with the content—is of no interest.

In other words, more than quality, quantity counts. Currently, the above artist with his private theatre, operates in the industrial part of Pistoia. He has observed that citizens also pay attention to their work, which means that their initiative has been successful. When I asked him how he feels about working in private sector which must mean higher price tickets for the theatre audience in comparison with the public theatres, he suggested that “public sector must be doing something wrong if people prefer to buy private theatres’ tickets.”

Amongst our nine interviewees there was also one art historian and critic. He suggested that artists and politicians can work together, but their views do not have to converge at all because they operate at differing levels. He believed that the objective of making art was crucial as a value added by the artist able to observe contemporary problems and situations (Markusen, 2006; Fainstein, 2014; Müller, 2019), a critical part

of the process of creating and understanding art. He also collaborated with local authorities, emphasizing the absence of a *rete* (network) that continually met, co-operated, and included all stakeholders. His collaboration decreased during the pandemic when he travelled the world. He was not negatively influenced by the pandemic; in fact, he had an opportunity to compare international examples with the case of Italy, and he suggested that the art education in Pistoia also needed an international element. He was suggesting that the art scene in Pistoia is not internationalised enough, and is very much embedded in a provincial state of mind. For him, the international examples could lead the local artists in Pistoia in such a way that the city would enhance its numbers of original, critical and local artists. Despite the fact that he wrote books on the art history of Pistoia, collaborating with the Region of Tuscany a couple of years ago, his collaboration has been interrupted even before COVID-19 and at the time of the interview, he felt that there was not enough interest on the side of the public institutions to contact art historians and develop new cultural, historical, and touristic works (either for academic or non-academic purposes) for the city.

Another painter from Pistoia, who travels back and forth between Milan and Pistoia, noted the absence of a network and collaboration, underscoring three important reasons that collaboration with public institutions was difficult: first, artist collaboration was lacking; second, most cultural and artistic events took place only if artists had personal connections with the public institutions hosting them; and third, art takes a long time to realize. In addition, the vision of the artist and public institutions do not always coincide because the artists might actually think more critically especially if they are independent. The artists interviewed were quite criticizing about how the NGOs work as well as cultural policies are made. And yet, their voices were not united.

Politicians by contrast typically see just 5 min ahead instead of preparing long term for the future. Hence, their natures differ (Markusen, 2006; Fainstein, 2014; Müller, 2019). The same artist, like the theatre actor above, underlined the weakness of networks and collaboration both among artists and between artists and public institutions:

There is no debate among artists. They do not come together to discuss the general needs of our society because art must talk about our society. You cannot talk only about exclusively personal concepts that one resolves at home. You have to dialogue with others. This is one of the great faults of artists. Also, institutions never dialogue with artists. I do not know what the motivation behind non-communication is—whether superficiality, whether lack of the general culture or lack of time.

He added that expecting artists to be their own managers as well as self-promoters violates the nature of art. According to him, an artist must lead most of the time a sedentary life to take time to contemplate and produce artwork. Currently, artists must be their own managers and promoters, an idea that he found

irrational. He admitted to doing so, but he did not like self-publicizing and self-networking. He suggested that art critics would not exist without art and artists. According to him, art critics together with assessors of culture, who are public officials, should be the ones to reach out to artists and discover new talents and new art works instead of one person reaching out to an institution randomly, creating little, discontinuous and unsustainable collaboration among stakeholders.

Besides the criticism of some of the policies that do not directly facilitate the discovery of local artists, he also made self-critical remarks, noting the lack of a developed network and continuous dialogue among artists in general that would enable collaboration: “We are not capable of collaboration either”. In the past, he had collaborated with Palazzo Fabroni (Museo del Novecento e del Contemporaneo di Palazzo Fabroni), one of the most important cultural hubs in the city and one of the most important museums in Pistoia.

Stating that the public institutions’ links with the artists are short-lived would not be wrong because they depend on relationships and personal contacts; furthermore, the positions of local governments and people change, and contacts dissolve if they have not been institutionalized.

In addition to the people working actively as artists and critics, the owner of the galleries was among our interviewees. One of the most important art galleries in Pistoia is Vanucci, a contemporary art gallery that promotes artists in the territory. Its owner emphasized international thinking about how the art will be shaped, and Pistoia is not particularly international at the moment; the city should open its doors nationally and internationally to art and artists from all over the world. He also added that local government officials must be more proactive to maintain dialogue with stakeholders, including artists and galleries; that they should coordinate cultural activities not only at the personal level but also in a systematic manner; and that a need exists for networking with more sustainable qualities for long-term projects and a better vision of the cultural sphere.

Last but not least, the manager of the art centre also underlined similar themes saying that the city should take the local artists as their main cultural force and provide them an international point of view inviting the world-known artists adding to their training. This view is in line with the idea that the smaller cities can have their further resources in education, arts and culture but they might be ignored easily in comparison with the metropolitan cities (Kresl and Ietri, 2016). In line with this view, the interviewee suggested that bringing theatre companies or theatre actors from Florence to Pistoia for instance, is not a solution nor an improvement as this attitude does not allow the city to use and flourish its own human resources. Hence, the tension between the local and the international can be said to be less evident than the tension between the local and the local (meaning here between Pistoia and another city who predominates the cultural scene), in

terms of approaching the art scene and implementation of the cultural policies.

This interview, as illustrated above, supported the common frameworks indicated: Internationalisation shall be used wisely for the education of the artists not overwhelming them but helping them grow; local art workers shall be supported more *via* limiting the importing of other artists or actors from other cities, which might hinder the flourishing of the local artists in Pistoia; and finally, artists and public institutions should collaborate at an institutional level rather than basing their relations on personal acquaintances.

Analysis of policymakers’ views

Notably, the Province of Pistoia plays an intermediary role between the local municipalities of the districts of Pistoia and the Tuscan regional government; therefore, the Province is crucial in coordinating and communicating activities in the strategic plan for culture in Pistoia. Despite the priority given to culture in terms of calls for projects and funding, human resources might be insufficient to meet the needs of this demanding job. In other words, the views of the interviewees confirmed the fact that the time and limited human resources was a major obstacle to collaborating with the artists. And yet, the policymakers confirm that they are open to collaboration within time.

Although currently the Strategic Plan for Culture in Pistoia does not involve the artists as stakeholders in the *Tavolo Permanente della Cultura*, the Province of Pistoia indicated that they plan to integrate them in the future and that they should have definitely integrated the artists much before in the process of decision making in culture. The province confirmed that he is interested to get the contacts of the artists and include them for future projects. For instance, an interviewee from the province said: “To my knowledge, there is a lack of an organised platform where the voice of the artists and the workers of the sector could be represented. This issue is there, and it needs to be addressed. Currently, the theme we are dealing with does not correspond to the representation of that world organically. Hence, the criticism is valid, because we have not opened up sufficiently to represent the world of the artists and the art workers. But we did open up to a segment of it with the association(s) included in the *Tavolo Permanente della Cultura*”.

When it comes to the decision making, the *Tavolo Permanente della Cultura*, is quite inclusive in terms of how decisions are taken and who are included, the same interviewee noted: “the dynamic of decision making is definitely approved by the public sector, while the private sphere is not yet a part of it.” Furthermore, the province representative indicated that the trajectory should be in the direction of including those, who are currently excluded, and that facilitating this process of inclusion can be done by the Province. Therefore, on the side of the public decision makers, there is a will to include the artists.

It is an ongoing process, according to decision makers. The process also will include other civil society organisations, as indicated by the interviewees as *Tavolo Permanente della Cultura* is a “dynamic instrument” (one of the policymakers defined it as such). Another policymaker from Province of Pistoia added: “while the funding from the EU, regions and the ministry focusses on tangible cultural heritage, the artists are interested in the exhibitions, events and cultural promotion. However, in the balance sheets, this is a different type of item in the budget.”

It should be underlined that there is a detail in the overall structural changes to policymaking. After the enactment of the law No. 56 of April 2014, the provinces do not have the same power of managing culture as the municipalities. Since then, the provinces have limited capacities in human capital. The resources for the provinces have been cut as the second policymaker indicated. This meant that the provinces could not support the small municipalities anymore and the bigger municipalities were not in need of their help in any case.

Another policymaker from the Province of Pistoia indicated that it is problematic that the artists do not have their own network and association which makes it hard to collaborate with them: “The institutions cannot call two hundred or three hundred artists in order to collaborate with them. The institutions should be able to communicate with a class or cluster (*soggetti aggregari*).”⁵ From this point of view, the policymakers’ perspective is justifiable, because the solidarity within the art sector matters a great deal. It is also observed that the artists diverge in their views about funding, fund raising, art making, their ideas on globalisation and internationalisation of artworks. This divergence makes it hard to be united and speak with one voice.

The province of Pistoia has a great role in term of valorising cultural heritage. The way that they contribute to the cultural activities has changed since 2014. Despite that, they are heavily involved in coordination of the public institutions for the museums.

Last but not least, two great achievements of the *Tavolo Permanente Della Cultura* can be summarised as such (underlined by the interviewees): First, the first network of museums of Pistoia was established so that the relevant activities can be coordinated by this network. Furthermore, this network is also recognised by Regione Toscana (Tuscan regional government). Second was defined as an ongoing achievement that started but not finalised yet: preparation of an inventory of the list of architectural and historical assets of Pistoia that will substantially benefit from PNRR (Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan) funds that will reach the peripheries progressively. The interviewees overall were aware of the strengths and weaknesses of *Tavolo Permanente*

della Cultura and they have been open to discussion and criticism in general.

Concluding remarks: Why the role of the artists in the city of Pistoia matters in initiating, shaping and continuing cultural policies

Our research reveals room for further involvement of artists in the process of making and implementing cultural policies in Pistoia. Our findings illustrate a need for building a stronger dialogue and network between the policymakers and the artists to balance a range of visions and ideas (between and within these groups) in the cultural policy-making process of the territory. The current cultural policy agenda focuses more on the city’s monuments, restoration, conservation, inventory, and in general, cultural valorization (restoration, conservation and documentation) in terms of libraries, archives, churches, museums, and theatres; but the interviewed artists and those involved in the art scene noted a general tendency toward including more exhibitions, galleries, and artist support programs in the policy agenda. Furthermore, the artists focused primarily on the need for a vision in cultural policies at the local, regional, and even national levels (while aiming at an international audience) that captures not only the past and the present but also the future co-creativity.

All the artists interviewed as well as art critic and gallery owners were highly interested in cooperating with public institutions. Although open to collaborations with public authorities in shaping the city’s cultural policy agenda, they seemed to enjoy and justify establishing a private cultural organization to more freely manipulate content and leading a transnational life as an artist were also choices. Thus, the fieldwork shows considerable potential to strengthen collaboration with artists in the territory for policymaking (Nitzky, 2013; Nyseth and Sognnaes, 2013). The stakeholders involved in the Strategic Plan for Culture did not necessarily include the artists or artist networks (Teresa and Zitcer, 2020); however, this decision was also related to their primary aim of detecting, discovering, and valorizing important monuments of the city. As noted above, *Tavolo Permanente della Cultura* is a “dynamic instrument”.

Some collaborations have occurred in the past between artists and public institutions (especially those involved in theatre), particularly in 2017, when Pistoia was entitled the cultural capital of Italy. Spontaneous and sporadic engagement has also taken place with artists based on personal connections and relations; however, the interviewees explained that these collaborations were not long lasting and they felt left out of the decision-making process. Besides, the artists enjoy independence and the private sphere. In this regard, our findings suggest that public institutions engaged in cultural valorization may want to

⁵ “*Soggetti aggregari*” is the word used by the interviewee. It can be translated as a cluster or class or whole.

project a cultural policy agenda that balances heritage conservation and arts and culture activities with the involvement of artists. This way, the consistency of the public sphere and creativity of the private sphere can be united.

Overall, findings show a range of visions and interests among stakeholders. The artists' views do not necessarily have to converge with those of the public institutions in order to collaborate, and as our research demonstrates, artists look at the social and political issues with unconventional eyes (Markusen, 2006; Fainstein, 2014; Müller, 2019). However, the cities need to collaborate with their artists to benefit from the constructive criticism that the artists can bring to the table. Otherwise, their voices as stakeholders are not heard (Teresa and Zitcer, 2020) and maintaining the collaboration becomes impossible (Arnaboldi and Spiller, 2011: 643). It cannot be denied that the policymakers are willing to include the artists even if this inclusion is in another format, or is related to different type of budgeting. In this case, the process could acknowledge that the artists can contribute to the cultural scene of Pistoia and cultural policies of Pistoia as consumers and producers (Sacco, 2011). However, the process should be more co-creative and corporatist (including more NGOs) in this case (Sokka et al., 2021). Finally, it can be added that the *Europeanisation of cultural heritage and heritagisation of European culture* are mutually intertwined as participatory governance is a part of the EU cultural policies (Hristova, 2017, 9) and Tavolo Permanente della Cultura is a good practice that represents this vision.

This case study raises a number of issues relevant to cultural heritage management through stakeholder collaboration. Our results suggest a mid-way approach in which restoration, conservation and documentation of monuments align with creative ideas from artists in order to build connections with citizens as a future approach to local and regional cultural policies. Artists can help public institutions communicate with citizens better than politicians because they often deal with the “human” element and create their own independent views, which can bring a fresh outlook and style even to the way monuments

can be valorized more by the public. Young local artists in particular would benefit from this outreach as well as the galleries. This way, a co-creative process can be achieved involving diverse stakeholders, and participative governance can take place in a more efficient way. There is a will to improve the Tavolo Permanente della Cultura and the future plans seem to realign again with the artists' contributions. However, the artists also need to unify their voices and communicate despite their divergences, rather than seeking liberation only in the private sector or individually. This attitude would also be constructive in creating more opportunities for collaboration.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Funding

The research was funded by REGIONE TOSCANA.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 08 August 2022

ACCEPTED 02 December 2022

PUBLISHED 28 December 2022

CITATION

Sajib SMS, Nicolli F and Alietti A (2022),
Problematizing tourism for
conservation: An eco-cultural critique
on sustainability.
Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 12:11094.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11094

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Problematizing tourism for conservation: An eco-cultural critique on sustainability

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Nature conservation has often been depicted as an effective policy measure to redress the ongoing environmental problems across the globe. The need to ensure sustainability for people's secured subsistence has rendered nature conservation an indispensable scheme in the tourism development policy. It is evident that during the last couple of decades, the notion of "conservation" has become less established whilst tourism development has been prioritised as a profit making venture by both the national and international agencies. Numerous solutions have been prescribed by international organisations adopting tourism as an "immense potentiality" which mostly represented a sustainability effort for the local development and environment. South Asia in general and Bangladesh, in particular, are no different, since policy for nature conservation has been misplaced and misread to reach sustainability goals, as it has always been connected with the tourism development agenda. From a systematic literature review, it was found that the use of natural resources by local people was exemplified as a threat to sustainability where the relations between conservation and tourism became a policy issue. The paper intends to problematise the mechanism of tourism policies for nature conservation or conservation policies for tourism development that overlooks the local eco-cultural management practice for sustainability. Along with the environmental discourses, an eco-cultural critique on sustainability was employed.

KEYWORDS

tourism, conservation, sustainability, eco-cultural critique, problematization

Introduction

From time immemorial, nature has been transformed into a resource for the livelihoods of human-beings. The growing transformation of nature for needs and development has generally overlooked "the fundamental principles of environment that is widely responsible for the environmental cost" (Duffy, 2013, 605-626). Crises, for instance global warming, climate change, food scarcity and increasing levels of poverty, in South Asia have been presented as grounds for environmental ruin. It is now evident that these challenges have gradually been increasing as a result of human-led actions. The use of resources for the local subsistence in developing countries who are only dependent on the local ecology has often put pressure on the remaining natural resources

(Adams, 2004). This has made it necessary to employ various approaches and interventions from a number of global and local interest groups and alliances from regional and international conservation authorities at different levels. Redressing human-made environmental challenges through biodiversity conservation is now reckoned as a prime global concern (Takacs, 1996). Over the last few years in South Asia, conservation goals have been redesigned in order to improve human wellbeing in general, which is collectively pronounced to be “development.” The term “conservation” is currently a leading term in the global environmental discourse that increasingly impacts tourism development as a policy issue. The contextualisation of natural resource for human use, the effects of its degradation and the methods proposed by conservancy groups to counteract this have a profound effect not only on the ecology but also on the livelihoods and wellbeing of local communities in poverty-stricken countries of South Asia (Wood, 1996; Dubey, 2007; Banik et al., 2008). Nevertheless, applications of the solutions of the degraded environmental issue are problematic for resource conservation. Perhaps, this context has facilitated conservation to take “a relevant public policy issue where concern for other environmental issues has been subject to the ‘issue-attention cycle’” (Kusmanoff et al., 2017, 160-165; Hannigan, 2006, 39).

During the last couple of decades, the global development and conservation actors have paid attention on trying to come together to promote tourism as one of the major policies to approach the dual challenges of retaining sustainability and sponsoring community wellbeing in the resourceful ecological zone (Liu, 2003; Hall, 2011). Ensuring sustainability for people’s secured subsistence rendered nature conservation an indispensable scheme in the tourism development policy. It is evident that during the last couple of decades, the notion of “conservation” has become less established whilst tourism development has been prioritised as a profit-making venture by both the national and international agencies. Numerous solutions have been prescribed by the international organisations adopting tourism as an ‘immense potentiality’ which mostly represented by a sustainability effort for the local development and environment. South Asia in general and Bangladesh, in particular, are no different since policy for nature conservation has been misplaced and misread to reach sustainability goals, as it has always been connected with the tourism development agenda. It is conventionally asserted that the use of natural resources by local people was exemplified as a threat to sustainability where the relations between conservation and tourism became a policy issue. The plan and process are commonly taken for granted as a solution to the conservation and development questions since they demand financing from the global actors where counteracting opinions and aspirations are almost absent. Additionally, tourism became a potential contributor to the issues that are significantly driving the environmental loss, for instance, overexploitation, change in

habitat, climate change, pollution and extra-terrestrial species (Hall, 2010, 253-266; GFANC, 1997). The corporate actors appreciate that it is essential to evaluate how nature-based tourism validates its importance to connect the people with nature in an ecosystem. Thus, tourism became a favorable market-led mechanism in conservation practices. In the policy and practice of conservancy agencies, [eco]tourism is viewed as “one of the supportive frontiers of biodiversity for utilization of the bio-ecological resources of an area” (Bashar, 2018, 1-10). On the other hand, the politics of conservation treating tourism as an another possible action to discourage local communities from uninterrupted access to natural resources weakens the local capacity and position. This paper attempted to problematise the normative tourism policy for conservation or *vice versa* through an eco-cultural critique as the indigenous people in South Asia in particular are dependent on the natural resources of their surroundings, nurture forestlands as the part of their lives, and connect their non-material aspects such as customs, rituals, traditions and social actions with the hill ecological system. Soini and Dessein (2016) proposed a framework of “culture as sustainability,” and in this study we suggest an eco-cultural perspective for connecting tourism with culture and sustainability. We delineated the intertwined relations between tourism and conservation and the challenges of cultural sustainability. Tourism policies, which are disseminated by development actors to establish sustainability, help to understand the neo-liberal practice that construct subjective discourses to devalue the local wisdom and capacity about environmental resource management with a nature-culture nexus.

Research methodology

The research methodology is based on the critical and systematic literature review of a broader framework of sustainability discourses in the context of tourism and conservation practices in a cultural setting. A substantial number of scientific articles, books, national and international policies, reports, speeches and international meeting protocols were reviewed and reevaluated by a systematic analysis on tourism and its politics. As sustainability discourses deconstruct a culture-specific way of development, culture becomes instrumental in raising questions about the politics of tourism when conservation policy devalues the eco-cultural practice of natural resource management that reflect a sense of local identity (Soini and Dessein, 2016). We introduced local “cultural practices” as a methodological tool to analyze the potentials and problems of tourism through conservation policy and to understand the sustainability paradox. An eco-cultural critique was theoretically applied to the issues concerning the concepts and notions of tourism and conservation.

Culture as a channel for sustainability

Notions of “tourism sustainability” and “sustainable tourism development” became vague and contested terms since the word “sustainability” was first pronounced in Brundtland’s report (Soini and Dessein, 2016, 1–12). Culture and sustainability have different meanings and contextual connotations. How culture influences sustainability is still an unexplored issue. Understanding how culture can be a channel for promoting sustainability rather than a hurdle is crucial to the development of “cultural sustainability.” Few studies have conceptualised the concepts together as “cultural sustainability” to evaluate it as part of social sustainability (Chiu, 2004; Cuthill, 2009; Wallace et al., 2011; Soini and Dessein, 2016). It is instrumental to incorporate ‘culture’ in sustainability discourse, as most of the sustainable development goals are embedded with culture-induced human actions and behaviours. In fact, sustainability is not only a process, system or strategy, but a state of mind of the people who are within it. According to post-modern critiques, as culture is viewed as prerequisite for local development, culture-embedded experiences and aspirations of locals need to be accounted for environmental or social sustainability (Wallace et al., 2011). This leads to an eco-culturally resourceful and sustainable society. For instance, eco-cultural sustainability was initiated in the ‘Tourism National Policy-2010’ to strengthen the local economy for national contribution in Bangladesh (MoCAT, 2010) “while also ensuring and enhancing traditional cultural values and protecting the integrity of the natural environment” (Pickel-Chevalier and Ketut, 2016; cited in Nogués-Pedregal et al., 2017, 88–108). However, Hof and Blazquez-Salom (2015, 770–796; cited in Bianchi, 2018, 88–102) challenged the state’s tourism policy that signified that the nature-culture based tourism model has progressively been restructured towards sustainability through better planning and projects. Rather, the mechanism of tourism development constitutes a “sustainability fix” masking the interest of capital by eco-culture friendly tourism and thereby the intensified use of scarce natural resources (Bianchi, 2018, 88–102). In principle, “nature-culture basis tourism allows neoliberalism to turn the very crises it has created into new sources of accumulation that conceals the contradictions between economic growth and environmental sustainability” (Duffy, 2015, 529–543; Büscher et al., 2012). One of the core justifications for nature-culture based tourism is that nature and culture can be conserved or saved because of their “market value,” and hence they can be commodified (Bücher et al., 2012, 4–30; cited in Duffy, 2015, 529–543). For instance, when tourism is well established, cultural values and customs are in danger, because of market competition. It grows an individuality which is not the local communal behavior for South Asian indigenous communities. Collectivisation is broken up and class divisions increase as is evident in the empirical study of South Asian scholars (Shiva, 1993; Shiva,

1997; Dubey, 2007; Rasul and Manandhar, 2009; Ahmed, 2017; Hettiarachchi, 2019; Rahman, 2019). The development of unplanned tourism in South Asia has had an impact on the sense of belongingness attached to the places, and the reciprocal relations between nature and indigenous communities (Sajib, 2022, 273–285). Tourism is mostly a driving force of transformation that sometimes engenders in local cultural wellbeing, and the commodification of culture and nature contributes to vanish the real cultural behaviours of indigenous communities (cited in Sajib, 2022, 273–285; Buntin, 2008; King and Stewart, 1996; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004). For instance, Escobar (2008, 169) illustrates that “such development policies and resource management tendencies of economic gain not only create challenges for the local people and their traditional knowledge of management but wreak havoc on local practices and have serious negative consequences for local sustainable food sources, sustainable development and environmental practices, and local ecosystems” (cited in Datta, 2015). Several scholars from Bangladesh (Chakma, 2008; Ahmed, 2017; Roy, 2020) showed how public and private agencies validate state forest conservation policies over indigenous communities. National and regional agencies sensitise that the resource use patterns of indigenous people in Bangladesh affect the sustainability of livelihoods as well as environmental degradation. Thus, tourism became the best alternative solution to distract from the people’s dependency on forest resources and for local development.

Branding tourism for conservation

Nowadays, tourism is defined as a “developmentalizable” entity and it becomes the largest global industry based on its contribution to global GDP, the increase of employment rate, and the offerings of its profitable services (Cole, 2008; Dalcher, 2017). Biodiversity-enriched countries, for instance, are coming across a very fast tourism development: “23 of them record over 100 percent growth in the last 10 years, and more than 50 percent of these receive over 1 million international tourists per year; 13 percent of biodiversity hotspot countries receive over 5 million international tourists per year” (Christ et al., 2003, vi; UNEP and CI, 2003). Through the tourism, the conservation of nature is mostly reckoned as a sustainable practice for the global and local actors in the context of mitigating global environmental loss and improving local livelihoods. Moreover, shaping “environment,” “nature,” “wilderness” or “biodiversity” as a “common good” and placing a value on “natural capital” has come to be gradually more noticeable in global political debates since the 1980s (Streimikiene et al., 2021; Costanza et al., 1997, 253–260; Van Koppen, 2000, 300–318). There is a long-lasting argument about how to associate nature conservation with poverty reduction and tourism development in local communities (Adams et al., 2004,

1146-1149; Scuttari et al., 2021; Wells and McShane, 2004, 513-519). The community conservation policies and actions are frequently shaped as “win-win” prospects with environmental and socio-economic gains (Chaigneau and Brown, 2016, 36). Conservation and tourism development are mostly slowed down by contested notions of sustainability in a local community (Streimikiene et al., 2021; Keep, 2008, 311-321). However, the notion of tourism sustainability is by no means refuted, as if its significance is spontaneous or recognizable, although the idea of sustainable tourism is adopted with blurred meaning (Hunter, 1997; Ponton and Asero, 2018). In fact, sustainable tourism now “represents an unstable paradigm, its meaning contested between interested social actors such as the tourist companies, advertisers, environmental pressure groups, local communities and, last but not least, consumers” (Ponton and Asero, 2018, 45-62). In an increasing number of cases, it is observed that tourism provides an insufficient supply of capital for conservation and supports local communities as well as an economic stimulation to take care of natural resource (Scuttari et al., 2021; Streimikiene et al., 2021). The connection between tourism and biodiversity is not always optimistic, especially while tourism development takes place with a lack of proper management structures and policies in order to foster nature conservation and distribute visible profits to local communities. Conservation and tourism sometimes do not succeed while the local concerns and their inherent capabilities and experiences for the sustainable prospect are not considered as valuable (Bologna and Spierenburg, 2015, 119-138). It is believed that “biodiversity conservation associated with community and nature-based tourism stimulates many other nature-friendly businesses” (Donlan, 2005, 913-914).

Critiques of the development models prescribed by international donors stated that foreign aid and structural adjustment schemes to stimulate tourism and development have mostly not succeeded in dealing with environmental crises (Shiva, 1993; Oliver-Smith, 2010). The concept of the tourism development overlooks the necessity of nature conservation, whereas economic development is given urgent importance. Generally, the two notions of “sustainability” and “development” have, to some extent, conflicting connotations: ‘Sustainability’ indicates stability and coexistence, but “development” denotes progress and transformation (Robinson and Picard, 2006; Giddens, 2009). Therefore, environmentalists are captivated by the “sustainability” approach, whereas public and private enterprises emphasise “development,” typically indicating GDP growth (Giddens, 2009). It is evident that conservation and development with tourism are not only unsuccessful in their plans and actions but also not characteristically relevant and have, in fact, sustained poverty in many cases (Harrison, 2008, 851-868). However, another paradigmatic shift in development currently focuses on nature-friendly pro-local tourism strategies. The shift along with “nature” demanding to “repay its way” and for local people

to be deliberately engaged in conservation policies has directed to materialise “ecotourism” as an added liable practice of nature-friendly tourism in South Asia. It endorses biodiversity conservation and also generates economic value for local people living in poverty. In the seventh assembly of the UNCSD in 1999, UNEP stressed that “the involvement of local communities in tourism development and operation appears to be one important condition for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity” (Christ et al., 2003, 4). Commitments of global and governmental actors in accordance with the CBD guidelines have been endorsed to strengthen the movement on “Sustainable Tourism in Vulnerable Ecosystems by creating tourism and biodiversity more cooperative to each other, involving local or indigenous communities, and developing infrastructure and resolving land disputes” (UNEP and CI, 2003, 27). They are critically important for the sustainability of tourism, “influencing not only tourism development itself but also controlling other forms of development that might be detrimental to the economic sustainability of tourism in the short or long term” (Mowforth and Munt 2015, 1-476; Fennel, 2008, 9; Christ et al., 2003).

There is a long-standing debate on whether tourism is a stable means of conservation or not, whether it takes care of the plants and animals in their natural habitats, whether it is likely to bring together conservation with the expansion of corporate values and income, and whether tourism can decrease regional migration and other concerns that locals are currently encountering. One specific issue is that tourism is overvalued and can serve as a further means for developing social, economic or environmental scenarios but it cannot be the best one. Adams (2003, 108), for instance, claims that “on the one hand, if it can be shown even on economic grounds the case for conservation makes sense, all to the good. On the other hand, it might not often be so good if conservation-economists suddenly asking the rules to be changed back so that the game can be replayed on stronger grounds.” Assessing the effects of tourism on nature and culture, however, is notably multifaceted and contested. Tourism is portrayed as benign to some extent, and often as the “only potential” or the only sustainable substitute for a nature-protective and resource-inclusive development approach in South Asia. In practice, it often appears that tourism is branded as an economic “ladder” in the discourse of those who highlight the issue of the sustainability of any conservation policy. On the contrary, there is an argument that extreme dependency on measurable values of nature conservation through tourism is a “slippery slope” (Adams, 2003, 108). However, alternative tourism (such as community-based tourism, nature-based tourism, pro-poor tourism, responsible tourism, ecotourism and sustainable tourism) for instance, is largely believed to mutually develop the livelihoods of local people and environmental sustainability. It is proposed that “returns to nature encourage people to disinvest in other means of livelihood, particularly livestock and cultivation, thereby

reducing the ‘degrading’ effects of these forms of land-use while sustaining incomes” (Powell, 1998, 121). However, if the earnings from tourism remain marginal, and even without culture-specific needs connecting to livelihoods and means of earnings, it is implausible that local people will perceive nature as an alternative way of living. In fact, such beliefs might eventually lead to the “individualizing and profit-maximizing ideology of neoliberalism” (Sullivan, 2006, 105-135). Following Sullivan (2006), Fletcher (2011, 443-461) depicts with a neo-liberal critique that “sustainable tourism practices are accessible mainly for a ‘transnational capitalist class’ and serve to sustain capitalism more broadly” (cited in Hanna et al., 2015).

Discourses conducted in the public domain have a strong impact on how local people are involved in policy issues, and adjustments surrounded by the conservation and sustainable tourism discourse also have effects for public commitment in conservation policy. How conservation is valued, measured and meant to policy makers and local people as well, is often influenced by the tourism policy discourses with which it interacts (Gustafsson, 2013, 39-54; Coffey, 2015, 1-20). Public environmental policy for conservation, for example, sustainability and ecotourism, is usually a liability of governments as signatories to the CBD-1992, even though it is largely assigned to local governments or local authorities that may have separate priorities and goals (CBD, 1992). This makes tourism policy for conservation characteristically political in nature. It is important to conservation NGOs as well; few of them have visible involvement in conservation plans and actions, but the majority are engaged in conservation advocacy. However, the manifestations of nature and culture is a form of the political approaches along with tourism and conservation policy. Therefore, it is taken for granted that tourism will protect nature, produce profit or support people, supply basic materials, and promote an aesthetic or moral way of thinking about nature conservation. Though particular attention is currently devoted to local wisdom in conservation discussions, specifically in article 8j of the CBD, this is not enough and “mostly misleading that ground reality is hardly valued in its own languages or it is defunctionalized to support the western conservation policy” (Shiva, 1997, 1-148). For example, Escobar (1998, 53-82) doubted that “biodiversity does not exist in an absolute sense. Rather, it anchors a discourse that articulates a new relation between nature and society in global contexts of science, cultures, and economies.” However, the development, through conservation and sustainable tourism, is never problematised, albeit critics have increasingly drawn attention to the impracticality of balancing the preconditions of economy and environment in the current policy structures (Escobar, 1999, 1-30).

South Asian context

South Asia consists of five regions: 1) India 2) southern islands of Sri Lanka and the Maldives 3) northern mountain area

from Kashmir to Nepal and Bhutan 4) the east, Bangladesh 5) the west, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Hettiarachchi, 2019, 2). The world’s best marine resources (coral reefs of Maldives), seashores (Cox’s Bazar) and mangrove zones (Sundarbans) are situated in the territory. Rasul and Manandhar (2009, 187-207) asserted that “its centuries old civilizations, rich and unique cultural and biological diversity, diverse and vast array of geographic features, attractive oceans and beaches, mangrove forests, mountain ranges including the great Himalayas, the Karakorum and the HinduKush mountains and, above all, very hospitable people, make the region a very attractive place for intra-regional as well as international tourists.” Ohmae (1995) termed the territory a “natural economic zone.” For example, with the Annapurna Tourism Development Project and the Bhakthipur Conservation Project in Nepal, it initiated an effective tourism model, tendering its unique nature and heritage conservation, community benefit, and sustainable funding features (Hettiarachchi, 2019, 4). Through its ‘Tourism Earth Lung’ initiative, Sri Lanka developed its conservative position towards becoming a decarbonised tourism destination by 2018 (Hettiarachchi, 2019, 5).

Tourism became an area of cooperative interest for SAARC in the late 1980s (Rasul and Manandhar, 2009, 187-207; Timothy, 2003; Dubey, 2007). With the backing of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), it designed a comprehensive Tourism Development Plan (TDP) to develop tourism. The major goals of the TDP are: “to promote eco-tourism in order to reduce poverty, and to facilitate private sector investment in tourism” (Rasul and Manandhar, 2009, 187-207). Nevertheless, tourism has not contributed to the wellbeing of locals or nature conservation as expected in South Asia. Poverty remains a major problem, often affecting marginalised rural populations that depend on some of the most biodiverse landscapes for their livelihoods (Regional Report, 2018, 210-291). The challenges facing nature conservation are, therefore, rapid economic growth and rising consumption, as well as poverty and marginalisation. In addition, tourism has a particular impact on the underprivileged indigenous locals in South Asia. Hill and forest areas are widely accepted places for tourism, but these places are especially vulnerable because local wisdom relating to natural resource management is ignored. For instance, tourism gradually instigates dislocation, heightens living expenses, prevents access to resources, creates socio-cultural disorder, and ultimately marginalises local people. The highly environment-sensitive countries in South Asia, such as the Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan, developed the nature-based tourism industry. A crucial issue is that if these countries are successfully developing tourism to generate an income source for local people and are mitigating these needs with natural resources, why are people in these countries poverty-stricken even now?

Natural resources in Bangladesh have significantly contributed to the national economy in the context of livestock, agriculture, forestry, fishery and nature-based

tourism. [Bashar \(2018, 1-10\)](#) reported that “the largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, provides livelihood and employment for half a million households and more than 60 million people depend on aquatic resources every day, and 60 percent of the country’s protein requirement is met through fish consumption.” However, its natural resources are vulnerable due to a transformation from local subsistence to a national cash economy. Forest land-grabbing in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) for tourism development is a good example of this. The development and promotion of tourism has not been responsive enough to the potential implications for the natural and cultural heritage of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is currently pursuing new schemes under the national environmental policies in order to balance sustainable resource use. Moreover, Bangladesh has signed conservation-related “Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the obligations of CBD Bangladesh has made 1st National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) in 2006 and 2nd NBSAP (2016–2021) in 2015 to steer biodiversity conservation endeavors” ([Faisal, 2018](#)). It has also framed guidelines, policies and legal charters connected to biodiversity and tourism. These are: National Conservation Strategy (2016–2031), Bangladesh Biodiversity Act 2017, National Tourism Policy 2010, The Tourism Vision 2020, National Forest Policy 2016 and Ecologically Critical Areas (ECA) Rules 2017 ([Faisal, 2018](#)). The National Sustainable Development Strategy and the Seventh Five-Year Plan of the country have unambiguously highlighted the biodiversity conservation concerns posed by nature-based tourism ([Faisal, 2018](#); [Rasul and Manandhar, 2009, 187–207](#)). Many biodiversity-rich areas have been made into Botanical Gardens, Safari Parks, Eco-Parks, Fish Sanctuaries, Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks to promote conservation and the sustainable use of resources for economy ([Faisal, 2018](#)). In Bangladesh, alarming threats to biodiversity include “rapid and unplanned urbanization, conversion of forests and wetlands into tourism spot, unsustainable use and over exploitation of natural resources in tourism destination, uncontrolled tourism” ([Faisal, 2018](#)) in the landscape of environmentally sensitive, ecologically valuable and biologically diverse protected areas (e.g., in CHT, Cox’s Bazar and St. Martin Island) ([Sajib et al., 2022, 89–103](#)). It is evident that this conservation-through-tourism policy has not only contributed to environmental loss, but has fuelled socio-environmental crisis, in which locals have become double victims as they have been widely represented as solely responsible for local environmental damage ([Sajib et al., 2022, 89–103](#)).

Blaming the victims

There is a growing tendency to generalise and blame local people for socio-environmental crises in all spheres due to their visible interactions with environmental resources ([Sajib et al.,](#)

[2022, 273–285](#)). Local people are deliberately characterised as a threat to biodiversity, as a challenge to be controlled, rather than as local actors to be involved and measured. Local people, for instance, the indigenous communities of CHT in Bangladesh, in the context of identity recognition are redefined in terms of ownership and participation. Locals should be involved in conservation plans and policies as influential actors who are able to perceive and value the economic significance of nature and who can hence conserve it for their own interest. This viewpoint is often overlooked and underestimated in the current projections of measuring and interacting with nature. It furthermore displaces local communities, which are disregarded as stakeholders as meticulously characterised by market-induced actors. Thus, locals become less able to perform the significant role of being valuable “eco-cultural subjects” ([Goldman, 2007](#)) as designed by conservation benefits. It has been suggested that indigenous people serve as “para-biologists” and can save the wildlife by employing their traditional knowledge, and support conservation efforts by conducting their own observations and measurements ([Escobar, 1998](#)). Nevertheless, local communities are often excluded from the dialogue about conservation and development policy. It appears that local culture and knowledge are not considered to have any value added power, and are characterised as a barrier to conservation and development. As stated by [Brown \(2002, 6\)](#) “the conservation-orientated literature traditionally viewed local community welfare and development as directly conflicting with the objectives and practice of biodiversity conservation.” There is no attention paid to local livelihoods in poorly protected regions and the indigenous people of CHT, for instance, are often forced to leave their land in the name of conservation. Locals are persuaded that “fortress conservation” or the “fences and fines” policy is the best way to protect biodiversity ([Salafsky and Wollenberg, 2000, 1421–1438](#)). For example, the indigenous people in CHT have lived in a certain area for a long period of time but have been obliged to depart their locality because it has been closed off by the government as an extremely restricted zone that is in danger and needs immediate action. It would seem that since poverty and conservation are considered to be different policy areas, the connection between locals and their locality is neglected. Action against these oversights new policy is installed with the target “to increase benefits from alternative livelihood activities as a way to reduce the threat to conservation from local people” ([Berkes, 2007, 15188–15193](#)). One of the most powerful and convincing strategies is the application of a buffer zone near to a core zone, with the consequence that the core zone meets high-level safeguards so as to conserve the ecosystem ([Ramus and Montiel, 2005, 377–414](#)). To ensure conservation entrance into this zone is restricted, and to provide economic alternatives, such as tourism, local people can access the buffer zone for their subsistence. Nevertheless, the ground reality of access to resources for subsistence contests this discourse. One of the

flaws of this model is that it is not clearly associated with changing the behaviour of local people, since they are not responsive to the value of nature conservation (Salafsky and Wollenberg, 2000). However, both the environment and local culture is impacted by tourism since they are often projected as commodities for tourists; for example, following the introduction of tourism in CHT, Mowforth and Munt (2015, 1-476) described the “zooification” of indigenous culture. The ethnic groups in South Asia and other indigenous communities around the world have been subjected to “zooification.” People and their cultures are projected as “untouched” or even “primitive” describing to originality which is a trading spot for tourism agencies (Mowforth & Munt, 2015). With the discourse of “living in harmony with nature” (Ulloa, 2005), the tourism market has succeeded in allowing tourists to ignore the poverty of indigenous people. The tourism business advertises culture as a commodity to tempt tourists to experience another world, for example, as an “exotic,” “sensualised” and “naturalised” “other.” Indigenous cultures and people characterise the way to sustainability through “living in harmony with nature” (Ulloa, 2005). In indigenous terrains of South Asia, nature conservation policy, with tourism as the preferred method, has habitually been formed on totalitarian approaches, which on the whole has not contributed to producing long-lasting livelihoods for locals, creating a sense of marginalisation and inequality, which is hardly ever an effective ground for nature conservation plan and policy (Timothy, 2003; Rasul and Manandhar, 2009). Therefore, it could be argued that tourism has failed to connect the distance between nature and culture and has reproduced the “othering” of nature, presenting nature as separate from society.

Conclusion

This study made an attempt not only to provide an eco-cultural critique of contemporary approaches to conservation within the tourism and development framework, but also to problematise the market-induced policy discourses on sustainability, where environmental values were explicitly measured in economic solutions. In this paper, conservation has been problematised as a policy issue signifying a dominant connection between nature and culture, and constituting a linkage of actors through which tourism and conservation are articulated and negotiated. This study suggested that conservation and tourism policies are not as impartial as they are designed to be, and the challenges need to be identified in respect to applying these policy structures to sustain conservation and development. Conservation and tourism are aimed at money-making projects for seeing and using nature. Regardless of its uncertainty, the formulation of a nexus between nature and culture represents an alternative policy context for tourism and conservation. Categorising

natural diversity as an environmentally distinct phenomenon and problematising the conceptualisations, views, principles and politics of various policy actors, the paper contributed to identifying the drawbacks of orthodox conservation policy. Many critics (Philipp, et al., 2022; Fennel, 2008; Sullivan, 2006; Wells, 1995, 319-333) argued that approaches towards interconnected “conservation and tourism policies tend to misplace the ‘conservation’ vision, with misreading over whether conservation or tourism is the way or the end.” The relationship between conservation and tourism has more commonly been revealed to be biased in support of the policy actors, and in contrast to the local communities. Moreover, cultural issues of sustainability in tourism development are connected to the impact of local community wellbeing. The contribution of tourism to the nature-culture nexus still needs to be reviewed through empirical and theoretical observation. Finally, it can be argued that eco-cultural behaviour, rituals and practices are customarily influential in redressing the challenges of the three pillars of sustainability which lead to sustainable development if properly addressed by the culturally embedded tourism policy.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

This paper was presented in an International conference on “Kaleidoscope of Sustainability” in 2021, organised by Coordinator of the PhD programme in Environmental Sustainability and Wellbeing, University of Ferrara, Italy. All authors acknowledge the Coordinator and conference committee that encouraged them to publish the article. The corresponding author would especially like to thank his Supervisor and co-supervisors.

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 15 May 2022

ACCEPTED 01 December 2022

PUBLISHED 30 December 2022

CITATION

Drion GJ (2022), Towards a theory and
practice of cultural communication.
Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 12:11085.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11085

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Towards a theory and practice of cultural communication

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This paper tentatively introduces the concept of cultural communication, exploring new theoretical and practical perspectives on culture and cultural policy. Notably, it presents a theoretical model for cultural communication as a dedicated, common, widespread communication “mode,” thematising ambiguity. This concept of cultural communication may provide new footholds for the legitimisation of public cultural policy—positioning the arts firmly within the context of cultural communication—and for the practical, heuristic application in a structured practice of arranging cultural encounters, carried out in Netherlands.

KEYWORDS

cultural communication, cultural policy, cultural democracy, cultural capability, systems theory

Introduction

In the past decades, the legitimisation of cultural policy in Western Europe has been shaken by, for example, sociological deconstruction, post-colonialism, diversification, neoliberal strands in government and populist rhetoric—in combination with societal changes such as digitalisation, globalisation, segregation and austerity. Urgent calls are sounding for new, more encompassing views on the meaning and value of culture as well as for practical policy goals and outcome evaluation tools (e.g., Holden, 2006; Stevenson, 2016; Wilson, 2017; Hadley and Belfiore, 2018). Clearly, a wider dissatisfaction with—or contention of—the “deficit model” of cultural policy is growing in strength and a new “democratic” case for the meaning and value of culture, inclusiveness, new audiences, multiculturalism, cultural capabilities and local ecosystems is emerging (e.g., Ahmed, 2012; Gielen et al., 2014; Holden 2015; UCLG, 2020; EU, 2021).

This may be seen against the backdrop of the emergence of culture as a designated theme for global democracy and sustainability (e.g., Kagan, 2011; UNESCO, 2022), while the rise of social media and networked societies adds further urgency and depth to the discourse on what it entails to live together—and the role “culture as a public good” (UNESCO, 2022) may play in both the local and the global, in (post-)pandemic times.

In this transitional policy-landscape the key concepts (culture, the arts, democracy, policy) have started drifting. Loosely scanning policy documents,¹ the term “culture” may,

1 Listed here as ad hoc findings by the author.

for example, mean: way of life, civilisation, identity-set, value-set, heritage, expressions, the arts or a combination of those. “The arts” may indicate: artifacts, disciplines, artistic practice, expressions, creativity, creative industry. Democracy (in a cultural context)² may refer to: representation, deliberation, participation, pluriformity, diversity, inclusiveness, or cultural struggle. “Policy” may indicate the dimensions of politics, policy or governance. To complicate things further, arguments tend to switch back and forth between individual, group and societal perspectives, between local, regional, national, international and supra-national perspectives; between intrinsic and instrumental (economic, social, wellbeing, education, creativity, sustainability) perspectives, and between legitimisation, strategy and effectiveness dimensions.³

There are practical reasons for these entanglements to persist: within day-to-day *realpolitik*, culture is typically a “weak” portfolio, charged with contested images; the pragmatics of “making the case” usually prevail over the muddy waters of conceptual discourse. These pragmatics occur in local politics, but also in national and European policy arenas—each with their specific vocabulary.⁴ Moreover, the concept of culture *itself* has been (and indeed, increasingly is) a tool for purposeful and powerful ideological rhetorics (ranging from populist nationalists, to neo-conservatives, to neo-Marxists) that seem to feed on political, market and sector interests and ideologies. Conceptions of culture have thus become entangled in ideological and political discourse and positioning.

But there is also a deeper issue at work. This has to do with circularities that have irreversibly become part of any cultural policy debate, since sociology and multi-cultural society have established the awareness that any judgement on cultural expressions, values or identities is inextricably bound to cultural bias.⁵ “Who is talking?” is now the first question that is put forward in any debate on cultural policy. With this rhetorical “axe” the debate on cultural policy is irreversibly split along *cultural* fault lines, instrumentalising the discourse on cultural policy.⁶

In the face of these challenges, this paper develops the idea that culture may be conceptualized as a communicative process, i.e., as imaginative or performative communication. The guiding hypothesis of this paper is that by building this new process-framework for the conception of culture, the debate on culture, cultural policy and the arts may find a new point of orientation,

and some of the circularities and tensions in the debate (Drion, 2023) may be resolved or reframed.

Exploring this hypothesis, the paper takes off with a short introduction to the work of Niklas Luhmann on communication—as one of two possible avenues for grounding a new theory of cultural communication (to be distinguished from communication about culture or communication of culture).⁷ It finds that at the heart of Luhmann’s grand theoretical construction, an opening for the concept of a specific communication mode may be found, facilitating ambiguous communications. From this, the concept of cultural communication is drawn up. Annotating on Luhmann, the paper will then illustrate that this concept of cultural communication sits well with real-life observations on play (Schechner and Schuman, 1976), performative and subjunctive interactions (Fisher-Lichte, 2009; McConachie, 2015) and a societal “third space” where societal binaries may be left open or tried (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996; Baecker, 2012). This specific domain of practice of suspended meaning⁸ is also the locus—albeit not the exclusive prerogative—of the arts.

Switching to a more practical perspective, the concept of cultural communication is then brought to bear to explore new perspectives for real-life policy development, circumventing the circularities embedded in de rhetorics of cultural policy. A short *Practical frame* is dedicated to the reflective framework of cultural encounter, putting cultural communication into practice for (arts-, culture- and social-) professionals, cultural organisations and policymakers – as recently carried out in Netherlands (Drion, 2018; Drion, 2022).

Over all, this paper may best be considered a tentative exploration. It covers a lot of ground, conceptually positioning a new concept. As such, it has its limitations, which will be discussed at the end of the paper, by confronting some alternative theories and concepts.

Theoretical frame

Systems and semiotics

Looking for descriptive (value-free) frameworks⁹ to scaffold a theory of cultural communication as process between people, two options immediately come to mind: semiotics (Charles Sanders Peirce)¹⁰ and systems theory (Niklas Luhmann). There are

2 The current discourse on cultural democracy (or views on the democratisation of culture) will not be explicitly discussed in this article. See also: Drion 2023 (forthcoming).

3 See, e.g., Belfiore and Bennet (2008), Belfiore (2014).

4 See, e.g., Drion 2023 (forthcoming).

5 See, e.g., Eagleton (2000) or Bauman (1999), Bauman (2011).

6 See Drion 2023 (forthcoming).

7 See Carbaugh (2012) for a short overview of four ways in which culture may be theorised as communication.

8 In this paper the term “meaning” indicates the Dutch “betekenen” or the German “bezeichnen” which translates roughly to “signs that make sense.”

9 Value free as in neutral process-theory.

10 See: Peirce and Fisch (1986).

connections between the two frameworks (as indicated by (e.g.): Maturana and Varela (1984), Bateson (2002), Hoffmeyer (2008), Deacon (1998) and Bausch (2001)).¹¹ Another study (Drion, 2023) will research these similarities in the context of cultural communication. This current paper is directed at the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann, whose work is of profound and still growing influence on sociology—and offers interesting applications in the theorising of cultural policy as well. Moreover, Luhmann's work comprises a foundational meta-theory of societal communication, as such, any trial at conceptualizing culture as communication must, in one way or other, relate to it.

Society as communication

Luhmann's work is focused on one thing: the construction of an all-encompassing theory of society as communication. Or, to put it more precisely: society as an amalgam of self-regulating systems with one single operator: communication. Loosely paraphrasing from his dense prose, two fundamental notions (as a sort of "truisms") stand out at the heart of his theory. The first truism is that humans are "thrown" into the world equipped with mental faculties (psychic systems) that can never connect directly: we can never know for certain what other psychic systems think or feel: all we can ever do is: try to communicate—and try again. The second truism is that every imperfect trial of communication consists of *selections as temporal events*: we say this, not that. Luhmann then shows how these two simple facts spawn the most intricate and complex set of functionally stratified communication systems creating their own boundaries and rules: society.

Luhmann builds his encompassing systems theory by oscillating between the microlevel (of communication between psychic systems) and the macro level of social systems (society). He argues that both psychic systems and social systems must make temporal selections when they communicate, or more precisely: that communication *is* temporal selection.¹²

This notion of communication-as-selection entails that both psychic and social systems organise themselves in functional (selection-driven) ways: patterns of selections grow into functional social (or cognitive) units. Social systems (sociologist Luhmann does not say much on

psychic systems, but emphasizes that they are indeed systems) are formed by the use of functional binaries. These binaries drive the formation of subsystems, like the binary "true-untrue" for the science system or the binary "legal-illegal" for the justice system. Society for Luhmann is the grand total of all of these self-regulating binary communication subsystems which he describes meticulously in several major works.¹³

Selection as distinction

Luhmann underpins his key-concept of binary selection with George Spencer-Brown's Logic of Form (Spencer-Brown, 1969). Here his work does become very abstract, it requires examination, as it is a central part of Luhmann's reasoning to which this paper wants to annotate.

Spencer-Brown postulates that at the heart of any (temporal) act of selection lies a unity of distinction and indication, that spawns a form. For Luhmann this means that any communicative selection is at the same time both a distinction and an indication: by saying "this" and not "that," both a distinction (between this and that) and an indication (this, not that) spring to life, are made simultaneously manifest—as a "unity of selection." Spencer-Brown names this unity of selection: *form*.

For Luhmann this is a crucial notion, as it depicts that every selection forms a "cut out" shape that not only indicates what is selected, but also indicates what is not selected (out of the range of alternatives at hand). In other words, the form spawned by selection exists as a shape that marks the difference between the selected and the not-selected (Figures 1, 2).

What is of importance here, is the notion that in Luhmann's world communication is the basic operator of any social system, and selection (in the Spencer-Brownian sense of form) is the basic element of every communication. This means that any communication (and indeed any communication system) is a reduction to form, which allows for the unselected (out)side to be observed and remembered.

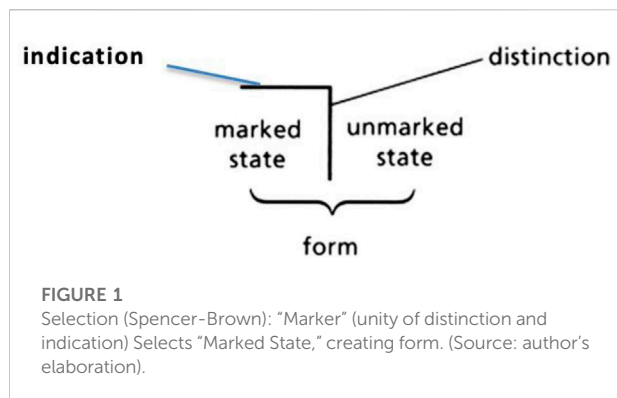
Structures and media

Observation, expectation and remembering are a key part in Luhmann's social theory. Because communications are events that only exist in time, communications must be tried again and

11 Notably in the perception that difference is a basic condition for information to "appear" and to be handled between (or within) systems. As Bateson famously put it: "information is a difference that makes a difference." Systems can only perceive differences; systems operate on differences.

12 Luhmann famously defines communication as a three-fold selection: selection of utterance, selection of information, selection of understanding.

13 In particular, ten systems can be enumerated: political systems, economy, science, art, religion, legal systems, sport, health systems, education and mass media (Roth and Schütz, 2015). These are autopoietic systems, operationally closed, and each has a specific binary code that includes or excludes an operation (Appignanesi 2018).



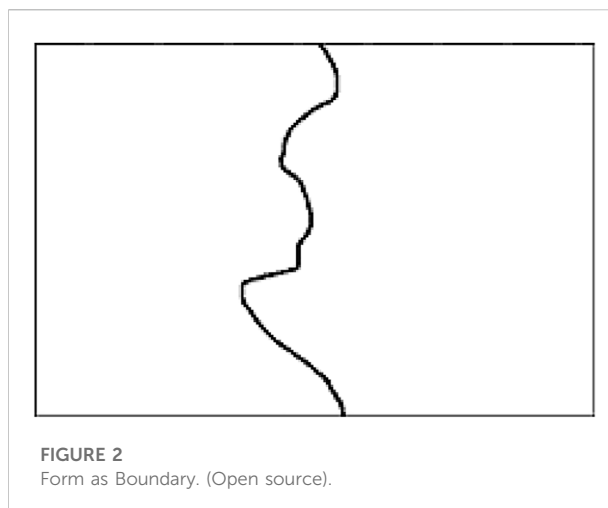
again. That is why, Luhmann says, grand structures and “media” continuously arise to facilitate effective communication and remembering: to make pre-selections, so to speak, that streamline communication. Luhmann positions these structures and media in society.

Luhmann does not claim that observation, expectation and remembering would not, also, be situated in psychic systems. As a sociologist, his focus is on society, that is: on communications, that weave patterns, forming societal processes of a specific kind (social systems) that in turn find ways that help to observe, expect and remember.¹⁴

Culture

How do culture and the arts fit into this grand concept of society? As for culture, Luhmann is quite clear that the societal organisation of observation, expectation and remembering cannot be a social system in and of itself (as it is not communication in Luhmann’s definition).¹⁵ Instead Luhmann introduces the term medium, which may here be taken to refer to a set of communication pre-sets or configurations (including language, values, structures) that provide the preconditions for enduring and effective communications within society. A medium is built up over time by the communications within a system, without being “seen” by the systems that use it. Although with much (uncharacteristic) hesitancy, Luhmann says this invisible medium is what may be called “culture” (Burkart and Runkel, 2004).

There is much to say about this, but it is clear that Luhmann does not thoroughly theorise culture as such and this leaves room for interpretation and amendments. Baecker (2012), Baecker (2013), Laermans (2002), Laermans (2007) and others have



done just that, and commented that culture in Luhmann may be seen as a sort of reservoir on which all communications draw to facilitate the ongoing process of meaning construction. Indeed, this is more or less in line with what the common, anthropological definition of culture entails (see: Geertz 1973; Keesing 1990).

Art as a social system

In his conception of art as a social system Luhmann (2000) works “outward,” starting from the practice of creation. In accordance with his theory, Luhmann argues that every step in the formation of an artwork designates a temporal selection by the artist: “Here and now, I do this, not that”.¹⁶ Luhmann then states that every selection by the artist refers to the work itself. The binary that drives this selection in relation to the work is the distinction “fitting/not fitting.” The “selection process” (the conception of the work) goes on until the work is “done” – the point when there are no further selections left to improve the work.¹⁷

Luhmann then projects the same binary “fitting–not fitting” operating at the functional level of the social system of the arts: art as a social system “autopoietically” reproduces itself by selecting fitting/non-fitting works. This must be taken in a paradoxical sense: what “fits” in the social system of art, fits because it does not quite fit, or in other words, in the social system of the arts, innovation “fits” (leads to continuation of the system) and

¹⁴ This part of Luhmann’s theory has deep philosophical and methodical implications, such as his systemic “blind spots” which we must leave aside here (see paragraph: Discussion and Limitations).

¹⁵ Luhmann opposes Parsons’ action theory. See Luhmann (2013).

¹⁶ Of course, these selections are not *per se* “conscious” or “rational”; they will, at least in part, be embodied and intuitive. See, e.g., McConachie (2015) and Johnson (2007).

¹⁷ There will obviously be different manifestations of this in material and performative art-forms.

imitation does not fit (is rejected, ignored or forgotten by the system).¹⁸

Notes

It is significant to note that Luhmann does not see the artwork itself as a dedicated communication. The work however does communicate by referring to itself as a product of selections by the artist. Each of these selections yield form in the sense that they also indicate the non-selected options in relation to the work.

Luhmann mentions (in passing) that a particular prerequisite must be fulfilled for the artwork to communicate (in the Luhmannian sense): it must, first of all, be introduced as artwork so that it may be interpreted as such (and not, e.g., as an “ordinary” soapbox or a pissoir).^{19,20} This is important for where this paper is going, because it leaves some space within systems theory to think of communication *modes*. I will come back to this in relation to play.

The second note is that Luhmann separates the “communication of the artwork” from the communication about art, which he designates as the “social system of art.” This is important because it leaves some space within systems theory to think of communication modes on the level of societal phenomena.

Wrap up

Luhmann’s social systems theory may be seen as an ultimate description of the systemic necessities of the process of communication. As such it may provide a strong and credible framework for a theory of cultural communication. There are however, as noted, some major issues to be addressed. The first is that Luhmann’s theory does not provide any clear definition of culture-as-process: Luhmann seems strikingly hesitant on the subject of culture (Burkart and Runkel, 2004). The second is that his description of the process of creation of the art work (as communicative artefact) does mention “a special kind of communication”²¹ in relation to the arts, but this “special kind of communication” is not theoretically developed in relation to culture. Thirdly, Luhmann seems to describe the social system of the arts in terms of communication about art and not primarily in terms of communication through (or with)

art. Finally, although not mentioned above—but mentioned by others—the work of Luhmann leaves some gaps when it comes to embodiment and emotions as locus or driver of (inter)personal and societal processes, actions and experiences (Ciompi, 2004; Ciompi and Endert, 2011; Damasio, 2018). These issues may be addressed if the description of culture is more precisely taken apart, in particular in relation to ambiguous communication.

Exploration

New territory: The process of culture, culture as process

A deep and significant (but often hidden) aspect of the use and definition of the term “culture” is the distinction between the process of culture (i.e., the way “culture” influences or determines the interactions in society) and culture *as process* (i.e., as properties of communication). Put in other words: the difference between the process definition of a noun or a verb.

The use of culture as a noun in a process-definition of culture focusses on what culture is through what it does, i.e., the way culture as a set of (e.g.,) values, behaviours or artefacts (or as “reservoir of symbolic meaning” (Laermans, 2002)) mutually interacts with the processes that happen within and between people (or within and between structures or organisations). This use of the term culture is very well developed albeit contested and stratified in different schools of thought.²²

With the use of culture as a verb, a process-definition of culture shifts focus to what it entails to culturally communicate. This use of the term culture (as process-distinction of communication) has not yet been theorised. It does however resonate with Luhmann’s description of the creation-process of artworks, as well as with the concepts of bio-systems and cybernetics (Deacon, 1998; Bateson 2000) and with some stands in sociology (Laermans, 1997; Baecker, 2012), art-theory (Van Maanen, 2005) and play-theory (e.g., McConachie, 2015). It is my aim to bring these strands—in a provisional way at least—together within the basic framework of communication theory, extending on Luhmann’s suggestions on a special “kind of communication” that comes with the creation and interpretation of art. I will develop this by connecting the everyday practice of ambiguous communication with *subjunction* (such as in play, storytelling, irony and the arts).

18 See Luhmann (2000) 118. Cf Gielen et al. (2014); Van Maanen (2005).

19 See Luhmann (1987: 105) on “registering form as medium.”

20 Here Luhmann seems to introduce some form of meta-communication into the communication of art. I will elaborate on that when I introduce the term *communication mode*.

21 Luhmann (2000) 26.

22 See: e.g., Eagleton (2000).

Communication mode

The suggestion I am making then, is that cultural communication may be conceptualised and theorised as a designated mode of communication. Let me illustrate this with an example, elaborating on Luhmann's suggestion that for any artwork to function communicatively (as an artwork), it must be introduced and recognized as such. The communicative "mode" that designates such a switch from "reality" to the space of purposeful "non-reality" is playfully thematised by Magritte in his famous painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, which points to the self-evident difference between literal and imaginative interpretation. Ever since the arrival of abstract and conceptual art (like the ready-mades of Duchamp or Warhol's Brillo Box) this distinction between the real and the imaginary has been irreversibly established—and consequently been thematised ("re-entered") in art (Figure 3).

The point I would like to make is that this obvious communicative switch from reality to an imaginative non-reality mode is not confined to the arts and is indeed much more widely practiced in everyday communication than we perhaps might realise. To illustrate this, I will turn to the work of Bateson and McConachie on play and storytelling—and tie these back to culture and the arts.

Play

There are two interesting parallels between the "artistic" mode of interpretation (this is not a pipe, this is not a Brillo box) with other, quite common communicative settings: social play and storytelling.

Gregory Bateson famously stated that for any social play (human or animal alike) to take off, a meta-communicative



signal "this is play" is required (Schechner and Schuman, 1976; Mitchell, 1991). Only if the signal is picked up, a playful communication mode (my term) may be established and playing may progress unimpeded by any misunderstandings that what takes place is actually "for real."

It is obvious that there are many sorts of play and many definitions of play,²³ but for me it is significant these all have in common that some form of open-endedness is essential to playing: playing is, in a deep evolutionary sense, always a designated, staged form of trying.²⁴

Bruce McConachie (2015), Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), Fischer-Lichte (2009) and others have suggested that play and storytelling (or more general: performance) are closely related²⁵ as both presume (and establish) a specific mode of communication: subjunction. Subjunction is the communicative transfer of "is" to "were" (or in other words, from a reference to reality to an imagined "as if" or "once upon a time"). This transfer opens a specific mode of communication: a playful performance and interpretation of a "reality" that is not-real, which of course is the hallmark of all art—but, as I just now put forward, not limited to art.

These switches from the real to the not-real are similar between play and performative acts, but the question remains whether they may indeed be the same in terms of communication?

Back to Spencer-Brown: The re-entry of form into communication

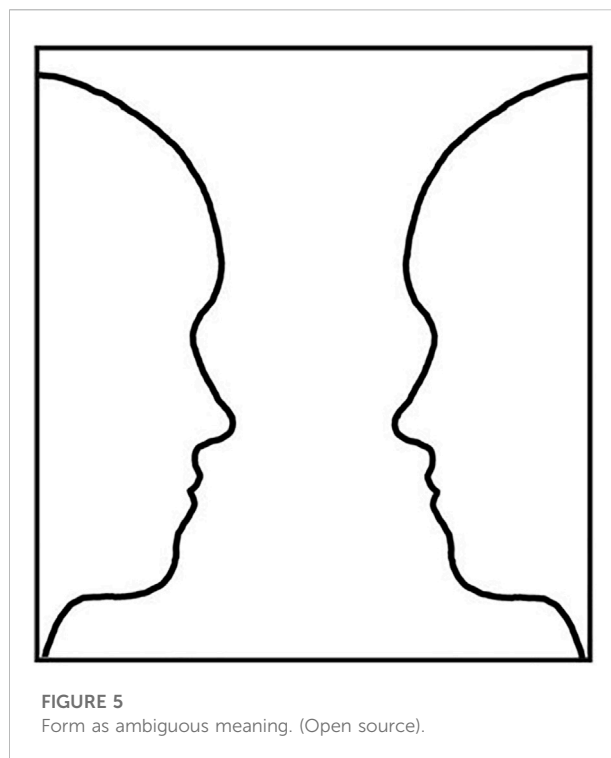
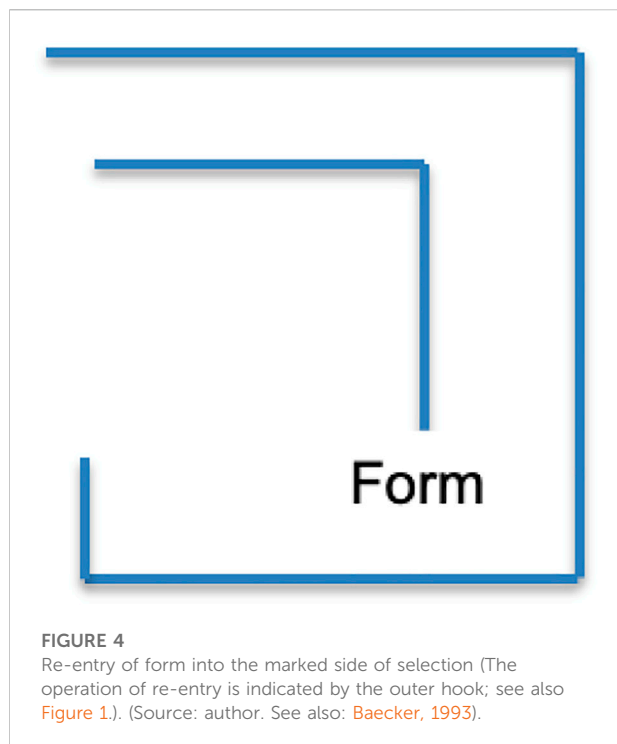
What happens "communication-wise" when we switch into this subjunctive mode of communication? How could this be reconciled with the concept of selection (i.e., reduction to form) as the basic unit of communication? I would like to suggest that the imaginative communication modes of subjunction and play have in common that they both thematise ambiguity. Put in the language of Spencer-Brown: an ambiguous communication mode is the re-entry of the form (i.e., the shape between the indicated and the not-indicated) into the marked state, as a *thematized ambiguity*.²⁶ (Figure 4).

²³ See: e.g., Huizinga (1938), Caillois (2001), Sutton-Smith (1997), Henricks (2015), Gadamer (1993).

²⁴ A significant difference between play and game should be highlighted here: a game will usually have an ending related to rules, play may not; a game needs to be played, but playing does not need a set of *a priori* rules *per se*. See also: Upton (2021). See also: Baricco (2020) on games, digitization and culture.

²⁵ Indeed, for all of these forms the word "play" is used.

²⁶ For an comprehensive introduction to Spencer-Brown in relation to Luhmann, see: Baecker (1993), (in German). For a lighter form, see: Baraldy (2021).



This may seem very abstract or theoretical, but it may also be seen in an everyday perspective. When communication switches to an ambiguous mode, the difference of what is indicated and what is not indicated (the Form) becomes part of the communication as ambiguous meaning. As such, it “lives” on for as long as the ambiguous communication mode is continued. A “flippety image” or “Kippbild” (Vilc, 2017) is an example of this oscillating meaning (Figure 5).

Proposition

This brings me to the centre of my argument. It is my proposition that an actual, distinct (and widespread) open ended communication mode exists in society, between people, distinguished by the selection of thematised ambiguousness. Annotating to McConachie I would suggest that from the “root” of this common ambiguous communication several different practices “branch off”: play, playful ambiguous communications (such as humour and irony), storytelling, all expressive performances—and art.

Looping back to Baecker’s and Laermans’ (noun-)definition of culture as a reservoir of shared meaning, I propose to call this imaginative, ambiguous communication mode: *cultural communication*, because it is, per saldo, thematising the playful “what-if” in the domain of shared meaning. Or put differently: seeing culture (as a noun!) as a reservoir of shared

meaning (Sinn) (Laermans, 1999; Laermans, 2002; Baecker, 2012), ambiguous communication may be the way this reservoir is continuously, playfully opened for association, reflection, subversion and growth.

Positioning

Culture, communication, otherness, play and space

Among his many other interpretations of and reflections on Luhmann’s work, Baecker (2012), Baecker (2013) puts forward that culture may be placed in systems theory as a *Tertium Datur*: a societal “third space” where the “opposition” to the functional binary way Luhmannian communication systems operate, resides. For Baecker then, culture produces the “third values” that facilitate a vocabulary that the differentiated social systems may share. Although Baecker’s elaborations of Luhmann’s theory suggest a similar direction as the one that I am proposing, his reasoning seems “tied” to the process of culture (as a noun). Although this obviously deserves much more attention (see also: *Discussion*), I will now simply suggest that the concept of cultural communication may provide an explanation of how this societal “third space” is linked to the process of communicating.

It is interesting to note that, although formulated in a completely different context, the concept of playful undecidedness has parallels with Homi Bhabha's Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) as a space where (in a colonial context of cultural domination), dominant cultural expressions, identities and clichés are paraphrased, ridiculed and transformed. This in turn has strong relations with Victor Turner's concept of liminality as a phase of becoming, between an old and a new equilibrium, state or identity (Turner, 1982). And last—but not least—it may be associated with Edward Soja's (urban) theory of Thirdspace, as a space of limitless options, radically open to otherness (Soja, 1996).

These conceptions of space have in common that they envision a communicative mode of imagining, undecidedness, openness and creativity: when binaries lose their urgency and conflicts and identities are liquified through imaginative interactions. They also have in common that the term “space” is not used in any physical sense (although place as physical space may be an important context), but as a locus created by an associative and communicative interaction, as communications (including embodied behaviours) set themselves in a mode of ambiguity and performativity, opening new horizons for shared meaning and sense-making.

In Netherlands, Hans van Maanen (Theatre Studies) has suggested that artistic experience can only come about when the interpretation “schemata” of the subject are sufficiently challenged, i.e., when the confrontation with an artwork sparks interpretive surprise, wonder or (as Pascal Gielen later put it) dis-measure (Gielen et al., 2014). This notion too, comes close to my propositions on cultural communication, although Van Maanen (2005) seems to speak mainly in relation to the arts.²⁷ In addition, I would suggest that the experience of dis-measure that Van Maanen—I think justifiably so—puts central to artistic experience, may find its pendant in a specific communication *mode* that is of a much wider practice than the arts as such.

This short positioning would not be complete without Johan Huizinga. In his seminal work *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga (1938) famously places play at the root of all culture. “Behind any expression of the abstract lies a metaphor and within any metaphor there is a wordplay,” Huizinga writes. In this way, humanity “continuously creates a second, imagined world alongside that of nature” (...) “Great activities of cultural life” (including religion, law, economy and science) are rooted in a “soil of playful activity” (sic). Huizinga does not theorise his thesis, but richly illustrates it with an abundance of examples from history and anthropology. Annotating, I would suggest a

theory of cultural communication may help to fill in Huizinga's thesis.

In the field of cognition and evolution strong clues can be found that cultural communication (in the sense of the playful thematisation of the what-if in the domain of shared meaning) may be an important factor in the evolutionary development of humans and society. We need ambiguous ways to *try meaning*, on both the interpersonal and the societal level. Vygotsky (1996), Damasio (2018), Donald (1991), Tomasello (2000), Dissanayake (1974, 2012), Van Heusden (2009), Van Heusden (2010) and many others have theorised, researched and documented this convincingly in the context of human development, cognition, interaction, cooperation and evolution.

To round this short positioning off, it is worthwhile to reiterate that inspiring connections may be found between systems theory and semiosis (the production and comprehension of signs). The concepts of Eco (1978), Eco (1988) and Lotman (2011) on sign systems, media and the “semiosphere” are strongly related to the process of sense-making, imagining, culture and the arts (Machado, 2011; Tarasti, 2015; Thibault, 2016; Zerubavel, 2018).

(A short discussion of culture, power-reproduction and ‘blind spots’ can be found in paragraph Discussion and limitations.)

Policy perspectives

The guiding hypothesis of this paper is that a process-conception of culture may offer a new point of orientation for cultural policy and may resolve some of the circularities and tensions in the current (identity driven) debate. Annotating on Luhmann's theory of society as communication, this paper presented a process-conception of culture as a playful ambiguous communication mode (designated as cultural communication or “culture as verb”). It then associated this concept with performative interaction, undecidedness and societal “third space,” and pointed to related strands of thought on art, culture, cognition and semiosis. So, what changes does this bring to the table for cultural policy?

The first (and most obvious) change would be that a policy directed towards cultural communication will no longer be grounded in, or (primarily) aimed at the conservation, dissemination or production of specific values, identities or artefacts—as traditional cultural policy is. Instead, it will be grounded in, and aiming at the interactional processes by which values, identities or artefacts come to life. In that sense, such a policy is democratic in the deep layer that it is not (primarily) directed at representation of solidified identities, values or artefacts in the public sphere, but at the (imaginative) processes by which identities, values and artefacts mediate, liquify and *change*; essential for an open society (Ignatieff and Roch 2018; Zerubavel, 2018). By

²⁷ Although in this context challenges may also reside in new information, revelation of identity, emotional content or new context/place. See: Van Maanen & Van den Hoogen in: DeBruyne and Gielen (2011).

grounding in this deeper democratic layer, cultural policy may find a way out of the circular “legitimacy stalemate” pointed out above (see: *Introduction*), because it can no longer be instrumentalized or “hijacked” by identity rhetorics. (See also: *Discussion and Limitations*.)

Elaborating on this, it is interesting to note that it was Gregory Bateson (who published extensively on systems, cognition, cybernetics and play) that coined the term “schismogenesis” for the mechanism of cultural opposition: although culture may remain “invisible” for anyone “inside” it, cultural awareness will urgently come to the surface when confronted with other cultures: every culture will define itself in terms of otherness. Bateson (in Schechner and Schuman, 1976) sees the dynamics of this cultural “schism” as a natural function of human society. However, feelings of fear and resentment lie close to the surface and can easily be manipulated by populists and activists (Ciompi and Endert, 2011). Needless to say, these mechanisms have since Bateson’s time (he wrote on schismogenesis in 1935) become exponentially more virulent with the rise of social media and online tribalism.²⁸

In these polarized times then, it seems of importance that other ways of cultural awareness and growth (other than through cultural opposition) are at the disposal of society. It is at this point that a new cultural policy, directed at cultural communication, may play a role.²⁹

A second change that a process-directed cultural policy may bring about, concerns the role of artists and the arts. It has often been said that artists or the arts should not claim exclusivity for the societal enhancement of creativity and imagination (or, for that matter, for cultural participation, or for social “bonding” and “bridging”),³⁰ as there are many other processes in society that may bring about these qualities in people’s lives. The concept of cultural communication may help to put the issues concerning the role and surplus of artists and the arts in a wider and deeper perspective.

If we see cultural communication as a mode of deliberate ambiguous communication (thematizing the playful subjunctive “what-if” in the domain of shared meaning), the role of arts and artists may come to light as a specific depth in this communication mode. Artists and artworks renew and update the expressive vocabulary (“form-languages”)³¹ in and of society, creating inspiring, provocative or wonderous signposts in the

“third space” of cultural communication. To be able to do so, artists must also be the keepers and disseminators of the specialist vocabulary of their discipline and the sets (passed down and continuously developing) of integrated skills that may bring that vocabulary to life.

From this vantage point artists can confidently unfold their role and position in society (in the Luhmannian sense of a communication system), and transparently balance the necessity of their artistic skills and autonomy with the necessity of their communicative embeddedness; proudly conscious of the fact that their work will find full significance in the playful context³² of cultural communication and cultural encounter (see also: *Practical frame*).

Combining these two observations, cultural policy design may gain new perspective. Two dimensions can then be functionally distinguished: the dimension of the width and the dimension of depth of cultural communication.

- For the maintenance and facilitation of the width of cultural communication, policy can be directed towards the capability³³ in and of society to arrange cultural encounters past the cultural “walls” of schismogenesis and power reproduction.
- For the maintenance and facilitation of the depth of cultural communication, policy can be directed towards the capability in and of society to arrange cultural encounters beyond the vested vocabularies (form-languages).

This “third way” of policy formation may have far-reaching implications, to be discussed and explored.

In the *Practical frame* (below) a trial set-up in Netherlands is presented, serving as a prelude to such explorations and discussions. In anticipation, a key finding of this trial may be of interest here: a policy directed at the arrangement of cultural encounters would have to be *adaptive* in a deep democratic sense, as cultural communication only springs to life in a *free* setting. Traditional policy elements (input, output, outcome) will have to be re-designed in a process-vocabulary for the facilitation, collaboration, and evaluation of cultural encounter. In a mid-sized “new-town” in Netherlands this policy re-design was democratically rolled out with the participation of the broad cultural field, triggered by the collectively shared challenge to *facilitate cultural*

28 See also: Burkart and Runkel (2004) and Baecker (2012) on culture, opposition and middle ground (Tertium Datur).

29 There are, of course, many other valuable approaches to this problem: the claim that art and artists act as “mirror” or “consciousness” of society is obviously one; another may be the growing interest in the education in culture (see, e.g., Van Heusden 2010); a third may be the growing attention to inclusion, cultural rights and participatory practices.

30 See, e.g., Otte (2015).

31 Drion, forthcoming.

32 See also: Gadamer (1993).

33 See: Nussbaum (2013). Nussbaum’s capability approach relates to the freedom people have to do and be what one has reason to value. In relation to culture and democracy this has been adapted by Wilson & Gross towards cultural capability: the freedom people have to recognize and explore what they have reason to value. For Drion et al. cultural capability relates to the capability in and of society to culturally communicate. See also: *Practical frame*.

encounters for everyone.³⁴ This yielded a new collective vision for cultural policy for a period of 8 years, and major revisions of funding and collaboration. In the *Practical frame* (below) some further remarks are made on the development of specific tools for policy design and collaboration.

Discussion and limitations

As pointed out in the *Introduction*, this study is a tentative exploration of new territory, and as such is limited in its scope and reference. Below, these limitations will be discussed in the context of the tensions between Luhmann's theory and the conceptualisation of cultural communication as a basis for new cultural policy.

Luhmann's grand theory of society as communication is as huge as it is dense, and it develops a radical (Moeller, 2006; Moeller, 2011), highly specialized and completely original vocabulary. Moreover, Luhmann's theory is highly consistent: it does not tolerate "cherry picking" or *ad-hoc* changes (Blom, 1997; Laermans, 1999). How does this relate to the propositions developed in this paper?

By connecting and annotating to this central point of Luhmann's theory (i.e., Spencer-Brown's unity of indication and selection) this article suggests an opening for conceptualizing an ongoing selection of ambiguity as a dedicated communication mode. As such, it does not dispute Luhmann's grand theory or any of its implications; it sits beside, and in dialogue with, Luhmann's great framework. The paper explores this position and is, needless to say, very much open for further discourse.

That said, as stated at the end of *Theoretical Frame*, there are tensions that need to be addressed when referring to Luhmann's system theory in the context of cultural policy. The first tension addressed in this paper is that Luhmann is hesitant about the definition of "culture" within his grand theory. Several authors (Burkart and Runkel, (2004), Baecker, 2012; Burkart and Runkel, (2004); Laermans 2007) have pointed to Luhmann's hesitancy, and have made suggestions for elaboration. This paper hooks on to these elaborations from the angle of cultural communication, drawing the preliminary conclusion that the concept of cultural *space* may perhaps form an interesting and viable bridge. However, the positioning of cultural communication in relation to cultural space on the one hand and system theory on the other, definitely deserves further exploration.

The second tension addressed in this paper is that Luhmann has a very specific view on the way *art* functions as a social system in society. In Luhmann's view, artworks communicate in a functional system, driven by the paradoxical binary "fitting—not-fitting". The theory of cultural communication presented in this paper places at the heart of cultural communication (which includes artworks but is not limited to art) a non-binary (!) ambiguous communication mode. In Luhmann's world this mode would have to be theorised back into a binary fashion (ambiguous—not-ambiguous?). This also, deserves further reflection.

The third tension is that Luhmann's world is, at first glance, not very "physical" or "immediate." Psychic systems and the body are in Luhmann's view "structurally coupled" and "irritate" each other, but there seems to be little room for direct physical interaction or immediacy, which seems intuitively essential for play (e.g., Winnicott, 1971; Sutton-Smith, 1997), performativity (e.g., Fischer-Lichte 2008) and cultural communication as presented here. This tension has not been addressed directly in this paper; I plan to study this further in relation to semiosis and living systems.

A fourth tension, mentioned here for the first time, may be that Luhmann actually does speak of a "doubling" of meaning, but does so specifically in relation to mass-media. Mass-media construct reality, or explore possible realities, e.g., in a story or a sit-com (Luhmann 1997). Through mass-media, "realities can be constructed and constructions can become realities" (Luhmann 1997). However, Luhmann makes these remarks in the light of a Luhmannian system (of mass-media), driven by the binary "new information—old information." In contrast, the theory of cultural communication presented in this paper draws on the selection of ambiguity in a dedicated communication mode. The relation between these two concepts of "doubling" needs further reflection.

Blind spots

Any choice of frame creates its own blind spots, as Luhmann famously theorises. From the point of view of this article it is important to note that the framework of ambiguous communication (as indeed in Luhmann's system theory) does not see power-relations *as* communication. It states that cultural communication is tied to a communication mode that may bring values, identities and artefacts into play between people. Cultural policy should then be directed at the width (i.e., past the walls of power relations) and the depth (i.e., renewal of form-languages) of cultural communication. In other words: the theory of cultural communication presented here does not

³⁴ Gemeente Zoetermeer (2019–2020).

deny the existence or importance of power-reproduction or exclusion in relation to cultural policy; it sees this as circumstance to be addressed by flanking policies. (See also below.)

Power and power reproduction

In that regard, the work of (e.g.,) Bourdieu (1984), Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), Ranciere (2000), Ranciere (2010), Braidotti (2005) and Gielen et al. (2014) must be mentioned. Although mutually different in many aspects, these and other authors have in common that they place the reproduction of power-relations through the cultural reproduction of meaning and value central in their work. This leads them to a specific analysis of society and culture, and consequently to specific (although quite diverse) analysis and (perhaps idealistic) design of cultural policy. These analyses are, no doubt, of significance in the debate on cultural policy (where indeed they find growing influence and support). I would not want to oppose their inclusive objectives in any way, although elsewhere (Drion, 2023) I do propose that cultural policy on the basis of identity may well be fundamentally flawed. At the current point in time I would however suggest (1) that a theory of cultural communication may explain the dynamics and evolution of culture on a deeper communicative level, and (2) that a theory of cultural communication may crucially show the fluidity of cultural communication as an intrinsic dimension of society (in the Luhmannian sense), which interacts with the structural and power-reproductive mechanisms of society, and must therefore be included in, and be the deeper goal of, any cultural policy.

Ecosystems, cultural democracy, capability and commoning

Cultural ecosystems are currently at the forefront of the discourse on cultural policy, governance, participation and democracy.³⁵ It is important to note that the term appears in two conceptually different strands: a representational and a participatory strand.

In the representational variant, cultural ecosystems are conceptualised at the institutional level, as a set of more or less formal facilities that need to be opened for democratic representation of all cultural groups, both formally (as diversity) as in their programming and *modus operandi* (as inclusiveness) (Hadley and Belfiore, 2018; EU, 2021; Hadley, 2021). In the participatory strand, cultural ecosystems are seen as a democratic process-approach to inequality and exclusion. It is interesting to note that two

variants of this particular strand are emerging: cultural commons (Volont et al., 2022) and cultural capability (Wilson, 2017). Although there may be comments on the theoretical underpinning (Drion 2023), both of these participatory strands relate well to a frame of cultural communication: commoning as a strategy for facilitating cultural communication and encounter (see *Practical frame*); cultural capability as a participatory strategy for talent-development and supported cultural autonomy (Wilson and Gross, 2018).

Further study

As may be clear from the above, further study is beckoning on a whole range of subjects. For the further development of a full-blown theory of cultural communication, critical analysis from system theory is very welcome, as well as corroboration by a further study of semiotics in relation to meaning, systems and ambiguity. Some promising leads may be found at the crossroads between the work of Lotman (2011), Eco (1978), Eco (1988) and Fischer-Lichte (2008), Fischer-Lichte (2009) on culture, the arts and semiotics, and in the work of Vygotsky (1996), Donald (1991), Damasio (2018), Van Heusden (2009), Wheeler (2015) and others on the relation between biosemiotics, semiosis, cognition, culture and evolution.

On the practical side, fruitful crosslinks may be found in the actual discourse on cultural capability, cultural ecosystems, cultural democracy, Thirdspace, arts education, social resilience and inclusiveness. The reflective framework presented in the *Practical frame* (below) may serve as a perspective for *arranging cultural encounters*—as basic unit of cultural practice, organisation and policy. Extensive research is needed to follow the actual impact of the method, and the way a shared vocabulary may work to arrange and align practices, organisations and policies. Nonetheless, the framework seems (as such) a step forward, as a heuristic operationalisation of what actually happens in cultural encounters has, so far, been missing.

Practical frame

How can we arrange cultural encounters past the ‘walls’ of power reproduction and schismogenesis? Or put differently: how can we open the concept of cultural communication to the real-world practice of actual activities, organisations and policy?

In the Netherlands a two-year trial was set up, aiming to find a practical approach for cultural communication, *by heuristically modelling cultural encounters*. The trial was made possible by FCP (the Dutch national fund for cultural participation) and was supervised and hosted by LKCA (the Dutch national centre for expertise on cultural

³⁵ See, e.g., Drion (2022).

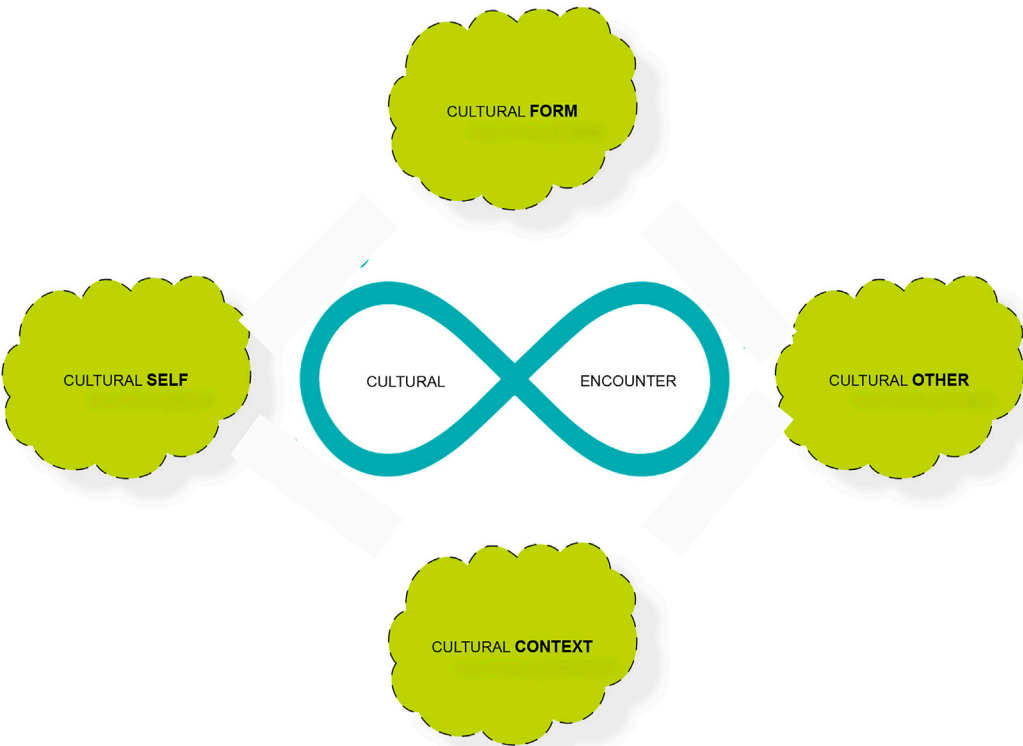
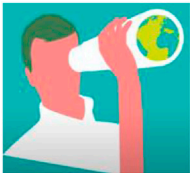
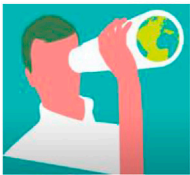


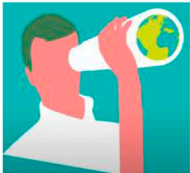
FIGURE 6
The heuristic model of cultural encounter. (Source: author)



PRACTITIONER
(arranging
encounters)



ORGANIZATION
(arranging
programmes)



POLICY
(arranging
coherence)

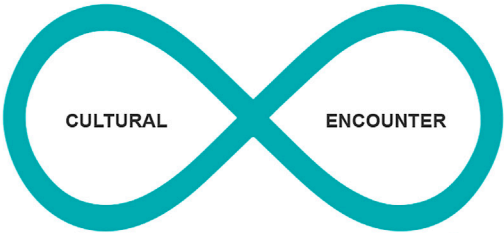


FIGURE 7
Three levels of operation. (Source: author)

education and participation); six professional organisations were involved in nine separate set-ups.

Key notions

The trial was built around the tentative hypothesis that in a cultural communication mode four heuristic elements (cultural nouns) may be in play: cultural self, cultural other, cultural form and cultural context. The reasoning behind this is straightforward: if cultural communication is indeed a specific communication mode happening between people, a cultural *self* and a cultural *other* must be brought into play, spawning *form* that can only make sense (Luhmannian “Sinn”) in *context*.

It is crucial to emphasize that this model is not referring to “actors” or “agency” in any way. It heuristically models a mode of communication (as such, between people) as a self-generating process. The heuristic modelling has the specific purpose of opening cultural encounters for professional observation and evaluation.

The term “cultural” in this model may need some clarification. In this paper, a distinction was made between ‘culture as noun’ and ‘culture as verb’. In the model presented above, the process of cultural communication (i.e. the point where culture *becomes* a verb) is represented by the “infinity sign” (or lemniscate) in the middle. The heuristic elements surrounding the process may be seen as “bearers” of symbolic meaning, identity or values, that are brought into play when a cultural communication mode is present (Figure 6).

Positioning

In the context of this trial the term *cultural capability* was adapted in the Netherlands from the seminal work in the UK (Wilson, 2017; Wilson and Gross, 2018; Gross and Wilson, 2020) and consequently developed in the specific direction of Cultureel Vermogen³⁶ (Drion, 2018, 2022): *the capability in and of society to culturally communicate*. Cultureel Vermogen (CV) proposes a dedicated model for opening cultural encounter to professional, organisational and policy design and evaluation. The model is a tentative proposition, developed over a series of dialogues with specialists in the field of cultural education, participation and policy.³⁷

36 “Cultureel Vermogen” (CV) is not easily translatable into English (just as “Cultural capability” is not adequately translatable into Dutch). “Vermogen” points to a combination of ability and opportunity, but it also has the connotation “potential power” as in the physics equation $W = V \times A$ (capability = difference $\times$ connectivity). The phrase “in and of society” indicates that the societal and individual aspects of CV are at the same time distinguishable and intertwined.)

37 As such, it may provide a way to explore the specific ‘operational gap’ in the capabilities approach. (Gross & Wilson, 2020).

The working hypothesis of CV is: *cultural encounters may be arranged by connecting the four heuristic elements into “strong” practical arrangements - that touch on both the depth and the width of cultural communication*.

Levels of arrangements

Three levels of operation can work together to bring these arrangements about: professionals (arranging encounters), organisation (arranging programmes), policy (arranging coherence).

For each of these levels, dedicated proto-tools were developed helping practitioners, organisations and policymakers to collaborate – using a shared vocabulary. The tools will become available in the summer of 2023 (Figure 7).

Remarks on future developments

The findings of trial setup of Cultureel Vermogen were presented in a conference in May 2022 in the Netherlands. A platform for further development is under construction. (More information: <https://www.lkca.nl/categorie/thema/cultureelvermogen/>).

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank everyone who in the past years have contributed to the ideas expressed in this paper, especially the many friendly co-readers and my PhD supervisors at the University of Groningen. This paper could not have been written without their support.

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RECEIVED 12 August 2022

ACCEPTED 04 April 2023

PUBLISHED 02 June 2023

CITATION

Mohiuddin M and Molderez I (2023),
Rohingya influx and host community: A
reflection on culture for leading
socioeconomic and environmental
changes in Bangladesh.
Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 13:11559.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2023.11559

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Rohingya influx and host community: A reflection on culture for leading socioeconomic and environmental changes in Bangladesh

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The paper analyses the socioeconomic and environmental changes in the Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is one of the largest refugee host countries in the world. Due to the refugee inflow, Rohingya and host communities have been experiencing tremendous socioeconomic and environmental changes that hinder their sustainable life. Factors that have resulted in the camp area are market instability, cultivable land decline, pollution, deforestation, water and sanitation crisis, law and order failure, and drug use. All these changes accompany the refugee and host people's discomfort and suffering. Moreover, some host people might feel unprivileged because they were not considered for relief schemes by donor agencies. A qualitative study was conducted to collect the data using the Case study and Key Informant Interview (KII) methods. Semi-structured interview schedules for the case study and open-ended interviews for the KIIs were used in this study. By illustrating the refugee and host's socioeconomic and environmental dynamics, we tried to explain the current situation of the camp area. We also tried to shed light on the experiences of both communities regarding inclusiveness and building a cohesive society.

KEYWORDS

Rohingya refugee, host community, socioeconomic development, environment, inclusive society

Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the largest refugee host countries in the world. It is home to more than 1.3 million Rohingya refugees and 166 million Bangladeshi people within 147,570 square kilometers ([World Bank, 2021, 02–26](#)). The state struggles to handle the large population, whereas tremendous pressures are on the land, food, water, sanitation, and environment. Simultaneously, after the independence in 1971, the

demographic structure in Bangladesh changed partly because of the migration of Rohingyas from the Rakhine state of Myanmar. These displaced people have given Bangladesh a grave situation. The presence of refugees, at times, may contribute to the massive changes in the hosts' social structure along with assorted troubles. For example, Tanzania experienced several significant changes and inconveniences after the arrival of refugees from Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Whitaker, 1999, 5–18). Bangladesh might be facing similar issues.

Rohingyas started migrating to Bangladesh in the 1970s and 1980s. A notable migration took place in 1991 and 1992 when around 200,000 Rohingyas migrated to Bangladesh. Rohingyas who came to Bangladesh then have been living in two registered camps in Cox's Bazar for the last three decades. In 2017 and 2018, nearly 700,000 Rohingyas arrived in Bangladesh. Now more than one million Rohingyas have been living in Ukhia and Teknaf Upazilas (Subdistricts) where Rohingyas are double the local people (European Commission, 2017, 1–2). Rohingyas have been living in 34 camps covering huge cultivable land and forest. The Bangladeshis administer the camps with the help of international agencies, especially the United Nations. However, Bangladesh has never signed any international convention or treaty to shelter refugees. Bangladesh sheltered Rohingyas on humanitarian grounds (Bashar, 2012, 10–13). Local people also accepted Rohingyas and supported them with homes, food, clothes, land, water, and sanitation when international communities were not there (Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery-GFDRR, 2018, 15–25). This openness to Rohingyas has impacted host communities' socioeconomic and environmental resources, leading to discontent among them. The primary reaction comes from the labor market where Rohingyas sell their cheap labor affecting host peoples' employment. Refugees may benefit hosts in many ways if refugees can sell labor to local producers to expand consumer markets and justify increased foreign aid. Therefore, accepting refugees may sometimes be part of the government's broader development plan (Daley, 1991, 248–266). Nevertheless, some local people might have thought that refugee labor is a cost rather than a benefit. Bangladeshi host people think that the presence of Rohingyas adversely affects their life in many ways since they made the more significant section of the society unemployed with their cheap labor and extra working hours (Brac, 2017, 25–26). In Cox's Bazar city, most of the manual and automatic activities are accomplished by Rohingyas which annoys the host laborers because Rohingyas are selling labor cheaply. Simultaneously, necessary daily grocery item prices have increased, albeit some items, e.g., rice, pulse, and oil are available at low prices. Some Rohingyas sell their relief items to the local market although development agencies (United Nations Development Programme-UNDP, 2018, 56–68) narrated that selling relief materials is illegal. Some local farmers become frustrated by the drop in the prices of beans, maize, and rice as refugees sell

these items in the market (Whitaker, 1999, 5–18). Hospitals and health providers also face tremendous pressure, and sanitation has become a significant issue. Law and order decay because police and law enforcers do not have the resources to manage the large population. Sometimes, Rohingya groups get involved in militant and extremist activities in the camp area and kill and hurt fellow Rohingyas (Tamal, 2019, 1–2). It is also reported that a group of Rohingya youth instrumented with arms and deadly materials move around the camp and attack Rohingyas and locals if they find disagreements with them (Crimes in the Rohingya Camps, 2020, 4). Therefore, maintaining law and order is a significant challenge for security agencies in this area. The notable challenges, however, are related to the environment. Multiple environmental effects such as air and water pollution, landslides, cyclone, and flood, have already been experienced by the people in the camp area. The groundwater has already been depleted. Erosion of soil and terrain may cause landslides during the rainy season. Sewer sludge management and solid waste management are in critical condition. Local and Rohingya people directly or indirectly depend on nature for collecting firewood. Many host people living within the camps have already depended on government and international relief as they have nothing left to survive.

Very few empirical studies were conducted comprising the host and Rohingya communities' socioeconomic and environmental changes. This paper aims to conduct a comparative assessment of the camp area's socioeconomic and environmental changes to discern the communities' bilateral relationship and inclusiveness. The findings may help future researchers and policymakers bridge refugees and hosts to build an inclusive society.

The theoretical framework

Malinowski's cultural theory of needs is significant to understanding cultural integration. It emphasizes the cultural existence of society for meeting the individual's basic biological, psychological, and social needs (Malinowski, 1944, 67–74). Every society is integrated into different cultural domains whilst these domains are linked by contemporary societal forms and functions. By form, Malinowski meant the social institutions that have multiple functions and are integrated into one another to respond to a variety of needs of the societal people. He outlined these needs into two main ideas, basic needs, and cultural responses. By basic needs, he meant metabolism, reproduction, bodily comfort, safety, movement, growth, and health. Some institutions are responsible for responding to basic needs. Every culture has the function of satisfying these biological needs for survival. To Malinowski, humans have, first and foremost, to satisfy all the needs of their organisms (Kohler, 1946, 126–128). On the other hand, he addressed commissariat, kinship, shelter, protection, activities, training, and hygiene as the

cultural responses. The interaction between basic needs and cultural responses is significant to advance society and culture. The cultural responses to basic needs create new conditions, new needs, and new imperatives or determinants that are responsible for controlling human behavior. Therefore, any cultural integration of different cultural groups or people is needed to intake their basic needs and cultural response while maintaining their own identity. Every cultural group should be given chances to achieve their basic needs and cultural responses during integration. Malinowski advised host countries to set policies that would facilitate other groups' cultural needs and responses. It can promote tolerance, respect, and trust towards other cultures and help to develop an integrated society (Algan et al., 2012, 11–15). He asserted to design of the host states' institutions in a manner that can be able to accommodate cultural diversity. Cross-cultural contact generates behavioral changes that can dampen cultural differences and promote multiculturalism and social integration.

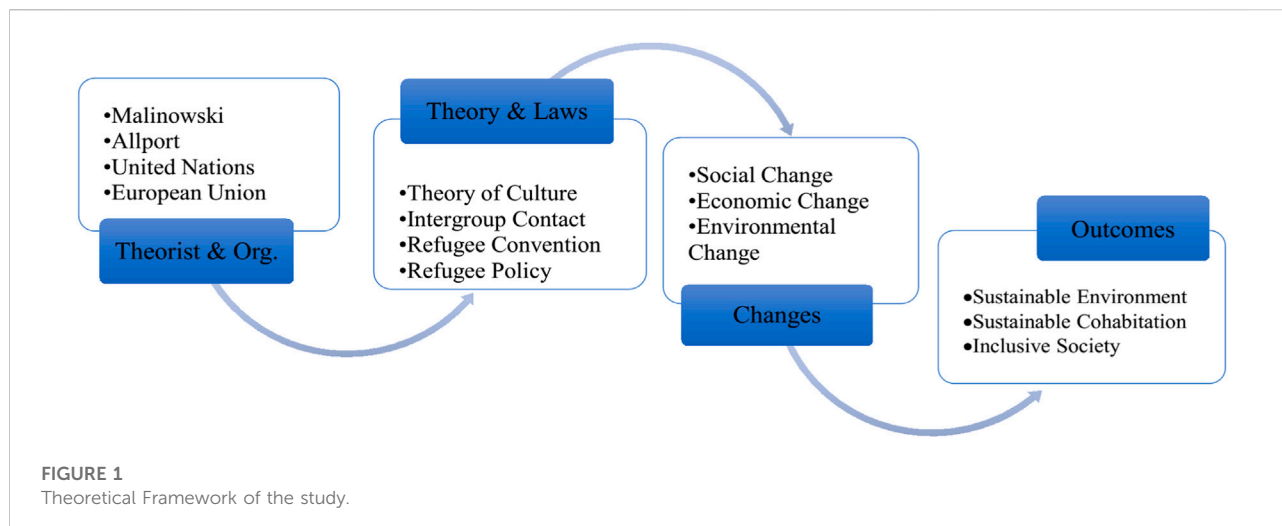
Several sociologists and anthropologists evaluated Malinowski's cultural theory of needs while they also criticized it. Oscar (2012, 95–125) argued that the relationship Malinowski exhibited between basic needs and cultural responses is satisfactory. Because any cultural theory must be based on the organic needs which can relate to more complex imperatives called spiritual, social, and economic perspectives of society. He disagreed with the categories of basic needs since it is not exclusively biological as Malinowski called it. Parsons and Shils (1951) commented that Malinowski was the first to re-establish a connection between man as a biological organism and man as a culture creator by his need theory. Kempny (1992, 45–56) argued that the concept of basic needs is the part of 'body of conditions', which must be fulfilled if the community is to survive and its culture to continue. He also commented that the theory of needs is Malinowski's weak point and highly criticized idea since he thought only singularly whilst there is a mutual interdependence between basic needs and culture.

Furthermore, the American Sociologist Williams (1947) first proposed that contact between members of different groups can reduce prejudice. Allport (1954) expanded this proposition from a socio-psychological perspective and emphasized that positive contact between members of two groups can reduce prejudice if contact happens under optimal conditions, i.e., cooperation, common goals, authority support for positive intergroup relations, and equal status within the contact situation. The effectiveness of intergroup contact to reduce prejudice is well established, as Pettigrew and Tropp (2006, 953–954) empirically observed in their meta-analysis of 515 studies. However, the meta-analysis showed that optimal conditions are facilitating but not necessary for contact to reduce prejudice. To develop integration among cultural groups, it is essential to contact the groups directly with one another (Hewstone and Swart, 2011, 375–376). By direct contact, Allport meant 'face-to-face encounters' among the members of different groups to reduce

intergroup hostility. It is noteworthy that recent advancements in intergroup contact theory have underlined that contact needs to be experienced as positive to reduce prejudice because negative contact could instead increase prejudice (Barlow et al., 2012, 1629–1643). Also, recent research has suggested that despite contact opportunities segregation might persist and people might avoid intergroup encounters (Ramiah et al., 2015, 100–124).

Malinowski's cultural theory of needs and Allport's intergroup contact theory are significant to understand the Rohingya and host communities' interaction and integration in Bangladesh. Malinowski emphasized the role of host institutions' functions to regulate the basic needs, e.g., socioeconomic issues of the Rohingya people along with the cultural responses. Likewise, Allport stressed the contact among communities to reduce prejudice and misunderstanding (Tropp and Thomas, 2005). Positive contact between Rohingya and their host is essential to eradicate the prejudice and distance that persist between the communities. Both groups have different needs and cultural responses and the host community's dissatisfaction with Rohingyas has intensified due to the socioeconomic crisis and environmental disaster. Therefore, the precondition of the integration between the communities is to ensure equal socioeconomic and cultural practices along with positive contact. The cultural theory of needs and intergroup contact theory can help us to understand the Rohingya and host communities' interaction and foster positive integration between the communities to build an inclusive society.

Moreover, the 1951 Convention about the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol placed considerable significance on the integration of refugees and enumerated social and economic rights for the assistance of refugees. The European Union issued refugee integration policies based on the recommendations of the UNHCR by signing The European Parliament (1986). It emphasized the four significant policies including the free movement of people, services, goods, and capital to create a single European market albeit they limited the movement of individuals from the Third Country Nationals (TNCs). The Treaty of Amsterdam of the European Union (1997) set the policies for immigration and asylum and prioritized it as the first pillar. Article 63 of the treaty ensured policies of minimum standards for the grant or withdrawal of refugee status and protection (Sigona, 2005, 118–120). In addition, Robinson (1998) narrated the concept of integration as chaotic and vague since it results from the combination of several forces. Although integration is individualized, contested, and contextual, it's not only a matter of host society and refugees, rather it involves many actors, agencies, logics, and nationalities. He mentioned that among these actors, NGOs can play a major role in shaping the national discourse on integration and refugee policies by acting as lobbyists, advocate, and implementing agents (Zetter et al., 2002, 98–105). Overall, institutional,



organizational, and intergovernmental policies are needed to integrate refugees and build an inclusive society. In building an inclusive society with Rohingya and the host community in Bangladesh, national and international institutions and NGOs should coordinate with the Bangladeshi government to set policies. The theoretical frame of this study is given below (Figure 1).

Methodology

We conducted exploratory research to understand the socioeconomic and environmental changes in the Rohingya camp area. Several qualitative methods, such as the Case study and the Key Informant Interview (KII), were used by following the non-linear path and Grounded Theory (Punch, 1998, 123–126). The non-probability purposive sampling method was used to draw samples. The sample selection was performed according to the purpose of the study from the three main target groups, e.g., Rohingyas, the hosts, and the service providers. The service providers are the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) officers, Camp in Charge (CiC) officers, Non-Government Organization (NGO) officers, and the police. Samples were asymmetrically distributed; thirty (30) Cases were selected from the hosts, whereas twenty (20) Cases were collected from the Rohingyas. Furthermore, ten (10) KIIs were interviewed among the service providers, e.g., two RRRC officers, three CiC officers, three NGO representatives, and two police officers. These KIIs were significant in understanding the change inside the camp. A detailed distribution of the samples is shown in the Table 1.

Data were collected following the Case study protocol with a semi-structured interview schedule which is characterized by the flexibility of approach to questioning and does not follow a pre-determined system of questions. For the KIIs, the open-ended or non-structured interview schedule is used which allows greater

freedom to ask, in case of need, supplementary questions or omit certain questions. In Case studies and KIIs, male and female respondents aged 18 to 50 were included. In this study, we did not record the respondents' names and personal information because we were not interested in exposing respondents' identities for security reasons.

Furthermore, the study was conducted in the Ukhia Upazila Rohingya camp and the nearby area. Ukhia refugee camp is well-known for the registered refugee camps and the habitat of the highest number of Rohingyas. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2020, 8–11), around 300,000 hosts and 700,000 Rohingyas live in Ukhia. Data from Rohingyas were collected from camps 9 and 11, whereas the service providers' data were collected at the CiC office of camps 9 and 11. The hosts' data were collected from the West and East Balukhali villages in Palongkhali union (Grassroot administrative unit), the nearest area to the camp. Before conducting the study, the researcher repeatedly visited the study area along with the three research assistants trained in the study's methods and concepts. After formulating data collection instruments, the researcher and three research assistants collected the data in the first and second weeks of June 2021. Finally, the recorded data were transcribed and analyzed into words.

TABLE 1 Sampling distribution among the stakeholders.

Stakeholders	Sampling method	Sampling distribution
Host community	Case study	Interviewees 01–30
Rohingya people	Case study	Interviewees 31–50
RRRC	KII	Interviewees 01–02
CiC	KII	Interviewees 03–05
NGO	KII	Interviewees 06–08
Police	KII	Interviewees 09–10
Total samples	Cases (50) + KII (10)	60

Results

In this section, we illustrated the findings of socioeconomic and environmental issues that were collected from the Rohingya refugees, the host community, and Rohingya camp service providers. The findings are the local market instability, cultivable land decrease, stealing and robbery, criminal activity, and intergroup marriage. We also used secondary sources where it was required. Both empirical and nonempirical data are elucidated below.

Local market instability

The local people said that the local market turns out unstable after the Rohingyas' arrival. The local market sells daily greenery and necessary items such as rice, fish, vegetables, dry fish (Shutki), and firewood. The prices have increased five times in the area after inflow. Earlier host people bought several fish at lower prices, e.g., Catla carp fish, Rohu Carp fish, and Mrigal fish for 300–350 BDT or 4 dollars per kilogram, but now prices have increased to around 500–600 BDT or 7 dollars. Furthermore, expensive fish, e.g., Hilsa, Shrimp, and Pomfret, are doubled their prices (Alam, 2018, 7–10). The prices of beef, chicken, and regular meats have increased three times. The daily grocery items, e.g., milk powder, chili powder, sugar, salt and garlic, onion, and turmeric, are hiked as the population becomes doubled and supplies are limited. In this situation, hosts and Rohingyas have to spend more money to buy staples. Every household experience a rising cost of living. An additional one million Rohingya people have created intense pressure on the supply chain and prices (Filipski et al., 2020, 8–10). The price rise has affected ordinary Rohingyas and host locals, albeit traders and producers are benefited from the Rohingya's presence. Notedly, rice, pulse, soap, toothpaste, and cooking oil prices do not increase because Rohingyas sell these articles to the local market. The UNHCR and Humanitarian organizations distribute relief items, e.g., cereals, food grains, and other pieces of stuff that are sometimes in surplus (Khuda, 2020, 8–11). Therefore, they sell these extras to the local market, even though selling relief products is prohibited and illegal. Likewise, the regular price of one sack of rice in the market is around 3000–3500 BDT or 40 dollars, still, Rohingya people sell it for 1200–1500 taka or 17.5 dollars. Contrary, locals have no permission to sell relief products in their shops which they collect from the Rohingyas because the police, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), and military forbid them. Rohingyas agreed that prices of goods have increased in the market, and it is always unstable. They also added that at the beginning, there was pressure in the local market since Rohingyas bought their necessary articles from the local market. However, now they are under a relief scheme and they do not need to buy from the market except green

vegetables, fish, and meats. Hosts complained that they are not allowed to set up shops or any permanent settlements near Rohingya camps for security concerns albeit Rohingyas are allowed to build shops or infrastructure. They found it a discriminatory attitude of the security personnel to them. The research team noticed a "Rohingya market" beside the camp where Rohingyas are the buyers and sellers. They sell relief articles in the market. The language between Rohingya and locals is identical; therefore, it is hard to identify "who is Rohingya and who is the host." From the investigation, we found that different structures and shops set up by the Rohingya are illegal and do not have licenses. Even they do not pay taxes to the government since they do not bear any legal documents. The hosts argued that security forces and law enforcement agencies do not forbid them because they fear the international media and journalists.

Moreover, the hosts opined that the labor market seemed much more unstable in Cox's Bazar district. The wage of the local laborers has dropped in half after the inflow (50%) because Rohingyas sell cheap labor in the hosting area. They leave the camp silently to seek short-term jobs in nearby cities, e.g., Ukhia, Teknaf, and Cox's Bazar. A significant number of the hosts are day laborers and work in the agricultural field. After the government's requisition of land and hill for camps, poor local laborers have become workless. The camps covered 60% of the cultivable land of the hosts and 40% of hills and government-reserved forests (Brac, 2017, 25–26). Earlier, poor laborers worked in agricultural lands and forest hills to earn around 500 taka or 6 dollars daily. It has depressed by 50% since the land is squeezed, and Rohingyas sell labor cheaply. Rohingyas work in hotels, motels, restaurants, shops, vehicles, and boats in Cox's Bazar city and Saint Martin Island (200 Rohingyas Caught Fleeing Bangladeshi Camps by Boat, 2019, 3). Several Rohingya mobile vendors were seen on Cox's Bazar Sea beach and Saint Martin Island during data collection. They escaped from the camp, and they are not even listed. This situation impacts the local people's income and living. Poverty incidence during the post-influx period is recorded higher in Ukhia and Teknaf than the national average of 24% (Making Rohingya Settle Down, 2021, 4). In the pre-influx period, impoverished people worked, garden, collected firewood from the forest, and cultivated their land. However, they have been compelled to leave all those income-generating works due to building makeshift in this area because camps occupied all lands and forest hills. A Rohingya leader (Interviewee 31) expressed his opinion about the Rohingyas' escape from the camp and seeking work outside the camp:

"It is impossible to work outside the camp as we are not allowed, which is strictly fostered by the military, Border Guard, Bangladesh (BGB), and police. It's also true that some people may work in the city by escaping from the camp, but it's complicated."

Cultivable land and Rohingya camp

The host people said that cultivable land and agricultural production curved in the host area after the influx since lands are acquired for camps, government buildings, and NGO offices. In the past, there were forests and hills where people collected wood and leave for fire. There were rivers where people caught fish and sold it in the market. Fishing was the primary income source for livelihood. Around 28% of employment came from fishing activities, e.g., shrimp cultivation, dry fish preparation, and hatching (Responding to the Rohingya Emergency in Bangladesh, 2020, 4–7). There was a ban on fishing from August 2017 after the influx, and around 30,000–35,000 fishermen became jobless, seriously affecting their annual income. The yearly income of the local fishermen was 40,000 taka to 90,000 taka (\$470–1058) but suddenly dropped due to the ban. Moreover, host families are poor, and they depend on the cultivation of rice. Rice is a prominent grain for food. Numerous families produced extra rice to sell in the market to maintain their family expenses. Some families were also engaged in banana gardening. They could survive on the income that came from the banana garden. Many locals bred domestic animals, e.g., chickens, cows, and goats, and grazed cows and goats on the field. By selling these animals, they would collect their livelihood. Now they are compelled to pull up these activities due to a shortage of land in the post-influx period. Host communities' former cultivable land is at present the Rohingya camp (Xchange, 2018, 35–37). A tremendous loss occurred for the poor daily laborers who worked in the field of others, cut paddies, and sold labor to the rich and landlords. Agriculture has completely shut around the camp area. Hills and fields have moved under the camp, and the host people have stopped farming and cultivating.

Many locals stated that there are some lands around the camp unusable due to contamination and pollution, particularly by human waste and camp trash. No multi-purpose drainage system surrounds the base, and the garbage, dirt, and debris directly come to the abandoned land. On average, 2–3 acres of land are covered by camp waste, although RRRC officers disagreed about the land size (Sattar, 2021, 1–3). Furthermore, some cultivable land was provided to Rohingyas when they first arrived and started living in the yard and bare space of the host people, which is later occupied for building the Rohingya camp. A crowd of hosts complained against Rohingyas for grabbing their land, though we couldn't collect concrete documents. We talked to government officials, and they informed us that many applications about the locals' land grabbing are still under analysis. An NGO officer (KII 6) refused this allegation against Rohingya and said:

“Rohingyas have no scope to occupy the land of others as they live in the camp. Of course, most of the camp is built on the land of host people, private and reserved forest, which Rohingyas echoed too.”

The researchers found that the CIC office is another stakeholder that captured the hosts' land to build offices. Government and NGO offices are set on the land of the host people. During the establishment, government officers committed to recruiting at least two members from every host family for the camp job. However, they did not keep their promise and did not recruit any members from the hosts. The locals informed that many agitated hosts attempted to break down the government offices to evacuate their land, but government officials requested them to wait. The CIC office did not ignore it and assured that they recruited several local people in the office, and the process continued. Even many NOGs appointed host people in their offices. We met up with some host males and females working inside the camp and they denied the help of the RRRC and CIC office.

Stealing and robbery

Multiple stakeholders reported that stealing and robbery have increased in the camp area in the post-inflow period. The CIC office and Rohingyas informed that some local and Rohingya youth get united to conduct this activity at night when there is not enough security inside the camp. Host and Rohingya youth committed many occurrences in Ukhaia and Teknaf Upazilas (Uttom and Rozario, 2019, 5–6). Police and RRRC officers also echoed the same as they recorded several stealing and robbery cases whereas both Rohingya and locals were accused. Hosts stated that they frequently notice the occurrence of stealing mobile phones, household accessories, cows, goats, and chickens. Earlier, people grazed cows, buffalos, and goats on barren land at large, while currently, they have to continuously check whether it gets missed or someone takes them away. Rohingyas rejected the complaints against them and said they have no scope to steal animals from locals as they remain inside the camp albeit the CIC admitted that they have received a couple of complaints against Rohingyas. Multiple sources reported to the researchers that some Rohingya youth and children are used to stealing domestic animals and materials from the local people. It does not happen every day; only a small portion of Rohingyas may be involved in this activity.

The police reported that in recent years, some events of robberies took place in many villages, albeit the perpetrators were not identified. Local people said that the host and Rohingya youth might involve in robberies since Rohingyas and locals gradually get intimidated. The locals reiterated that some Rohingyas often visit the local houses and ask for multiple help and food, e.g., curries, vegetables, and dry foods, to locate the position of household items to steal in their flexible time. Hosts supposed that a few Rohingya women typically conduct these acts as they can visit the host family in the daytime. Sometimes the thief runs inside the camp and

disappears. Once someone gets into the base, it is not possible to trace them anymore. Beyond that, there is no punishment for this offense and the CIC and other authorities are reluctant about the issue. However, the Rohingya people ignored the accusation and also agreed that some might be involved in these activities with the local people. Hence, credit primarily goes to the host people. Both the communities requested the CIC, RRRC, and other authorities to be more active during the night and act against the perpetrators.

Criminal activity and social unrest

The host people confirmed that there is an increase in criminal activity compared to the past, mainly due to the presence of Rohingya criminals and extremist groups. Local people live in fear and panic as several Rohingya rival groups are involved in conflict with one another inside or outside the camp. The RRRC and security forces are also concerned as fractions among the rival Rohingya groups have increased. A police inspector (KII 9) stated:

“Rohingya criminal and extremist groups become active in the evening after office work. In the meantime, they committed several deadly incidents among themselves.”

He also asserted that extremist groups move inside and outside the camp near the hosts to create panic among the mass refugees and hosts. Rohingya people reported that if someone goes against the interest of extremist groups, they forcibly take them away and punish them according to their Islamic rules. At least ten extremist groups, e.g., Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), Master Munna Gang (MMG), Islami Mahaj, Nabi Hussain Dacoit Gang (NHDG), and Pakistani Taliban (TTP), are actively operating inside and outside the camp (Rohingya Militants Active in Bangladeshi Refugee Camps, 2019, 3–4). Rohingya and hosts are panicked by the behavior of the criminal groups. A host (Interviewee 4) narrated the situation: “Whenever we stay outside the home for work, we become worried about our families as the houses surround Rohingya camps.” He also argued that it might not be true that all Rohingyas are involved in illegal activity and make mischief to the hosts’ families and property. However, criminality in this area has increased dramatically during the post-migration of Rohingyas. The conflict between locals and Rohingya has also increased. Sometimes disputes and contentions take place for a simple cause. Many conflicts occurred between two ethnic groups to cause “hassle” among children. A CIC officer (KII 3) said: “Tension has increased between Rohingya and Host, and they set forth intolerant.” The host people stated that Rohingyas are united and camp administration sometimes works in favor of migrants.

Refugees and hosts agreed that another serious crime that takes place in the camp and hosts’ area is the drug business. Most of the conflicts are because of this drug. Hosts illustrated that drug is a gigantic and profitable business in Ukhia and Teknaf Upazila. The dealers are both Host and Rohingya. Hosts and Rohingya youth are getting involved in different criminal activities and hiding in the camp. A host (Interviewee 10) stated:

“A few months ago, security forces rescued million dollars of gold from the camp earned by robbery from different areas of Bangladesh.”

He also said that locals use Rohingyas as a medium to traffic drugs, especially the “Yaba tablets” from Myanmar. Both Rohingya men and women are involved in transferring drugs from Myanmar to Bangladesh and supplying them to different areas of Bangladesh. It is said that Rohingya women can perform better than men in dealing drugs and Yaba. Some innocent Rohingya women do this job for money and security. The study found that locals and Rohingyas work together in Yaba and the drug trades. Even many Bengali youths are involved in emotional relations with Rohingya women and girls, abducting and forcing them into prostitution. Rohingya girls are trafficked to Cox’s Bazar city hotels, motels, and cottages in the beach area. Some local people get married to Rohingya girls and collect “Birth certificates” and “Passports” to exit Bangladesh to go abroad together. An RRRC officer (KII 1) said: “We investigated some cases of Rohingya trafficking while arresting many culprits.” while an NGO worker (KII 7) mentioned: “Rohingyas and locals formed a secret team to traffic women. Sometimes, Rohingya woman agrees to go abroad for a better life.” Bangladeshi security forces identified several cases of entering fake marriages by Bengali people with Rohingya girls so that collection of documents from government offices becomes easier. However, intercultural marriage is not a regular issue and the chances are not so high. A Rohingya man (Interviewee 35) living in the camp agreed and narrated: “Criminal activity, drug business, and intra-group conflict increased inside the camp.” But he ignored the involvement of women and girls in drugs and prostitution.

Local youth and intergroup marriage

The host people informed that they notice a behavioral change in youths in the post-influx period. They believed that it happens due to the breakdown of the social system and decaying morality among youths. Host youths are busy after the inflow as an alternative income source is created for businesses, e.g., supplying gas cylinders and installing shops. Similarly, some youths are engaged in illegal drug businesses, e.g., selling Yaba tablets. Myanmar-originated Yaba is not new for Bangladeshi people, but its availability and accessibility have

increased whilst Rohingya people started to import it. Host youths take this chance and become drug dealers and users (Crimes on the Rise in Cox's Bazar Camps, 2018, 4). Different agencies in the camp area ensured us that the supply of Yaba tablets has increased during the post-influx period, and many Rohingya gangs are involved in this business. Host youths also get involved in this business by making friends with Rohingya gangs and using drugs. Locals stay inside the camp while taking drugs. Local and Rohingya youths supply Yaba tablets to host people. Local senior citizens (Interviewee 15) said: "90% of the youth have become schizophrenic or crazy in getting drugs and Rohingya women. They left their long-cherished culture and tradition."

They also argued that some even get involved in trafficking drugs to big cities, e.g., Dhaka and Chittagong. An intracultural change takes place among the youth in the host area, and local parents and seniors cannot accept it. Many host people (Interviewees 17 & 18) mentioned: "They (the youth) do not follow the rules, regulations, customs of society nowadays though they were obedient before Rohingya arrivals." A portion of host people believed that youths get attracted to young Rohingya girls in many ways, and are involved in sexual activities and marriage. An NGO worker (KII 8) said: "From the beginning, I have been working in the camp, and I did not find any case like this, though I heard about it." The local police said that there are many cases recorded, and it is due to the exchange between the ethnic communities.

Ahmed (2019, 12–15) said that many outsiders come into camps and get married to Rohingya women, and take them away to Chittagong and Dhaka. Later they forcibly get involved in prostitution. Sometimes host people get into marriage with Rohingya women. Local people informed that many marriages were accomplished secretly between the communities. Some previously married locals get married to Rohingya women again because it is effortless and does not need any document or government registration. Local people believed that Rohingya-Bengali marriage may intensify in the future if protective measures are not taken. The host admitted that marriage between the ethnic groups creates a disturbance, instability, and domestic violence in host and Rohingya families. Sometimes, many married men divorce their wives because of Rohingya women and girls. Some Rohingya women conduct sexual activities for money and sometimes get married to foreigners and even migrate to developed countries. Host people sometimes mediate between outsiders and Rohingyas to traffic Rohingya women seeking migration. In such a way, several Rohingya women were trafficked from the camp and sold abroad (Ahmed, 2019, 12–15). All these situations have impacted the host and Rohingya families.

Host and Rohingya people anxiously appealed to the government and security forces to handle the drug dealers. They thought that the government should investigate and stop criminal activities. The unemployed Rohingya youth bring drugs from Myanmar and sell them to the camps and host area. On the

other hand, many jobless young hosts get involved in the drug business and marry Rohingya women who are tempted by money and resources. If this turpitude runs, the innocent host and Rohingya will suffer in the long run. A local (Interviewee 20) reported:

"A married host with two children involved in a relationship with a Rohingya woman and married her without the permission of his first wife. His family had huge domestic violence, and now he has to maintain both wives."

Most of the Rohingya people did not agree with the arguments of the locals about the Rohingya women's involvement in prostitution and seduction. In their view, if this occurs, the ratio is abysmal. Rohingya people cannot go outside the camps without the permission of the government office. Furthermore, there might have been some cases of marriage between the host and Rohingya, and it's exclusively by choice of individuals, not the community sentiments.

Life in the camp and its impact on the environment

The Host people said that the Rohingya camp plays a significant role in the life of the people in this area. The regular movement has become restricted for both Rohingyas and hosts, and no one can move freely. Individuals of both communities have mandatorily to bear identity cards during their stay outside. This situation creates discomfort in the local community. Both communities severely suffered from different issues, whilst psychological misery is beyond imagination. The overall situation has become a social, economic, cultural, and psychological pressure for the hosts and Rohingyas (Gebrehiwet et al., 2020, 3–5). In the post-inflow period, local people have experienced several accidents and deaths, which is the highest in the last 15 years. Roads are damaged for running big trucks and lorries to carry food and materials for the Rohingyas. Rohingya people drive different wheelers and cars to transfer materials and goods.

There are also major environmental issues as nature has lost its balance due to deforestation, pollution, and population density. The temperature has increased in the camp area compared to the nearest Upazilas. Hosts and Rohingyas face tremendous heat and climatic change around the camp area (Rahman, 2018, 113–125). Dust covers the whole area during summer, resulting in different respiratory diseases among locals and Rohingyas. Loss of biodiversity, forestland, and endangered wildlife are consequences of deforestation and pollution. A local (Interviewee 21) said:

"A thousand acres of forestland cleared for refugee camps. Every year the Rohingya and hosts people suffer and die

because of landslides, floods, and cyclones.” A CIC officer (KII 4) explained: “In the last three years, around 50-60 events of monsoon-triggered landslides, floods, and cyclones took place in the camp where more than 20 Rohingyas died.”

The hosts opined that local people have lost their nature-based resources and livelihood due to deforestation and forestland clearance. An RRRC officer informed us that the development agencies are implementing several projects for rapid forestation and alternative cooking technologies such as LPG Cylinders, Cookstoves, Biomass briquettes, and biogas. Groundwater shortage is a vital problem for the people, although it was not severe before the influx. Thousands of swallow tube wells have been set up in the area at different slopes in the camp, resulting in excessive water withdrawal from the shallow aquifer and drying up the groundwater. In the meantime, many tube wells have already dried up and pondered the groundwater crisis. The crisis becomes deep during the summer and winter seasons. The water service providers are examining the possibility of a deep-water level; of course, it has no green signal yet (Department of Environment, 2019, 55–62). Simultaneously, groundwater contamination is a significant concern to the experts in this area of the cause of leakage, seepage, and overflow. Thousands of non-functional latrines and tube wells contaminate water. The experts of the Environmental Department of Bangladesh examined that 70% of the groundwater in the camp area is polluted. Groundwater depletion and contamination are the critical impacts of the Rohingya influx (DoE 201 55-62). Many hosts and Rohingya people mentioned that the water level got down and numerous tube wells are dysfunctional. A Rohingya woman (Interviewee 36) said:

“We must bring water from a half kilometer away as all the tube wells around our house are unused and non-functional.”

Both Rohingya and hosts reported that surface water is also contaminated in the camp area. Ponds and small-scale streams are the sources of surface freshwater in this area. The authorities cannot manage the huge water demands of the Rohingya and host people. Both communities contaminate surface water through open defecation on the banks of ponds and streams. The sedimentation deposited in the stream is also the reason for the deteriorating water quality and surface water contamination. Furthermore, poor waste management in the camp area is affecting the environment. This area has no unified solid and liquid waste management and drainage system. Therefore, wastes are drained to the hosts’ surface water and maiden land. The main waste materials that pollute the environment are polythene, kitchen garbage, food packaging materials, batteries, and plastic bottles, contributing to climate change. Due to a shortage of firewood, numerous families use plastic as cooking fuel, damaging the environment. A Rohingya man was collecting

plastic bottles to use for cooking. A host woman was also gathering firewood from the camp area for cooking. Likewise, the experts said that the landslide is a dangerous and potentially severe natural threat to the host and Rohingya. Due to cutting hills for building makeshift, the terrain lost its natural setting, and the vegetation cover of the landscape has already been removed. Weak soil structure contributes to erosion, and topsoil and other loose soils are highly susceptible to being blown away in the rainy season and stormy winds. Erosion has already blocked the passage, and hilly streams and risky hill-cutting may cause landslides in the camp at any time. In the rainy season, soil’s minerals are drawn away and kept into the mud, which is the cause of slides in the camp area (DoE 201 65-70).

Moreover, the impact on the forest and environment is immense. Around 60% of the forest land was chopped for making makeshifts, and the rest was also deforested due to the firewood collection (Imtiaz, 2018, 10–15). The monthly firewood demand for a single Rohingya family is 151 kg, while the mean family size is around 7. The total monthly requirement of firewood collected by Rohingya from the nearest forest is 6,800 tons. The host people also consume similar firewood from the forest. Around 90 percent of forest land will be cleared within a 10 km buffer zone if firewood is collected at the current rate in 31 months. Moreover, Asian Elephants are becoming critically endangered due to this influx. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (The International Union for Conservation of Nature-IUCN, 2020, 38–41), 40 elephants have been trapped on the west side of the Rohingya camp near the Myanmar border. Furthermore, the impact on the ecosystem is immeasurable, especially on wildlife, vegetation, marine, and freshwater ecosystems.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of the paper predominantly illustrated the socioeconomic and environmental changes in the camp area after the inflow. These changes have affected both communities whilst they also face several unwanted inconveniences, e.g., drugs, crimes, and extremist activities inside and outside the camp. The socioeconomic (basic needs) and cultural changes in the host area have impacted the host community’s contact with the Rohingyas. Overall, the presence of refugees generates positive and negative changes worldwide and Bangladesh is no exception. National and world communities have a consensus that the arrival of Rohingya refugees has strained the limited natural resources, local infrastructure, public services, local economy, and mass movements. Instead, it would be imprecise to state that refugee insertion is synonymous with the negative development of the host area. Rather we argue that the inefficacy of the state mechanism to deliver services, inadequate attention to the host people, extensive refugee-centric policies, discriminatory access to humanitarian reliefs,

and uncertainty about the future are considered a barrier to lagging behind the host area and the increase of resentment among the hosts. These points are also considered barriers to the inclusive relationship between Rohingya and their hosts. Refugee and host relations become jeopardized if the host's demand is overlooked or inadequately addressed by national and international agencies. To avoid making Rohingyas a scapegoat for the hosts' rising tensions and by considering the overlong refugee crisis, we would like to suggest initiating comprehensive, integrated, and all-inclusive humanitarian and development policies that will incorporate both communities. The policymakers should follow Malinowski's Cultural theory of needs which emphasised the basic biological, social, and psychological needs of individuals. Rohingya and locals should have indiscriminate biological, social, and psychological freedom with cultural openness. The cultural responses to the basic socioeconomic needs can create a new condition that may change both communities' behavior for integration. Moreover, policymakers should also follow Allport's intergroup contact theory implications to reduce prejudice and misunderstanding between Rohingya and the host community. Regular cultural exchange and contact can create cohesion, tolerance, and trust that can contribute to the integration and inclusivity between the communities. Apart from the theories, policy should be formulated by considering the Refugee Convention of 1951 which ensured the socio-economic and cultural rights of the refugees and believed that socio-economic assistance is the gateway to integration and inclusivity. We should also take into account the European Union policies of refugee integration. The EU policies secured the free movement of individuals of their members. Through the Amsterdam Treaty, the EU prioritized refugee immigration and asylum as their first pillar and corroborated refugee integration and protection. Furthermore, development agencies especially NGOs should play their role to set policies in the host country Bangladesh. Overall, integrated policies regarding relief and development programs in Bangladesh may contribute to releasing tension and building an intimate relationship between the Rohingya and the host community. Well-executed policies can guarantee socioeconomic and environmental sustainability and durable humanitarian assistance in Bangladesh that can contribute to building an inclusive society.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding authors.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Professor Dr. Abdullah Al Faruque, University of Chittagong Ethics Committee, Bangladesh. The patients/participants "Rohingya refugees" were provided written informed consent by the main investigator MM to participate in this study. In addition, the data were collected respecting the GDPR rules (<https://gdpr-info.eu/>) and stored accordingly.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the research participants from the Rohingya and host communities of Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh who contributed to this study. In addition, we are grateful to the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), Camp in Charge (CIC) of 9 and 11, NGOs, and Security forces in the Rohingya camp for their enormous support and cooperation.

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RECEIVED 13 May 2022

ACCEPTED 04 April 2023

PUBLISHED 12 June 2023

CITATION

Chêne A and Montero S (2023), Critical feedback from artists: initial findings of the impact of the health crisis on the field of art and culture.

Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 13:11600.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2023.11600

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Critical feedback from artists: initial findings of the impact of the health crisis on the field of art and culture

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Our research project aims to study the impact of the Covid crisis on the professional cultural sector in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region. To achieve this objective, the research team has joined forces with several stakeholders in a participatory process. Initial consultations with artists from various disciplines show that the crisis has affected the relationship to time and space in terms of the creative process and the relationship to audiences and inhabitants. It also reveals the need to rethink the organisation of the cultural system in order to better support artists and include them in the decision-making process.

KEYWORDS

Covid crisis, artists, impact, time space, re-organisation

Introduction

Financed by the Nouvelle Aquitaine regional authorities for a duration of 3 years (2021–2024), our research project aims to observe and analyse the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences on cultural and artistic activities, for those who work in this field, those who are involved in it on a voluntary basis, and those its content is addressed to. The objective is to bring to light and analyse the way in which the different categories of actors have worked and operated in order to maintain cultural and artistic activities, whether in terms of creation, dissemination or reception, in the various types of relational space in which they have been conducted: physical space, digital space, institutional space. The attention given to their actions, their testimonies and their processes will make it possible to stimulate reflection on contemporary cultural issues and to study their potentially innovative nature for the evolution of the sector. The productions that have emerged are also prisms through which it is possible to analyse our social ties and the role of art as an indicator of our relationship to the world (Simmel, 1988; Baudry, 2009).

Our main thesis is that the health crisis and its repercussions reveal and/or accelerate changes in the field of culture: the taking into account of people's cultural rights and participation, competition from mass culture, the impact of digital technology, new forms of cultural practices on- and off-line, environmental issues. . . (Donnat, 2007; Henry, 2014; Lucas, 2017; Cardon, 2019; Lombardo and Wolff, 2020).

In terms of methodology, the originality of the project consists in proposing a research process based on participation. Participatory research consists in associating non-scientific actors, citizens and or professionals, to the observation of data and knowledge production. By mobilizing different types of knowledge and expertise, it aims at developing appropriate solutions (Lamoureux, 2021) that will serve the community (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). We are currently working with professionals in the cultural sector—a theatre, a local community organisation, a cultural mediation association, a media library, a festival organizer, and artists' collectives—to build a common understanding of the crisis and its effects. Together we are defining and developing research protocols suited to different professional contexts and for dealing with specific issues. In a cross-sectional approach, questions and elements of analysis are shared and discussed within a common research space.

Current research in the field of arts and culture has so far focused on monitoring the crisis in terms of its economic impact on the professional sector (Département des études, de la prospective et des statistiques, 2021; GESAC/EY, 2021; Giorgi and Scott, 2022). Our research aims to provide qualitative insight into the crisis through the analysis of experiences and practices. Beyond this, the choice of conducting a participatory project should enable us to develop a shared knowledge of the pandemic period with the professionals in order to accompany them in the process of change and evolution of the sector.

In addition to this participatory process, more traditional methods are used by the researchers, namely, semi-structured interviews with cultural operators and their team in order to gather data on a broader spectrum that will feed the study conducted by the mixed research team (researchers and stakeholders).

This paper aims to report initial findings derived from interviews with artists conducted during the health crisis. This data is of particular importance in that it shows how the actors experienced this extraordinary period and reveals ongoing issues and transformation processes of the professional sector.

Indeed, the first stage of this research has consisted in gathering testimonies in order to record the individual experiences that have resulted from the disruption caused by the pandemic before they give way to more practical considerations. Collecting this shared experience in the time frame following the crisis when memories are still vivid, was of particular importance to the research as it points out the ongoing changes and/or the elements potentially leading to them. This collection process is part of a monographic study (Dufour et al., 1991) which, through the use of qualitative methodologies, aims to study what “a cultural or artistic job” consisted of during the first lockdown period. Indeed, in methodological terms, the goal of this research is to adopt a comprehensive approach (Weber, 1995; Watier, 2002).

To this end, group interviews were organized in partnership with the Nouvelle Aquitaine cultural Agency and UBIC, Bordeaux Montaigne University's Valorisation Unit, during the last lockdown period in France (3rd May–30th June 2021). They targeted a broad range of artists based in Nouvelle-Aquitaine from different fields: theatre, visual arts, danse, music, cinema, writing. These artists represented a diverse panel, both in terms of professions and fields of application: We opted for a multi-centric qualitative study in order to account for the heterogeneity of the experiences and to put this diversity to work by identifying the underlying common issues. 57 artists¹ participated in videoconference interview sessions between April and May 2021. The participants were questioned on how they felt about the crisis, how they responded to the challenges, how they adapted to the constraints in their creative work, and how they saw the future of their artistic activity.

These first collective sessions have enabled us to identify key issues raised by the health crisis that will be discussed and analysed in upcoming focus group sessions with the artists (Table 1).

The study of the economic impact of the health crisis shows that the French cultural sector was more impacted than any other sector but there is significant heterogeneity in how the effects were experienced, depending on the artistic field (Giorgi and Scott, 2022).

The performing artists in our panel were forced to stop their activity whereas visual artists and authors were able to continue working despite constraints. The French system of individual financial support, known as “the intermittence system,” was reinforced during the crisis and has benefitted performing artists whereas the former category of artists had to deal with the usual financial difficulties made more acute by the reduction of projects.

For many performing artists, being unable to perform for their audience seems to have led to a loss of sense and purpose, whereas for other categories of creators, isolation and remoteness could be experienced as an opportunity to invest the digital space for new projects or to develop new skills. Although ways of dealing with the situation can also be related to each individual's

TABLE 1 Research timeline.

April–May 2021	Initial consultations with artists
September 2021–June 2023	Individual and Focus group interviews
September 2023–June 2024	Data sharing and collective analysis
June 2024–November 2024	Dissemination and optimization of research results

1 32 performing artists, 12 visual artists, 8 cinema and audiovisual artists, 5 authors. Of which, 22 were intermittent employees, 20 under the author's status, 4 self-employed, 4 on long term contract.

own way of perceiving reality, the exchanges we had with the artists have brought to light common issues at a collective level.

The closure of cultural venues, interrupted or disrupted artistic activity, investment in the digital space: changes in cultural and artistic practices were observed during the health crisis, in all artistic disciplines.

The COVID pandemic appears to have caused an upheaval in practices both in terms of space and time. Interrelated in the process, space and time constitute both a constraint and an opportunity for change. On the one hand, the spatial-temporal disruption signifies loss of control, uncertainty, a limited power of action; on the other hand, it can foster reflexivity and lead to new perspectives.

Thus, the pandemic can be seen as having highlighted or accelerated the transformations that have been taking place in the artistic and cultural fields, and in so doing emphasizes the need to rethink time and space factors in the creative process and in the relationship with audiences and inhabitants, and to reconsider the role of artists in the cultural system.

A new relationship to time

Most of the artists in this research have placed the question of creative time at the heart of their comments and questions. After experiencing what many of them call a “*time of shock*,” they emphasize the extent to which the impact of the crisis on their artistic and creative activities has taken the form of a disruption of their relationship to time. By focusing on the way artists express their relationship to time, we wish to propose an analysis that takes into account the modulations and transformations of creative practices brought about by the temporal dimension of the crisis. In this analytical approach, the notion of time is seen as a framework that shapes the activities of artists (Ricoeur, 1983).

Regarding this issue, the crisis has brought to light two temporal categories: constrained time and new free time.

Constrained time

The first reason why artists experience a feeling of time pressure lies in the disruption caused by the crisis. The disorganisation of the sector has led to a feeling of loss of control over time. In the testimonies collected, this period is presented as a period marked by the interruption of activities, but also by an awareness of uncertainty about the future and a blurring of temporal reference points. Schedules and projects were rushed, postponements and cancellations had to be managed, the search for funding had to be made in a hurry . . . The time for creation was constrained and framed by the time of the crisis. This disturbed temporal experience gave rise to changes in projection: how does one project oneself into future when the near future is uncertain and when temporal

organisation is no longer under control? The artists reported feeling a lack of visibility of the situation and indecisiveness and also emphasized the extent to which this period gave rise to contradictory feelings: between the desire to act, to create, to move forward and the constraints imposed by the time of the crisis. The superimposition of the time of the crisis and the time of creation brings to the fore issues related to constraining, challenging and contradictory temporalities. In our analysis, we hypothesize that this temporal configuration, which was strongly characterized by uncertainty and an awareness of troubled times, present and future, reveals a problematic relationship to time that was already at work before the crisis and with which artists are confronted in their daily practices.

The second reason lies in the need, for many artists, to conduct several activities, a need which has emerged in recent years due to income uncertainty (Gouyon and Patureau, 2013).

Forced to carry out several activities in order to make a living, artists are “*caught up in time*” and no longer have enough time to create. Artistic activity is also “*competing*” with dissemination and mediation functions that considerably reduces creative time. Artists’ testimonies have underlined that much of their activity is now devoted to meeting institutional constraints (administrative, cultural, financial). The organisation of their work, based on the “*trptych creation/production/distribution*” seems to be questioned. The time spent trying to “*fit a project into an imposed system*” results in a lack of time for creation. In the artists’ comments, the idea emerged that this crisis has highlighted the need to change this mode of organisation, in order to find space and time for creation. The desire to regain control of time is therefore at the heart of their testimonies.

The pandemic has added to this the need to be present and active on the internet, which implies a substantial investment. Thus, in a context of crisis marked by increasing precariousness and a lack of financial means, creation time becomes a small part of their overall activity.

New free time

For many artists, the pandemic year, although complicated in many ways, has given rise to “a new time”: a time to reflect on their projects (past and future), to complete projects that had been put on hold, or to come up with new ideas and implement them. Some of them reported that this new “free” time had led them to reflect on their creative process. One visual artist wondered “*For what and for whom do we create?*” The question of the audience and the artist’s relationship with them seems to be one of the subjects that emerged from this period of reflection. One theatre director said: “*During that period, I asked myself a lot of questions. Like how can we get closer to the audience?*” The distance that was imposed between artists and their audience seems to have also led to a focus on venues and how they operate. The theatre director told us how

the pandemic period gave him the idea of working on smaller performance projects and to bring them to places where culture was not easily accessible (countryside, poor neighbourhoods). One performing artist described how the question of proximity to the audience was also at the heart of her reflection on her creative process. The development of a small project, she said, creates intimacy and helps to restore meaning. She also emphasized the importance of moving away from a strategy of big shows with a large number of spectators, and of fostering connection and closeness. The desire to reconnect with the public was also central to a project developed by an artist involved in the performing arts: for 3 days, a “space-time” was set up in the city of Bordeaux to collect the dreams of passers-by. The artist also emphasized the extent to which this new-found time had made it possible to produce small, easy-to-implement creations. This feeling was shared by another artist who explained how she tried new forms of creation during that period. She set up small performances in the public space which were filmed *in situ*. She explained that this had allowed her to rediscover the pleasure of creating quick art projects that could be produced and implemented within a short time. This new approach seemed to her to be the opposite of the lengthy processes that her previous projects usually involved. Reflection on how to develop a community-based culture is not entirely new in the arts sector but the exceptional pandemic period has provided more time to develop it further and has made it more prevalent and urgent.

The crisis has indeed generated a sense of urgency that has led artists to question the profound meaning of their artistic approach in light of society’s transformation. “*What message do I want to convey*” when time seems to be running out and existential priorities are emerging? Some of them talked about how this period led them to question the role that an artist plays in society. One author told us that the lockdown was not a time for creation but for listening. It was now more important for her to “*take the pulse*” of society, to listen to the experiences of others, to hear what was being said and talked about in society.

Other artists also emphasized that taking time for listening was necessary for engaging in a creative process. One of the actors explained that this “*physical and psychological*” availability was one of the characteristics of the artist’s work and as such was an integral part of the creative process (Nicolas-Le Strat, 1998; Jeudy, 1999; Jeudy, 2011).

One of the artists interviewed perceived this time of “*nothingness*,” of “*emptiness*” as a time for observing the social environment. It is a necessary step that must come prior to the time of creation so that the artists can put into words, give shape, or stage their observations of society. In this approach, the role of the artist is reminiscent of that of the mediator: the function of the artist lies in his or her power to reveal social issues and the collective social imagination (Jeudy, 1999). In this perspective, the role of the artist is inseparable from a social act: that of restoring, translating and interpreting the problems of society in a sensitive form (Bourdieu, 1992). It is in this sense that Tim

Ingold proposes to draw an analogy between art and anthropology and, more precisely, between the creative process of artists and the research process. According to Ingold, art can have an anthropological dimension when the artist, engaged in a sensitive relationship with the social world, produces a work which, for the public, bares a relationship to knowledge (Ingold, 2013).

The question of artistic creation, as a social act, is therefore inseparable from the question of transmission. Indeed, the pandemic period seems to have given rise to this question among artists: “*Why create if your work cannot be transmitted?*”. Because the crisis temporarily distanced audiences from places of culture, artists were led to reflect on the forms of transmission of art and culture, which can make sense in a social context marked by the dematerialization of works of art. Thus, it is important to place the notion of transmission in a double dynamic: both as a movement that ensures a link between the artist and the public and as a movement that allows for the establishment of a relationship with the work being disseminated (Davallon, 2006).

Thus, a tension is perceptible between the feeling of having experienced this “*return to oneself*” as an opportunity to confront one’s desires and draw new energy from them, to become aware of the social role of the artist, and the feeling of not being able to move forward, of being stuck.

The relationship to cultural venues: rethinking spaces and artists’ mobility

Artists have expressed their difficulty in creating art in the absence of suitable spaces: a major constraint was that interiors were too small and unsuitable for their artistic practices.

Some of them found a solution in moving to rural areas, as the latter offered artists facilities that were better suited to the pandemic situation, such as larger work and exhibition spaces.

These newcomers have discovered opportunities offered by rural spaces which artists that were already residing in those areas have been exploring for some time. Indeed, the attractiveness of the countryside for artists has been growing for several years (Delfosse, 2011). They move to rural areas in order to find the space they cannot have in urban areas, as well as work opportunities, non-dedicated places to create, as opposed to studios or cultural facilities, (landscape sites, heritage sites, farm buildings, etc.), new sources of inspiration and creation as well as new relationships with the public. In a context of widespread criticism of urban life (metropolitan congestion, air, and noise pollutions, artificialization and loss of connection with nature), recently accentuated by the experience of lockdown, artists are also sensitive to the benefits and positive representations of the rural world: the quality of the living environment, proximity to nature, closer social relations with the inhabitants (Delfosse and Georges, 2013).

One director in the audiovisual sector described how his view of the village he moved to during the first lockdown has changed since. This period, he said, “*has given me time to think about the challenges associated with the creative process in the public space and the relationship with the inhabitants.*” Today, he is involved in a creation project that promotes a close relationship with the inhabitants of the village, the farmers and other local actors. According to him, it is the rural environment that allows for relationships of proximity.

Cultural resources are increasingly identified as driving development in rural areas, and the presence of artists is perceived as a factor of attractiveness, a means of creating an image and a narrative for the area, their contribution can also help to enliven and enhance the area.

This desire of artists to invest in rural spaces should lead us to question what types of relationships to rural space they forge, the effects of their presence in those areas and how artists contribute to reorganizing the public’s relationship to art and culture, but also social relationships and spatialities in the rural world. This also implies thinking with artists about how to accompany them in this shift in creative activity, the types of support—financial or otherwise—to be mobilized, as distance from networks and institutions can be an obstacle to the development of their production and consequently their career. Just like art renews itself through its margins (Becker, 1985; Becker, 1988), the renewal of territories may thus mark the renewal of artistic creation.

The artists’ reflection about space has also focused more broadly on the need to reconsider the question of venues for creation and dissemination: facilitating artist’s mobility, putting a variety of venues at their disposal, linking city and countryside, reinventing exhibition formats outside dedicated venues or in mixed venues... were some of the proposals made by both visual and performing artists.

This implies reconsidering the spatiality of the creation process as well as artists’ mobility. Itinerancy, which is characteristic of artists residing in rural areas due to a lack of dedicated cultural facilities and venues, could prove to be a pragmatic and flexible response to recurring difficulties caused by the lack of creative space and the rise of property costs. Organising the reflection at a political level between urban and rural communities and institutional actors could make it possible to develop the links and spatial modalities that are necessary today in an interconnected world where the borders between the different types of territories are becoming blurry and lifestyles more uniform. This could also contribute to meeting the need expressed by artists to reconfigure the relationship to time in order to find more time for creation. This implies profound change in spatial references as well as in the methods used for organizing the creation and distribution chain, but it also responds to current sociological changes and lifestyles (Marchal and Stébé, 2022), as well as to the aspirations of

artists and inhabitants for a quality living environment to which art and culture make an essential contribution.

Finding one’s place in digital space

Faced with the closure of venues for creation and art dissemination, artists have invested in communicating with their public through social media or, more globally, through digital technology, in order to create and disseminate their work and above all, to continue to exist in public space. Thus, digital space has emerged as an opportunity to continue the activity; however, there is often a lack of knowledge and understanding of that space among artists, which also led to frustration and misuse.

Artists reported on stimulating attempts to manage various physical, virtual or hybrid spaces. Visual artists and professionals in the audiovisual sector in particular have explained how digital technology has enabled them to maintain their activity and stay in touch with peers.

Lockdown has made it necessary for artists to familiarize themselves with digital tools and how they work; “*I progressed,*” “*It pushed me 3 years forward,*” which was beneficial to the activity. A singer trained himself in streaming and digital tools. Another singer talked about how he used video to stay in touch with the amateur singers he works with. A visual artist told us how he used Instagram to continue his sales activities and used the Internet to launch a fundraising campaign in order to make a documentary he had wanted to make for a long time.

With pragmatism, some of them insisted on the fact that the use of the tool was now essential, “*unavoidable because it is the world we now live in.*” For young artists especially, digital technology also represents an essential means of communication for making oneself known. On a more personal level, digital tools serve as a palliative to isolation and a remedy for anxiety: “*It saved my life,*” “*I took the digital pill to calm myself down,*” a visual artist explained, underlining the role of digital technology in maintaining social links.

These new users stand out from the existing digital artists who have made their mark on the virtual space, which they also use for technical support, and as a creative and social tool (Fourmentaux, 2011). For these artists, the Internet represents a workshop and an exhibition space (ibid). They master the codes, the language, the functionalities, which they can use to their advantage in their creations (bypassing computer code, hijacking interactive software applications, creating artistic viruses. . .). Artists of the Net Art movement have demonstrated the potential of the internet to generate interconnectivity and interaction between artists and receivers. At the same time, digital technologies reinforce “le sacre de l’amateur” (Flichy, 2010), by providing users with the means, tools and spaces to develop their skills and knowledge and disseminate their creative work. As well as being dialogue spaces to exchange with family,

friends and other users, digital social networks have now become spaces for the display and reproduction of digital works by a wide audience. The use of digital technology reveals a desire for connection, a need to communicate with others, which confirms an “aesthetic of collectivity” (Turki, 2020) specific to the Internet.

Although the crisis has revealed to some artists the potential of the digital space and encouraged them to use digital tools both in the creative process and in project design, a majority of them perceive digital technology as an imposed constraint. Its potential appears limited in that it is considered by some as just another way of exhibiting their work. For many, it was above all a palliative used “to occupy the field” so as not to lose contact with the public, and “to not be forgotten”; and it also provides temporary alternative creation and performance spaces to artistic teams.

As for performance artists, they, above all, seek to stay connected with their public. These artists insisted that interaction in virtual space could not replace real face-to-face interaction: “*There is no such thing as theatre on the Internet, it is something else.*” Because creation is perceived as fundamentally involving a relation to the public in a physical and sensitive way, virtual space, and the substitute for relationship it provides gives rise to a strong sense of rejection: “*I refuse to adapt.*” Artists experienced a kind of culture shock which they perceived as a betrayal of their own values—“*I do not exist without an audience*”—a mediocre way of “*selling oneself for free to continue to exist.*”

Indeed, what defines performing arts is the co-presence of artists and public². Therefore, the broadcasting of performances on the Internet breaks with this fundamental principle and reinforces artists’ distance from the public. But it is important to note that “remote theatre” is nothing new and that the practice of “theatrophone” developed by Graham Bell in the 1870s, for example, structured a form of regular access to theatre for 50 years (Bauchard, 2021). Online experiments were conducted—as some English theatres had done—prior to the crisis with the aim of responding to the new cultural practices of audiences (ibid).

Modes of interaction and sociability frameworks exist in the virtual space, but artists cannot use them efficiently unless they have a good knowledge and understanding of the tools available (blog, forums, digital social networks). Likewise, artists and cultural operators in the performing arts remain unfamiliar with the culture of digital mediation and are more used to traditional forms of mediation based on face-to-face encounters and exchanges. The *hic et nunc* and “life on the screen” have formatted creative activity during the pandemic period and have been perceived by many as injunctions that

professionals unfamiliar with this format of aesthetic communication have found difficult to comply with.

Beyond the variables related to discipline or age, one’s relationship to digital technology raises objective technical questions, primarily related to skills and expertise. Creating art on a digital medium implies mastering specific modes of production and distribution, their techniques, purposes and effects. The fact that one has not learned or does not have the necessary skills to use these tools generates a feeling of powerlessness, of being forced to use them, and in turn can lead to a reaction of aversion. Beyond the technical aspects, designing quality digital creations and communications requires a combination of skills and expertise, but also the creation of partnerships and the mobilization of financial resources, which an individual cannot achieve alone.

Secondly, this raises legal and remuneration questions. These are familiar issues, but the pandemic has given them more prominence and made them unavoidable. Artists have expressed frustration and even anger about the use of their productions on the Internet as well as a fear that they might lose control over video distribution. One of their concerns is that their work might not be sufficiently remunerated and could benefit broadcasting channels instead.

However, the pandemic has aroused an interest among the public for a new cultural offer on the internet (Jonchéry and Lombardo, 2020). There is growing awareness among professionals that virtual space offers opportunities to develop new artistic propositions and digital narrations, to create new forms of mediation, all of which could not only enhance and enrich the work of artists and the missions of cultural operators, but also revitalize their connection with the public.

Structuring and reorganizing the sector: putting the artist back at the heart of the system

Artists share a desire to better promote their work: to disseminate more visibly what they do, how they do it, what skills and abilities they mobilise in their artistic practices, and what they bring to society. They believe that a major effort to promote artistic practice to a wide audience is necessary and should be a priority in the months and years to come.

Our exchanges with artists have focused on the issue of collective decision-making and how to involve artists. The discussion was political in nature and was based on the premise that artists were, more than ever, the “*forgotten ones in this crisis.*” They felt that they had been “*forgotten*” in terms of support systems: whereas cultural structures, venues and operators benefited from financial support from the State and/or had their subsidies maintained without having to expand their activities, artists experienced even greater levels of precariousness.

² The legal definition of live performance in France has been established since 1999 and stipulates the physical co-presence of performers and audience.

It was also noted that young people, starting in the profession, faced important obstacles and sometimes had to give up. Several cases of career abandonment among artists of all ages were pointed out, which represents a failure and alerts us to the lack of support artists received during that period.

This lack of support for artists is seen not only as a sign of ignorance of the realities faced by creators, but also of the contempt in which they feel they are held and, more generally, of the contempt in which the artistic function is held. One scriptwriter has strongly denounced the way in which institutions keep artists on the sidelines of decision-making. On the one hand, the State or local authorities do not consult artists enough, and on the other hand, regional and departmental cultural agencies have neither heard nor accompanied artists, even though these agencies were created to serve the function of representing and associating all the actors, including artists.

Finally, many artists have highlighted the need to rethink the links between creation/production/dissemination. The majority of the artists interviewed insisted on the idea that the Covid crisis had brought to light an organisational issue that was already present and which they felt needed to be discussed. Some mentioned the difficulties linked to the permanent partitioning between institutions, operators, programmers, artists and companies. They report being generally confronted with more or less porous and frictional layers that lead to difficulties in the daily implementation of projects and criticize a constraining organisational logic that formats the process and inhibits creative risk-taking. One artist has reported that she spends a lot of time adapting her projects to distributors and broadcasters' evaluation and reading grids, and that she regretted the lack of meetings and exchanges with institutional decision makers. In her opinion, more interaction with institutional actors could help to give them a "*sensitive sense*" of artistic projects, which in turn could lead distributors to take more risk and include atypical and innovative projects into their programming. Another artist agreed and stated that the Covid crisis may have made it possible to rethink the relations between programmers and creators and to think about how to take into consideration the importance of a "space-time" of freedom necessary for creation.

For many of the participants, the pandemic has revealed a crisis of confidence in the role of artists, with the underlying question of what kind of society we want for the future. To fight this crisis of confidence, artists call for a real process of co-construction of cultural action and policy by better taking their needs and realities into account. They ask for new collective structures and decision-making methods.

Conclusion

For the representatives of the art world in our panel, the health crisis has played a revealing role in the world of art as in society as a whole. The pandemic has generated unexpected benefits (new free time which has been a source of reflection and innovation) and new opportunities (discovering the

potential of digital technology, and of rural areas; experimenting new creative formats), but it has also had deeply ambivalent consequences, in that it has resulted in individual and collective psychological, organisational and professional destabilization.

The COVID crisis has highlighted the structural difficulties of a fragile artistic and cultural sector and has revealed sharp differences in treatment between operators/cultural actors and independent artists. Artists have felt misunderstood and poorly supported and thus have felt violently affected by the crisis.

These first observations, although they were conducted in one specific French region, seem to reflect a general situation, and alert us to the situation of creators, their fears, and their needs, both in terms of technical support and of recognition and valuation of their work. Beyond this, what is pointed out is the need to collectively reflect on the place of creation in society and the role we wish artists to play in the transformation of society.

The reflections on "meaning" that have been expressed in the debates must be heard. While they raise philosophical or ethical questions, they also highlight concrete problems and call for tangible measures:

- The need to rethink the place and role of creation and dissemination venues by giving greater priority to the possibility of mobility, of having several venues at one's disposal, of thinking in terms of a network (town/country), of reinventing formats such as off-site exhibitions, or in mixed venues. . .
- The issue of valuing and disseminating artists' work: how can their work be made more visible and how does one highlight its social contribution?
- The question of remuneration for artistic productions. It is no longer just a question of working for symbolic "valuation," but of (re)thinking the way in which we give an economic and monetary value to artistic production.
- The challenge of the transition to a digital environment calls for an acculturation of the sector and requires an increase in technical and legal skills. From this perspective, the need for digital training must be met.
- The political challenge associated with the necessity to develop structures and collective methods in order to give artists a more active and decision-making role.

Finally, and this is also the challenge of this ongoing study, the initial results highlight the importance of understanding the frameworks of artistic creation and its dissemination by exploring the spatial and temporal issues underlying contemporary social logics: creating, transmitting and disseminating are indeed understood in the light of a more global transformation of the social uses of space and territorial

practices. This “urban world” (Lussault, 2017) in which we live is inseparable from the emergence of spatial and temporalities forms that may prove decisive in the establishment of theoretical and practical frameworks for thinking art and the role of the artist in their social link dimension.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by SM, Université Bordeaux Montaigne. The

patients/participants legal guardian/next of kin provided written informed consent to participate in this study. In addition, the data were collected respecting the GDPR rules (<https://gdpr-info.eu/>) and stored accordingly.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 03 December 2022

ACCEPTED 07 July 2023

PUBLISHED 26 October 2023

CITATION

Badia F and Donato F (2023),
Management perspectives for
ecomuseums effectiveness: a holistic
approach to sociocultural development
of local areas.

Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 13:11851.

doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2023.11851

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Management perspectives for ecomuseums effectiveness: a holistic approach to sociocultural development of local areas

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Considering their focus on participation and sustainable tourism promotion, ecomuseums can play a crucial role in the sociocultural development of local areas. Through three exploratory case studies of Italian ecomuseums located in the Emilia-Romagna region, this study shows the emergence of three different profiles of ecomuseum development strategies: they relate to the sustainable tourism, the cultural districts, and the holistic approach to sociocultural development. These kinds of strategic profiles not only emerge in opposition to each other but can also overlap and appear jointly within different situations of ecomuseums. The final aim of this work is to reflect on the applicability of management tools to support the implementation of these strategic aspects, especially in the current scenario, in which new perspectives are emerging about the role of communities in interpreting and enhancing their tangible and intangible cultural heritage in relation to sustainable tourism and local development linked to cultural and natural heritage preservation and promotion.

KEYWORDS

museum management, cultural heritage, sustainability, community involvement, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

The ecomuseum is a concept that originated in the early 1970s as part of the process of innovation in traditional museology, which was called “new museology” (Ross, 2004). The conceptualization of ecomuseum is due to de Varine (1978), but later, it was developed and further analyzed by other important scholars, such as Riviere (1985), Corsane et al. (2007), and Davis (2011).

It is a well-established notion, and its usefulness appears to be valid, as the concept of ecomuseum is closely interrelated with those of community engagement (Choi, 2017) and sustainable tourism (Bowers, 2016). Another concept that can present important points of contact with ecomuseum is the cultural district, which Santagata (2002) defined as an industrial district where culture and cultural heritage are the dominant factors. All these

concepts appear to be very topical today; indeed, in recent years, their centrality, both in the academic debate and in real life, has grown significantly. Moreover, recent academic studies have reported a growing diffusion of ecomuseums in Spain (Corral, 2019), North America (Sutter et al., 2016), and generally worldwide, with a particular increase in developing countries (Wuisang et al., 2018). Ecomuseums also represent an important reality in Italy, especially in some regions where they have received legislative regulations (Santo et al., 2017) aimed at strengthening their role in the development of local communities.

In light of these considerations, the debate on the role of ecomuseums has also seen interesting recent developments. At the same time, from the point of view of the diffusion of concrete ecomuseum experiences, the last few years have shown an important recovery: numerous academic studies, in this regard, recall the recent growth of the phenomenon (Belliggiano et al., 2021; Tsipra and Drinia, 2022). This element is interesting since after an almost constant growth in the diffusion of ecomuseums in the last decades of the past century, a slowdown of this trend was subsequently recognized (Maggi, 2006).

Therefore, various scholars have analyzed the role of ecomuseums in museum studies (Davis, 2008), their importance for the development of communities (Doğan, 2019; Pappalardo, 2020), particularly in rural areas (Ducros, 2017), the relationship between the development of ecomuseums and sustainable tourism (Bowers, 2016; Belliggiano et al., 2021), as well as that between this form of museum and the promotion of community participation in cultural heritage management and policy (Sokka et al., 2021). Furthermore, ecomuseums fit very well in the European Union (EU) framework for action on cultural heritage (European Commission, 2019), as well as in the current European policies that place culture and cultural heritage in the context of the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2022).

Nonetheless, to the best of our knowledge, the subject of how the development of ecomuseum strategies can be made more effective by the application of managerial tools still appears to be underdeveloped. Therefore, the present study tries to fill this research gap through the analysis of managerial profiles that can make the development of strategic profiles for an ecomuseum more effective.

The achievement of this objective has declined through the proposal of distinct case studies, according to the qualitative research method of multiple case studies (Stake, 2006). Consistent with this, three cases of Italian ecomuseums from the Emilia-Romagna region were subjected to analysis. The approach that has been used is exploratory (Yin, 2018), which means that the basic idea is the definition of a framework of hypotheses on possible managerial tools. The analysis of the case studies, which considers the evolution of the three ecomuseums

in recent years, also includes the COVID-19 pandemic period, which tested the ability of each ecomuseum to keep its communities united at a historical moment in which the sense of loneliness and disorientation of many people was significant. According to these hypotheses, which will be subjected to further study in future research, managerial tools, if implemented, could favor the effectiveness of strategy implementation in ecomuseums.

Theoretical framework

The ecomuseum has been described by many authors and scholars in several circumstances, as already reported in Badia and Deodato (2015). One of the most famous definitions is that of Riviere (1985: p. 182):

An ecomuseum is an instrument conceived, fashioned and operated jointly by a public authority and a local population. The public authority's involvement is through the experts, facilities and resources it provides; the local population's involvement depends on its aspirations, knowledge and individual approach. It is a mirror in which the local population views itself to discover its own image, in which it seeks an explanation of the territory to which it is attached and of the populations that have preceded it, seen either as circumscribed in time or in terms of the continuity of generations.

De Varine, who is credited with the invention of the term, has stressed some important elements of the concept of ecomuseum on several occasions. First, “the ‘eco’ prefix to ecomuseums means neither economy, nor ecology in the common sense, but essentially human or social ecology: the community and society in general, even mankind, are at the core of its existence, of its activity, of its process. Or at least they should be. . . This was the intuition of the “inventors” of the ecomuseum concept in the early 70s. . .” (de Varine, 2006: p. 60).

Again, De Varine noted how, in the years following its first definition, the ecomuseum has assumed two different paths in practice, partly opposite each other (de Varine, 2002). The original definition aims to highlight the link between the museum and the natural environment toward a concept similar to a museum park. Simultaneously, around the early 1980s, a concept derived from ecomuseum has been developing, notably because of the experience of Le Creusot in France, as a museum becoming an instrument of community development.

This path of distinction between different forms of ecomuseums on a global scale has widened over the years. Currently, therefore, types of museums that are also very different from each other are called “ecomuseums” (Davis, 2011). In this diverse picture of concrete cases and practical

realities, some common elements seem to emerge and essentially refer to the mission of the ecomuseum.

Maggi (2006): p. 63 noted that “almost all ecomuseums, even when using different denominations, have a particular mission: they try to promote sustainable development and citizenship through local heritage and participation. The most relevant obstacles they face seem to be the same almost everywhere: people involvement, effective leadership and the continuity of the initiatives.”

Cogo (2006): pp. 97–98 developed this concept by explaining the most important points of the ecomuseum mission:

- the safeguarding and valuing of local socio-cultural traditions; - the safeguarding/rediscovery of collective memory in terms of the intangible heritage comprising the identity of a population, and its mediation with contemporary society; - the study, research and dissemination of local naturalistic, historical and social topics; - the promotion of sustainable economic and tourist development, by using natural and historic resources, the social heritage and other local resources, via a network able to attract tourists and the additional exploitation of cultural resources; - the promotion of socially responsible business enterprise and the active participation in processes of sustainable growth.

Two main features seem to characterize the mission of an ecomuseum: the support for the advancement of sustainable tourism and the active promotion of civic participation in cultural heritage management development. The ecomuseum can be part of an implementation strategy of sustainable tourism—not without difficulties (Howard, 2002)—when it is able to promote its activities toward visitors and tourists (Belligiano et al., 2021), enhancing its specific connection with the local area through the promotion of values that reflect its identity (Bowers, 2016; Simeoni and De Crescenzo, 2018).

Sustainable tourism combines the paradigm of sustainability with economic development based on tourism (Hunter, 1997). Sustainable tourism is not aimed at unlimited growth but is consistent with the enhancement of existing resources. In its various forms, an ecomuseum project explicitly aims to initiate socioeconomic activities compatible with the logic of sustainability. Specifically, tourism is sustainable if it is developed as environmentally friendly, economically viable, and socially equitable for local communities; in other words, it refers to a level of land use that can be maintained in the long term, as it produces economic, social, and environmental benefits for the area in which it is implemented.

For example, at the economic level, the positive impacts of sustainable tourism can be identified in job creation on the site, in the redistribution of income, and in restraining the depopulation of rural areas. In addition, sustainable tourism can reduce some negative social effects of “traditional” tourism, such as its

seasonal nature, the weight of external tourism companies that do not have a direct impact on the territory, the instability of local revenues, and transport and infrastructure development oriented only to tourists and not to local people. From an environmental point of view, sustainable tourism is concerned with reducing, if not breaking down, the negative impacts of traditional mass tourism (e.g., depletion of natural resources and pollution).

In summary, sustainable tourism satisfies both the needs of the local community in terms of quality of life and the demand of tourists, protecting cultural and environmental resources, maintaining a certain degree of competitiveness, and promoting the phenomenon of solidarity tourism through a relevant role of the ecomuseums (Doğan, 2019).

Another relevant key feature of the ecomuseum mission is favoring citizen participation in paths of local development through the enhancement of cultural heritage. Participatory approaches appear particularly appropriate for cultural heritage management. Relevant international institutions have already claimed the importance of community engagement in cultural heritage management and development since the beginning of this century (UNESCO, 2002; Council of Europe, 2005; European Commission, 2019). Academics and professionals in cultural management suggested multistakeholder governance models (Bonet and Donato, 2011), even considering the opportunities of a collaborative governance approach (Jeon and Kim, 2021).

Participation can be considered a challenging task when establishing an ecomuseum. In fact, an ecomuseum can promote a greater sense of collective ownership, more community-led initiatives, and a process of appreciating, supervising, and safeguarding the interactions between people and the environment (Choi, 2017). These processes can assume particular relevance in disadvantaged or depopulated territories, such as rural areas (Ducros, 2017; Bindi et al., 2022).

With reference to the development of specific participatory practices in the context of ecomuseums, community (or parish) maps (Clifford and King, 1996; Parker, 2006) emerged as one of the most widely used tools for ecomuseums. Community maps are instruments through which residents can expose their own representations of cultural heritage in its broadest sense, including the landscape, knowledge, and traditions of the place. These processes are fundamental for reinforcing the sense of awareness and identity of a community (Guran and Michelutti, 2021).

The map of the community is also a place of memory, as it sheds light on what people want to pass on to future generations. Specifically, it normally consists of a cartographic representation (or any other composition inspired by that logic of representation) in which the community can identify itself. The basis of the abovementioned knowledge and understanding can still lead, secondarily, to the development and eventual rediscovery of gastronomic production and

handicraft traditions, which could even allow the promotion of the territory and its products through the active involvement of the local community.

Although these two aspects (i.e., the development of sustainable tourism and the promotion of citizen participation) appear to be the most typical features linked to the development strategies of an ecomuseum, a third possible characteristic element can be identified: the promotion of a cultural district linked to the territory of which the ecomuseum wants to be an expression.

The cultural district stems from the concept of an industrial district (Becattini, 2004), which is defined as a local production system characterized by a high concentration of industrial companies specializing in that industry sector. Therefore, the cultural districts can be seen in an industrial district in which culture and cultural heritage are the dominant factors (Santagata, 2002: p. 15):

The content of the goods produced in these districts is strictly connected to the local civilization and savoir vivre. Furthermore, the economic advancement of these products is naturally correlated with the local culture: the more their image and symbolic icon is identified with local customs and cultural behaviors, the more they seduce consumers (cultural lock-in) and the more their production is fostered. In this case, the importance of culture is all-inclusive, mobilizing the aesthetic, technological, anthropological and historical content of the district.

The perspective of the cultural district takes on value for an ecomuseum because it enhances the need for collaboration between stakeholders as an essential element for its development (Arnaboldi and Spiller, 2011). This represents an approach to local development, where cultural production and participation play a central role in local development through integration with other economic sectors of the local area. In this context, culture can become a constitutive element of economic and social growth, based on social and environmental sustainability, in its ability to promote the elements of human, social, symbolic, and cultural capital linked to the founding values of the territory concerned (Sacco et al., 2013). With reference to cultural districts, the literature has shown the complex dynamics of management and governance that can favor their development (Schieb-Bienfait et al., 2018), also because the cultural district sees the involvement of a plurality of subjects, both in the public sector and in the private sector, whose government may require the development of collaborative governance paths (Gugu and Dal Molin, 2016).

Although the subjects related to the development of the ecomuseums seem to have assumed a good rate of advancement (Liu and Lee, 2015), the presence of research works that analyze the possible role of management tools to support these processes effectively appears rather limited.

Considering this framework and the emerging research gap, this paper aims to develop the following research questions:

- 1) Which concrete ecomuseum development strategies emerge in the current context?
- 2) Which management tools should be adopted to increase the effectiveness of these ecomuseum development strategies?

Methodology

The research method employed multiple case studies (Stake, 2006). The basic idea for using this method relates to the purpose to obtain, thanks to replication, the possibility of enriching the proposed considerations in compliance with the necessary methodological rigor (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007): replication indeed leads to comparison, which allows the initial theoretical concepts and the relationships established between them to be developed in more detail (Yin, 2018).

For this multiple-case study, three cases were selected. The choice fell on three ecomuseums belonging to the same territorial context (Emilia-Romagna, Italy) to favor a basic homogeneity of context, which is a necessary element for obtaining at least partial replicability of the research, which is an essential reference in multiple case study research. At the same time, these ecomuseums presented certain profiles of differentiation, which justify the multiple approaches that will be examined in the next section.

The three cases are the Ecomuseum of Argenta (province of Ferrara), the Ecomuseum of Bagnacavallo (province of Ravenna), alternatively named as “marsh herb ecomuseum,” and the Ecomuseum of hill and wine of Castello di Serravalle (province of Bologna). The research in these three realities was conducted using the following research tools:

- Semi-structured interviews (Qu and Dumay, 2011) with the directors and/or the administrative staff of the ecomuseums. At least two interviews were conducted for each ecomuseum. Overall, eight interviews were conducted, and six subjects were involved. Each interview was conducted using a homogeneous methodology based on a series of open-ended questions. Every interview lasted between 60 and 90 min.
- Material analysis of additional documents, provided by the ecomuseum staff or available on the web, regarding the activities of the ecomuseums.
- Participant observation through one experience of direct participation by the researchers in the ecomuseum proposal for visitors/tourists. These visits were realized without the involvement of the directors of the three museums to live a more genuine experience, not developed *ad hoc* by the museum staff for the research perspective.

In the next section of the article, every case study will be presented, highlighting the following points:

- Introduction and brief history of the ecomuseum
- Governance and the role of the managing entity
- Most relevant activities
- Involvement and participation of the community
- Impact of COVID-19 on the activities of the ecomuseum
- Analysis of the economic fundamentals
- Special projects and future strategies
- Role of management tools in supporting strategic development and operational activities

However, these points represent only a trace of the following exposure and will not be analyzed exactly in this order but depending on how the different points have emerged during the semi-structured interviews.

Case studies

Ecomuseum of Argenta

The Ecomuseum of Argenta was founded in 1991 with its first component, the Museum of the Valleys, following the will of certain groups of associations in Argenta to enable projects of restoring the environment and the river around the oasis of Campotto, territories belonging to Po Delta Park. Then, between 1994 and 2002, the ecomuseum was extended with a second component, the Museum of Land Drainage, at the water pump of Saarino, which is the heart of the hydraulic system of the government of the waters between the Apennines and the Adriatic Sea. Finally, in 1997, the ecomuseum was completed with the third component, the Civic Museum, conceived as a center for representing to visitors the history of the town of Argenta and its urban landscape. The Ecomuseum of Argenta is directly managed by the Municipality of Argenta, a city of 20,000 inhabitants, in the province of Ferrara. The director is an employee of the municipality. The ecomuseum has three other employees (one full-time and two part-time), as well as further cooperation with external professionals and a cooperative. The director has a good degree of autonomy in her management decisions.

The Ecomuseum of Argenta gained official recognition for its role by the Council of Europe and, on a regional scale, obtained the label “quality museum,” which means that it respects predetermined quality standards of museum management. This ecomuseum is based on integration throughout the territory between the local landscape and the three museum locations. The Ecomuseum of Argenta is hosted by a lagoon landscape inside the intensively cultivated Po valley close to the delta of this river. This landscape presents issues related to biodiversity, sustainable farming, and traditions of

manufacturing linked to the agrarian sector. In the specific case of Argenta, the ecomuseum assumes participatory functions for social and economic development by different actors in the local area. The Ecomuseum of Argenta can be defined as an internal agreement of the local community to take care of the territory. Therefore, the fundamental objectives that form the basis of the ecomuseum are mainly related to the sociocultural development of the territory and to increasing the level of awareness by the citizens of its values, history, and local traditions.

In this sense, participatory processes have been conducted by the instrument of the community maps in Campotto, Benvignante (hamlets of Argenta), and, in a more simplified way, other areas of the municipality of Argenta. Then, executive actions were implemented. For example, a space dedicated to the repopulation of native fish (such as pike, tench, and carp) was created, and new alliances were developed with companies, consortia, and associations of the agricultural and fishing industries.

Another interesting participatory project can be called “participatory archeology.” Following a recent discovery of an archaeological site of the Roman age in the area, the ecomuseum brought together associations and citizens with public initiatives, cycles of conferences, and courses with the high schools of Argenta, which continued despite the difficulties of the pandemic period. The result has been that the locals have begun to take an interest in the archaeological heritage of the area, to make reports, and to feel truly involved in these discoveries.

In parallel, the ecomuseum has enabled networking systems with restaurants for the revaluation of the gastronomy of the valley, with the reintroduction of the specialties of freshwater fish and the use of wild herbs in the kitchen. The economic boom of the 1960s and the extensive agrarian reform deleted these elements, favoring the consumption of sea fish and plant species that were alien to local traditions. Still, the ecomuseum is working for the rehabilitation of inland water navigation by electric boats with flat-bottom keel, which retools the historic “Batana” used both for monitoring fish and for natural excursions.

Among the initiatives and activities of the ecomuseum, an important role is played by the activities of restoration and enhancement of cultural and monumental heritage. In particular, Benvignante, a Renaissance village dominated by the residence of the Dukes of Este (this residence is part of the UNESCO recognition of the site of “Ferrara, City of the Renaissance and its Po Delta”), is at risk of dropping, along with the campaign and the rural village. After the earthquake of 2012 in this local area, which damaged Este’s residence, there was a first restructuring in 2011 and a second restructuring between 2014 and 2015. These actions were linked to the implementation of the community map. Another goal of Benvignante’s map is to build a basket of typical gastronomy

products, thus restoring knowledge, taste, and culinary innovation, with the identification of specific target markets. In the future, the residence will be equipped with kitchens and will be used for testing taste from gastronomic associations, agricultural and catering, and hospitality schools, with a link to the annual fair of the ecomuseums.

Other areas of the municipality of Argenta, which are located near the Valli di Comacchio and the Romagna, are characterized by biological fine dining with short production and distribution lines, such as the golden tomato; the cereal crops of wheat, barley, and spelt, derived organic flour and the incipient production of craft beer that emerged from Renaissance treatises of the Este period; and the typical “wines of the sands” and of the Bosco Eliceo. The artisan companies in the territory of the ecomuseum move in terms of knowledge and skills, specifically yarns, wool, and handcraft. This is the tradition of tailoring and knitwear factories, which were important in the years of the economic boom for women’s employment. These elements also emerge from the community map of Campotto, with the tradition of mulberry and silkworm breeding, silk yarn, and domestic wool, which engaged families and neighborhoods in partnership. Today, these skills have left silk but still emerge in other fields, such as diverse tailoring and wool.

A prominent role in the activities of the ecomuseum is occupied by networking activities with other institutions in neighboring territories. The most important initiative in this regard appears in the Constitution of the *Centro di Educazione Alla Sostenibilità* (Center of Education for Sustainability) (CEAS), which, in 2013, was set up as a network with other neighboring municipalities as part of a regional project for the promotion of institutional networks aimed at the development of sustainability in the territory. This center has assumed the name of CEAS “Valleys and Rivers” and is headquartered at the Ecomuseum of Argenta. The partners are identified, in addition to the Municipality of Argenta, in other neighboring municipalities (Mesola, Comacchio, Ostellato, and Portomaggiore). In addition to having importance from the point of view of establishing relations and exchanging experiences, the CEAS has also become a center of attraction for public funds, particularly from the Emilia-Romagna Region.

Finalizing the analysis of the main projects of the Ecomuseum, specific attention has also been given to educational projects, with constant attention to the relationship with the teachers and the schools in the area. In recent years, many initiatives have been developed aimed at creating itineraries for tourists and local inhabitants. The meaning of these itineraries is to make visitors discover the tangible and intangible heritage of the area. The main project concerns the Primaro route, from the name of a branch of the Po River—the longest river in Italy—which crosses the territory. The Primaro route traces a geographical route and connects it to all the naturalistic, historical, and economic emergencies along the route. Thus, while walking along the Primaro route, the story of Argenta is told from its origins to the present day.

The COVID-19 pandemic, although it has forced a slowdown in some cases, mainly due to the closures ordered for the museum venues, as established by national legislation in the most acute periods of the pandemic, has not had only negative impacts on this plenty of activities. The presence of outdoor nature trails has, in fact, been a reason for many people to rediscover itineraries when the rules on social distancing only allowed outdoor activities and prevented indoor activities. As for many other museums—somewhat around the world—the pandemic period was an important moment for ecomuseum managers to propose online activities and discover the opportunities provided by digital technologies. In this way, during the pandemic period, the Ecomuseum of Argenta played an important role in meeting the need for sociality in its community.

Moving on to a brief analysis of an economic nature, the Ecomuseum of Argenta has an annual budget of around €150,000. The largest part, for nearly €120,000 euros per year, is provided by contract between the ecomuseum and Municipality of Argenta, which is particularly directed to the payment of salaries to the employees of the structure. Even the rest of the funding is, for the most part, from public sources, but it is worth highlighting that the ecomuseum’s staff presents a particular to access to various funding lines on different public projects, partly regional, partly national, and partly from the EU.

With reference to management tools, there is a poor presence. This mainly depends on the circumstance that the ecomuseum is not autonomous from a management point of view but is comparable with an organizational unit of the Argenta municipality. However, the development of autonomous management tools compatible with this governance system, such as performance measurement systems or forms of non-financial reporting, has not been implemented due to the lack of specific economic-managerial skills and the scarcity of financial resources that can be specifically dedicated to these projects.

Ecomuseum of Bagnacavallo

The Ecomuseum of Bagnacavallo, also known as the Ecomuseum of Marsh Herbs, owes its foundation to the activity carried out by the Cultural Association “Civiltà Erbe Palustri” (Marsh Herbs Civilization). In June 1985, the founding nucleus of the future association began its activities. A young married couple, composed by Luigi Barangani and Maria Rosa Bagnari—who was the director of the ecomuseum for years—interested in recovering the artisan art that had once characterized the economy of their territory was the propulsive heart of this first nucleus. Thus began the first survey work within the country to recover original equipment, bundles of grass, artifacts, and leftovers to create a small exhibition. At the same time, the supporters of the initiative tried to identify people who still possessed the unaltered technical background of the manual arts in the use of marsh grasses and were available to collaborate on the first

informal idea of the reconstruction of classical production for the purpose of study and collection. As the first result of the research was carried out, the first edition of the Exhibition of the Marsh Herbs Civilization was held, with the first group of expert craftsmen at work, arousing great emotion throughout the community. With this initiative, the history of this ecomuseum began.

However, the history of the ecomuseum was born much earlier. In 1971, after Maria Rosa had married Luigi, when the young couple moved into their new home, Maria Rosa expressed the desire to beautify the small apartment with the window curtains that she had noticed in tatters in the bordering large house, previously Luigi's aunt's workshop. In this way, Maria Rosa, thanks to the teachings of her mother-in-law, learned to build curtains for windows using marsh grasses and rushes from the valley as per local tradition. The curtains displayed on the windows overlooking the main street began to attract attention for their beauty and originality to the point that several passers commissioned them.

Thanks to this origin, the Ecomuseum of Marsh Herbs has been characterized since its inception as a participatory project carried out by the people, by the population—first and foremost that of Villanova (a fraction of the Municipality of Bagnacavallo with 4,000 inhabitants). The sense of participation, which has always characterized the history of the ecomuseum, can be summarized in two phases.

The first phase can be considered the start of the ecomuseum story, which has not yet been defined in this way; it was aimed at making the community aware of itself and of its own history, culture, and tradition to avoid the loss of identity. The research and recovery of tradition was carried out among the people, with their help and active contribution to rediscovering and restoring a unique cultural heritage based on the values of aesthetics, a sustainable economy, and solidarity between generations. Reviving the processing of marsh grasses house by house, the grass once again invaded the country, causing amazement and emotion in the population and great interest in the institutions themselves. The completion of this first phase, therefore, led to the establishment of the ecomuseum in name and in fact.

The second participatory phase arose from the awareness that the importance of safeguarding the specificity and uniqueness of the recovered subject forced it to be disseminated and transmitted outside the limited boundaries of the municipality of Bagnacavallo, and even more than a fraction of it, such as Villanova. The logical thread that connected the history of the ecomuseum to the world of the valley and to the lands of the manual arts was the Lamone River, which has become a new horizon of interest. Thus, a new project was born: Lamone Bene Comune (LBC), literally “Lamone as a common good.” It was founded with the following objectives:

- To stimulate the participation of all the communities located along the Lamone River toward a single cultural horizon
- To raise awareness of territorial education for sustainability

- To enhance and promote the area around the river
- To safeguard the landscape and biodiversity of the lands and valleys of the Lamone

Currently, the collections acquired so far exceed 2,500 objects, which can be described as weaving products, textures, and artifacts made with wild herbs supplied by the nearby valley environment and by the various processing of soft woods.

The actions and products created by the ecomuseum are continuous negotiation tables, recovery of tradition (e.g., fires in March at the same time along the whole river, propitiatory crosses in the countryside, and potato crib with playing cards), creation of a vegetable garden of flowers, and forgotten smells.

The ecomuseum also promotes environmental protection issues, starting with the LBC project, which provides for the recovery and maintenance of the left embankment top of the Lamone River and its two continuations, one toward the sea and the other toward the hill, taking care of problems relating to the hydrogeological instability of Punta Alberete with the salinization processes that are advancing throughout the territory. The community development objectives are evident: the ecomuseum is aimed primarily at the local community, and it has the objective of stimulating community participation to promote the re-appropriation of the prior culture through projects of solidarity between generations. Finally, for both residents and tourists, there is a desire to raise awareness of territorial education in sustainability, safeguarding the landscape and biodiversity of the lands and valleys of the Lamone. In short, healthy use of the territory is promoted, even through responsible and sustainable tourism. In this, even the rediscovery of traditional cuisine linked to the territory, based on the conscious use of resources, is at the center of a rich activity of cooking workshops open to all.

From a tourist point of view, indeed, the promotion of responsible and sustainable tourism proposals involves tourists with alternative routes—compared to the traditional tourism of Romagna—based on the concept of slow tourism, exploiting already existing routes that connect the country's roads to embankment paths. In this context, the ecomuseum attracts interest above all of the cycle tourists, whose tourist activity particularly lends itself to lingering on the activities and itineraries proposed by the ecomuseum.

As in the previously analyzed case, the pandemic, which, in any case, implied the closure of the office in one of the most acute periods in 2021, has not blocked the activities. During the closing period, rich laboratory activity was carried out online. These projects were also brought back into attendance as soon as the rules allowed. In 2021, a summer school was also promoted entitled “Summer School of the Ancient Arts. Solidarity between generations so as not to lose wisdom and a sustainable economy.” This title is emblematic of the aim still pursued by the

ecomuseum, which makes use of a rich collaboration with the local associative fabric beyond the driving role of the association that manages it.

From a governance point of view, the ecomuseum is a cultural institute of the Municipality of Bagnacavallo, depending on the Direction of the Civic Museums of Bagnacavallo, and is managed by the founding body, the private association *Civiltà Erbe Palustri*. The municipality plays the role of orientation, direction, and control of the activities carried out by the ecomuseum in view of the tourist impact on the area. The association covers its managerial autonomy in organizing festivals, markets, environmental education projects, temporary installations, and the collection of evidence of the material culture of the local community.

Thanks to the attention of the public entity, there has always been collaboration with a public–private partnership for the use of public spaces. As already seen, the municipality has been interested in this activity since its beginning. The ecomuseum, between volunteers and collaborators, involves about 50 people, although these activities constitute their job only for the director and another collaborator.

The annual budget of the Cultural Association *Civiltà Erbe Palustri* is around 70,000–80,000 euros. This budget is sometimes supplemented by municipal public contributions, as well as by expenditure items of the municipality that affect interventions in the territory, even in the areas where the activity of the ecomuseum takes place. Often, public funds derived from competitive tenders, European and regional, have been intercepted for specific activities. Their own sources of revenue concern the museum store with ethnic artifacts from Romagna, a part coming from ticket office entrances and fees for the use of the convivial room for events and itinerant workshops linked to museum activity.

Despite the development of a set of activities fully consistent with the ecomuseum mission and its breadth, this second ecomuseum also does not have adequate development of management tools. This circumstance is also due to the lack of specific skills in the field of business administration within the association, even if the element that seems to emerge is also that their usefulness or necessity is not always perceived, with the potential detriment of even more incisive paths of growth and development of the ecomuseum.

Ecomuseum of hill and wine of Castello di Serravalle

The Ecomuseum of Hill and Wine has been running since May 2004. It was born with the aim of protecting and enhancing the cultural and natural heritage of Castello di Serravalle, a town belonging to the Municipality of Valsamoggia, inserted into the hilly landscape of the province of Bologna. The focus of this ecomuseum is on evidence of centuries-old human use of the land and the important buildings that express the relationship between landscape and man.

The owner of the venue and of the exhibitions is the Municipality of Valsamoggia, which comes from the merger of the municipalities of Castello di Serravalle (the owner entity of the Ecomuseum at its birth) with those of Bazzano, Crespellano, Monteveglio, and Savigno, which are all located in the territory of the province (here named the “metropolitan city”) of Bologna. The ecomuseum management has been entrusted to the public trust Foundation “Rocca dei Bentivoglio.” This foundation is under the direct control of the Municipality of Valsamoggia and manages the ecomuseum through a system of in-house provision. Some functional and operational tasks for the management of the ecomuseum are assigned to the non-profit cultural association “Terre di Jacopino,” whose associates participate in the management of the ecomuseum on a voluntary basis.

The ecomuseum has a main exhibition venue at a building called “Captain’s House,” which was built in 1,235 by Jacopino from San Lorenzo in Collina within the fortified village of Castello di Serravalle. The ecomuseum comprises nine systems of routes, which are the main themes of the relationship between man and land. Visitors can find educational panels for each system at the main exhibition venue with detailed text and images and symbolic objects with evocative aims: summary information and an essential exposure aim to bring the visitor outside in contact with the real aspects of the territory.

The ecomuseum proposes specific museum itineraries to its visitors focused on “nature and landscape: the gullies”; “architecture and land: the castle of Serravalle”; “man and landscape: work in the fields”; “humans and animals: zootechnics”; “the vine, the wine, and the landscape”; “the territory and its inhabitants: the first censuses”; “the post-war period and the reorganization of the territory”; “culture and folk tradition: folklore”; and “archeology and territory.”

In addition to the panels and objects for the nine itineraries, in the main exhibition venue of the ecomuseum, there is a room with archaeological findings of a Roman villa of the imperial age located just downstream of the fortified village. The most interesting artifact is a large terracotta that could hold more than 1,000 L of wine and inspire some local producers, such as the ancient Romans, to revive the wine in amphorae. In addition to educational programs for kindergartens and primary and secondary schools, the ecomuseum offers guided tours and tastings by appointment.

In recent years, the activity of the ecomuseum outside the main exhibition venue has been further developed, thanks to the support of the “Pro loco” (local tourism promotion association) of Castello di Serravalle. In fact, walks and excursions have been conceived to intertwine the places of the ecomuseum and the related themes. Paths regarding the German refugees in the area thus emerged, with walks in the various refuges, projects from which other enhancement projects were born, such as the walk on the occasion of the festival on the ancient vines or the walk to the ancient sources. This has helped bring these issues, even outside Castello di Serravalle, to nearby territories. In short, there has been work aimed primarily at establishing a dialogue between

the communities that form part of the rather extensive territory of the Municipality of Valsamoggia. This also appeared to be useful in overcoming the problems derived from the merger of the municipalities, which did not make everyone happy. Using the historical-cultural and landscape contents of continuity that exist between the territories has allowed for greater understanding and rapprochement.

The primary goal of the ecomuseum is to become a tool for the development of a form of culturally sustainable tourism in the territory. Some of the results have already been achieved, considering that after the birth of the ecomuseum, an economic appreciation of the buildings in the local area was observed in testimony to the revitalization of the area for tourism. Another important aim of the ecomuseum is the involvement of the population in creating a sense of awareness about the values of the territory. In particular, the engagement initiatives have been addressed to two specific targets: the segments of the older population and the younger population. For the elderly, initiatives were put in place with the aim of preserving the memory and the typical know-how of the rural world. To young people, instead, activities were promoted aimed at knowledge of their territory and the importance of taking care of it.

In agreement with these objectives, there have been meetings at the community center for the elderly and classes at the junior high school in the local area on the ancient crafts and the cycle of Parmesan cheese. There were three exhibitions to engage citizens with local origins, with the use of pictures taken from family albums and provided directly by the citizens themselves.

Other activities organized by the ecomuseum are addressed to the conservation of the peasant theatrical culture and to the use of dialect, supporting and disseminating performances of a recreational spontaneous group that animates the local carnivals and makes representations in dialect, especially staging “La Flepa,” a comic opera written by Giulio Cesare Croce, which has been orally transmitted for over three centuries and was reconstructed 20 years ago from the fragments that the elders of the valley recited by heart.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a crucial moment in this ecomuseum. In fact, before the pandemic, most of the operational activities were carried out by the historical staff of the “Terre di Jacopino” Association, whose average age was quite high. For this reason, since, as is known, the elderly people were those most at risk during the pandemic period, there was a need for the “Rocca dei Bentivoglio” Foundation to identify new initiatives and new activities that could be promoted in an alternative way by the ecomuseum compared to those traditionally promoted. This has led to the greater involvement of other local associations and the development of new online activities. Therefore, this represented, in a certain sense, a concrete way of implementing the aim that the ecomuseum itself had in its intentions: promoting intergenerational dialogue and favoring greater collaboration between the “historical” volunteers of the ecomuseum and the new resources activated by the foundation.

From the point of view of financial management, the annual budget available is approximately 10,000 euros. Although this budget is significantly lower than one of the above-presented cases, it appears interesting to note how, from the point of view of the percentage distribution of resources, this ecomuseum has a good degree of self-financing. In fact, the municipality contributes only about 30% of the budget, incurring the costs of managing the main exhibition venue and its offices. The remainder of the budget is covered by revenues raised by the association. They come for about another 30% from themed events in the village, 20% from the organization of tours, and 20% from sales of local products.

Similar to what was found in the other cases, this ecomuseum does not present the use of specific managerial tools. The small size of this reality leads to not detecting the usefulness or need for these tools, in addition to the fact that there is a lack of human and financial resources capable of implementing them.

Discussion

The aim of this section is to analyze what has emerged from the case studies, responding to the two research questions, which were about the kind of ecomuseum development strategies, and the management tools adopted to increase their effectiveness.

With reference to the first profile, the three cases were different, demonstrating variety and complexity that characterize the ecomuseums, even worldwide, but with relevant common features. The common elements mainly concern, on the one hand, the genesis, development, and participatory actions, which are implemented in all cases, and, on the other hand, the presence of a political will that is a decisive and stabilizing factor for the ecomuseum. Furthermore, it should be noted that the investigated development strategies properly mirror the main ongoing EU policies. On the one hand, cultural and natural heritage are envisaged as a shared resource, raising awareness of common history and values and reinforcing a sense of belonging to a common cultural and political space consistent with the 2019 European framework for action on cultural heritage based on the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 (European Commission, 2019). On the other hand, the analyzed cases put cultural and natural heritage at the heart of broader public policies consistently with the vision of the role of culture and cultural heritage in the European green deal (European Commission, 2022).

The divergent aspects relate to different management structures, different purposes, and different operating ways of realizing the activities, mainly attributable to the specificities of the territories. The different expressions of the development strategies of these three ecomuseums are not seen as conflicting. In fact, all three cases demonstrate specific attention to sustainable tourism projects, which have an impact on the cultural side of belonging and knowledge of the

area and its heritage. Therefore, the perspectives of sustainable tourism promotion and community involvement are present in all cases analyzed.

In all the cases, the ecomuseum project seems, however, to overlap this perspective in order to embrace a wider perspective of the “cultural district.” In the examined cases, the territorial element is, first, the common ground between the industrial district and the cultural district. The goal of a cultural district is to be a product of a particular territory based on territorial integration of the cultural offer. Specifically, the cultural district, on the one hand, implements a process of enhancing cultural resources of different types and, on the other hand, connects this process with the system of professions, services, and infrastructure connected with the same enhancement activities. According to this perspective, the process of developing cultural resources in the form of a district can have positive consequences in terms of employment, entrepreneurship, and innovation in various sectors.

In this context, an ecomuseum is part of a cultural district that is able to integrate with this productive and industrial system in the territory. These aspects seem to be present, as previously said, even with different degrees of relevance in the three cases analyzed.

A further expansion of the ecomuseum mission development seems to be present. In this case, a holistic approach to the sociocultural development of the local area is emerging (Badia and Deodato, 2015): the promotion of tourism in itself is beyond the scope of the ecomuseum, and even the development of entrepreneurship does not appear as central or primary factors. The ecomuseum task is primarily to improve the perceived quality of the territory, first from its residents. This can help to promote social development, and possibly economic growth, as well as—but not only—through sustainable tourism initiatives. A thorough knowledge and understanding of the natural and man-made components of the territory are the first fundamental elements of this perspective. Such knowledge and understanding, however, are only possible with the real involvement of the community—to be achieved both by local knowledge development initiatives at the local population and through its involvement with participatory

tools. For these reasons, the cases of Argenta and Bagnacavallo seem to be further along this path, whereas Castello di Serravalle is trying to start it.

The holistic approach to the sociocultural development of the local area can strengthen the community feeling that is the basis of every ecomuseum project. With its different ingredients, this perspective attempts to root a sense of responsibility and awareness of an area that becomes a place of culture and potentially socioeconomic development. After all, the goal of the ecomuseum is to improve the quality of life of the local community; the first step in this process should consist precisely of an awareness of the quality aspects of the territory, with its strengths and its critical issues, through an integrated and holistic perspective.

The following Table 1 synthesized the most relevant aspects emerging from the previous analysis and allows for a possible comparison among the three ecomuseums. In particular, the last line—about possible future challenges—contains some possible issues of development for the three institutions, which are the results of the authors’ perceptions after the conclusion of the case studies.

Another point of interest emerges from the comparison of the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the three ecomuseums. For all the cases analyzed, although the pandemic remains an event that has had a tragic impact on communities, from the point of view of ecomuseum management, it has been able to activate proactive response paths that have allowed certain improvements in management, especially based on the use of new technologies, both in dialogue with the community and between internal stakeholders.

With reference to the second profile, the role of the management tools, the cases present similar results (i.e., this kind of instrument is very little used). Fundamentally, three orders of motivation are behind this circumstance:

- Lack of skills
- Insufficient resources (financial and human)

TABLE 1 A comparison among the three case studies.

	Argenta	Bagnacavallo	Castello di Serravalle
Managing body	Municipality of Argenta (direct management) through its offices	Orientation and control by the Municipality of Bagnacavallo and management by the Association “Civiltà Erbe Palustri”	Municipality of Valsamoggia through its Foundation “Rocca dei Bentivoglio” + operational role of the Association “Terre di Jacopino”
Main goals	Socioeconomic development of the territory, rediscovery of ancient places and traditions, and community involvement	Sustainable and slow tourism, rediscovery of ancient places and traditions, and community involvement	Sustainable and slow tourism, enhancement of local food and wine, and intergenerational dialogue
COVID-19 pandemic impact	The ecomuseum has fostered the population’s desire for encounter and dialogue	The ecomuseum has maintained a constant dialogue with its reference public and has proposed many initiatives	The dimension of intergenerational dialogue within the ecomuseum has grown and has led to the development of new initiatives
Future challenges	To improve the online dialogue channels and to develop a stronger management structure	To preserve the legacy of its intangible heritage and to strengthen the managerial dimension	To reinforce the dialogue with other stakeholder of the territory and to develop new routes and itineraries outside the exhibition venue

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

- Incomplete perception of the usefulness or need for such tools

The first motivation is actually a problem, which often emerges in the context of museum studies and is present mainly in the cases of Argenta and Bagnacavallo. The second motivation represents an evident problem in organizational structures of a few dimensions, and it has emerged from the cases of Argenta and Castello di Serravalle. Finally, the third order of motivation can lead to problems when management is unable to understand the importance of these tools for the stronger development of its structure. As proposed by some academic literature, a possible solution to these problems relates to overcoming the dimensional limits of the governance structures of these ecomuseum realities. The problem of the size of the ecomuseums and their funding systems requires further development. The problem with the size scale concerns cultural institutions in general (Donato, 2013). The ecomuseum, by its nature, cannot be separated from being rooted in small realities characterized by low population density and difficult access to financial resources. Overcoming the reduced scale of ecomuseums would mean, in some cases, overcoming the proper meaning of the ecomuseum; therefore, this is not the correct way to go through. A correct solution in this regard would appear instead to develop (and in the experience of the Ecomuseum of Argenta is interesting) a system of networking and institutional partnerships with other ecomuseums or similar situations that would allow the increase of the critical mass and the political weight of the ecomuseum without distorting its original meaning. This idea is fully consistent with the studies that proposed a multilevel governance perspective for the management of cultural heritage (Bonet and Donato, 2011). A possible further development of these ideas could consist of analyzing the opportunities for full adoption of a perspective of collaborative governance in the ecomuseum context (Jeon and Kim, 2021).

Conclusion

Starting from the considerations set out in the previous section, this concluding section intends to carry out an analysis of the possibilities for the future development of this research, starting from the key concept that the proposed study was exploratory (i.e., aimed at validating the possibility of expanding the hypotheses here formulated in different contexts). First, the research was able to highlight only that in the cases, there was a scarce presence, or even the absence, of appropriate managerial tools suitable for supporting the development of ecomuseum strategies. The development of this study in new contexts of analysis could start from the observation of ecomuseum realities, if existing, in which such tools, such as performance measurement systems or non-financial reporting systems, have been developed.

Regarding this last aspect, the role of non-financial reporting, it primarily represents an accountability tool that appears to be

particularly appropriated in an ecomuseum context, as suggested in previous works (Magliacani, 2015). A full involvement of the community is represented not only by citizen adhesion to the activities proposed by the ecomuseum, but it is also fully realized when some form of transparent communication to the community of the activities carried out—and related to the use of public financial resources—is provided.

A further point for future research can be represented by the role played by the COVID-19 pandemic with reference to the topics developed in this work. Some authors have already produced preliminary studies that have highlighted how ecomuseums played a key role in supporting local communities in certain contexts, precisely during the pandemic period (Santo et al., 2021). These considerations seem to deserve further study, not only with a perspective aimed at what happened in the past but also to understand what lessons the pandemic period has produced in the ecomuseum sector, with reference to the ability of ecomuseums to know how to interpret and deal with moments of unexpected crisis.

In conclusion, this work also has some limitations. First, it considered a single geographical context (Emilia Romagna Region, Italy), so the results could be influenced by the specificities of the identified territorial context. Second, the work has considered only the perspective of the ecomuseum managers, but a potential development of the research could consider the point of view of the people involved in the ecomuseum activities.

Author's note

This work is a new and revised version of: Badia Francesco, Deodato Giuditta, (2015), Strategic Profiles of Ecomuseum Management and Community Involvement in Italy, presented at the 6th Research Session of the 23rd Encatc Annual Conference “The Ecology of Culture: Community Engagement, Co-creation, Cross Fertilization,” held in Lecce, 21–23 October 2015, and published into the Conference Proceedings with ISBN code 9789299003626, pp. 31–46.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

Conducted experiments: FB; participated in research conception and design: FB and FD; wrote and drafted the manuscript: FB; critical revision of the article: FB and FD;

performed data analysis: FB; contributed to writing the manuscript: FB and FD. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Acknowledgments

The authors express their sincere thanks to Nerina Baldi and Benedetta Bolognesi of the Ecomuseum of Argenta, Maria Rosa Bagnari of the Ecomuseum of Bagnacavallo, Luigi Vezzadini and Rita Nobili of the Ecomuseum of Castello di Serravalle, and the colleagues Barbara Caravita and Giuditta Deodato for the relevant suggestions and ideas provided regarding research and practice in the ecomuseum field. The contributions provided by all the subjects cited here were a source of inspiration for this work.

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 06 November 2023

ACCEPTED 07 November 2023

PUBLISHED 06 December 2023

CITATION

Lidstone G, Cogliandro Beyens GL and Borin E (2023), In Memoriam: Professor Fabio Donato (1969–2023).

Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 13:12385.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2023.12385

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In Memoriam: Professor Fabio Donato (1969–2023)

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KEYWORDS

Fabio Donato, cultural and creative ecosystems, models of governance and management in the cultural and creative sector, cultural heritage networks, cultural policy, cultural tourism, in memoriam

The communities of researchers and academics in cultural management and policy remain shocked and saddened by the recent passing of Professor Fabio Donato (26.07.1969–15.10.2023), a renowned academic and beloved colleague, friend, and father.

Professor Donato was an internationally recognized academic and researcher in arts and cultural management. Over the years, his commitment and dedication have significantly contributed to the theoretical and scientific discussion within the cultural and creative sector and to policy-making and decision-making on research and innovation at the European level.

Educated at the University of Pisa (Italy), Fabio Donato has worked since 2001 for the Department of Economics and Management of the University of Ferrara (Italy), where he became a full professor in 2007. Within the University of Ferrara, he held various roles, including Director of the Ferrara International School on Culture, Innovation, and Sustainable Development (2008–2011), Director of the Doctoral School in Humanities and Society at the University of Ferrara (2009–2013), Deputy-Director of the Department of Economics and Management and Director of the MuSeC—Master in Cultural Management together with Prof. Anna Maria Visser (2005–2017). During his career, he has authored around 100 scientific contributions. After an initial interest in the management of public services, Fabio focused mainly on studying the cultural and creative sectors. In Italy, he has been among the main advocates of the application of managerial approaches to cultural heritage, promoting and studying the introduction and evolution of performance measurement systems applied to cultural heritage organizations. His contribution to the theoretical and professional discussion in this field was instrumental in promoting the need for a collaborative, ecosystem, and holistic approach to the cultural and creative field, which could foster dialogue, civic participation, and collaboration between the various actors operating in the cultural and creative subsectors and beyond. These issues have become key themes in political and academic discussions in the following years and are still highly topical.

This e-book collects his contributions published in the EJCMP, which he co-founded in 2011, which represent the evolution of his thinking over the last decade. In his article “*The Financial Crisis and its Impact on the Current Models of Governance and Management of the Cultural Sector in Europe*” (published in 2011 in the first volume and issue of the journal and co-written with Prof. Lluís Bonet), he invites us to interpret

the 2008 financial and economic crisis as an opportunity to rethink the governance systems and management models of the cultural sector, in a “meso” (territorial) perspective, open to the various local stakeholders and based on the logic of collaboration and creation of territorial systems.

The “multiscale” approach, proposed in much of Fabio’s production, is visible in the concept of cultural ecosystem and his focus on cultural networks (as in the paper *“Developing local cultural networks: the case of Dante 2021 in Ravenna,”* co-written with Alessia Patuelli). His attention to the link between culture and territory is well represented in his studies on ecomuseums (*“Management perspectives for ecomuseums effectiveness: a holistic approach to sociocultural development of local areas,”* co-written with Francesco Badia). He studied participatory governance and was interested in an approach to heritage management also based on bottom-up stimuli from the communities and citizens, which could involve civil society in a transformative perspective (as visible in the paper *“Governance of cultural heritage: towards participatory approaches,”* co-authored with Sakarias Sokka, Francesco Badia, and Anita Kangas).

His interest in the evolution of European policies is well underlined in his scientific contributions published since 2018, including the reflection on the long-term impact of European initiatives such as the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 (as in the paper *“What is the legacy of the European Year of Cultural Heritage? A long way from cultural policies towards innovative cultural management models,”* co-authored with Elena Borin).

In deed, concurrently with his career in academia, Fabio had also played an active role in the development of the policy discussions concerning research and innovation at the European level, in line with his interest in the promotion of research and a strong belief in the key role of institutions. After having served as president of the technical-scientific committee “Museums and the Economy of Culture” of the Mibact (Italian

Ministry for Cultural Heritage, Environment and Tourism) and member of Italy’s Higher Council for Cultural and Landscape Heritage, since 2017 Fabio has taken up the position of Scientific Counsellor to the Permanent Representation of Italy to the EU. Fabio believed in the value of diplomacy and negotiation and in a vision of research and innovation that could benefit all European member states. Over the years, his commitment and dedication made a decisive contribution to policymaking and decision-making, enhancing innovation in research at the Italian and European levels.

We would also like to remember Fabio for his prominent role within ENCATC. Fabio has served in the ENCATC network with strong commitment and passion from 2005 till 2019. During that time, he made an invaluable contribution to the global academic and research community: as a Board Member from 2009 to 2015, he co-designed and launched the ENCATC European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy in 2011, and the Education and Research Sessions in 2013. In 2022, he was appointed by the ENCATC Board, Editor-in-Chief of the European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy after his proposal to have it published by top academic publisher Frontiers, showing visionary commitment to open science and taking the publication to an unprecedented international dimension.

This e-book is intended to be a moment to remember his thoughts, thank him for his contribution, and emphasize how his legacy can stimulate the international scientific community to continue reflecting on the issues he held dear.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.



OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 15 September 2023

ACCEPTED 05 December 2023

PUBLISHED 18 December 2023

CITATION

Bonet L and Rykkja A (2023), Why is managerial shared leadership in creative organizations a more resilient, transparent, open, and generous constellation? A case analysis approach. *Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic.* 13:12056. doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2023.12056

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Why is managerial shared leadership in creative organizations a more resilient, transparent, open, and generous constellation? A case analysis approach

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Leadership models in the cultural and creative sectors are frequently based on collective, shared, or distributed structures. In recent decades, research on these plural forms has yielded insights in the form of typological models and empirical studies. This article seeks to examine two issues in the literature on plural leadership that have received insufficient attention. The first is how cultural organizations combine and integrate multiple leadership models. The use of horizontal co-leadership at the macro (organisational) level alongside either vertical or horizontal leadership of embedded projects managed by teams is one example. Little is known about how the existence of distinct leadership styles at the macro and meso levels influences the career paths of individuals and organizations. The second is an inquiry into the evolution of leadership models in cultural organizations over time. This is especially important when an organisation transitions from a startup to a successful enterprise and expands its operations internationally. To empirically investigate these issues, we propose a single case study of Snøhetta, a multinational architecture firm. The results of this case study allow for a better understanding of how forms of collaborative leadership style can influence the career paths of people and organizations, and how it is possible to find a balance between the paradoxical institutional logic on which management and leadership of creativity is based. In other words, how the constellations of relationships that are generated make organizations with this leadership style more resilient and sustainable by virtue of being more transparent, open, and generous.

KEYWORDS

plural leadership, creative entrepreneurship, creative leadership, international studio, architecture and design

Introduction

Recent contributions to the literature on arts and cultural management situate cultural leaders as social agents (Price, 2017), whose capacity to enable artistic work to flourish (Mandel, 2017) may be explained by talent for advocacy and facilitation (Sutherland and Gosling, 2010). As individuals, cultural leaders are revered because they are thought to be exceptional individuals with charismatic personalities (Nisbett and Walmsley, 2016). Professionally, they are esteemed for their ability to balance a somewhat challenging juxtaposition of artistic, creative, and economic objectives (Lampel et al., 2000; DeFillippi et al., 2007). In a nutshell, the personality of a cultural leader unites the traits of an entrepreneur (success at the project or organisational level) who is a generous (attentive to the needs of the field or sector) public figure (demonstrates interest in larger societal issues and public concerns) (Price, 2017).

However, the emphasis on the individual traits of leaders may obfuscate significant aspects of the actual managerial models and leadership configurations utilised in the cultural and creative sectors. One important consideration is that so-called collective, plural, or shared models of leadership between two or more people have over time become the standard executive constellation (Hodgson et al., 1965) within management for cultural and creative organizations in many countries (Roeseng, 2008; Reid and Karambayya, 2009; Fjellvaer, 2010). Common configurations at the tops of organizations are premised on pluralistic models with two or more individuals having joint responsibility of leading the organisation with separate managerial areas of responsibility (Denis et al., 2012; Gibeau et al., 2016).

Another factor that may condition leadership styles and performance is that cultural and creative organizations' main line of activity is the acquisition, management, and execution of temporary projects (Gann and Salter, 2000; Grabher, 2002). Bureaucratic models and organisational structures therefore tend towards horizontal rather than vertical alignment. This is because horizontal structures are better for facilitating the management and leadership of temporary projects (Müller et al., 2018), whilst providing intra-organisational infrastructure and resources that facilitate and support project work (Grabher, 2002; Cohendet and Simon, 2007).

Further, leadership by constellations within project-driven horizontal structures may prove to be challenging. This could be related to cultural differences across geographic contexts (Mandel, 2017; King et al., 2019); conflicts between leaders (Reid and Karambayya, 2009); or intra-organisational tensions between the need for creative autonomy (of the project teams and their members) and performance at the organisational level (Lampel et al., 2000; Gilson et al., 2015). Finally, the variety of relationships with external stakeholders (from providers to competitors, politicians, or media) in project-based

organizations implies that there is not a single hierarchical path or procedure, but several often-complementary relations (more or less dissonant) to track and monitor. Solutions are therefore most likely to be both customised and context-specific, as there are few standard recipes or procedures to draw upon (Cohendet and Simon, 2007).

It should therefore be of no surprise that leadership and management of cultural organizations requires capacity to address competing institutional logics (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Peterson and DiMaggio, 1986; Thornton et al., 2008). Among those identified we find the actual influence of both internal and external stakeholders on the mission, goals, strategy, and resource of the organization; its governance model, defined both by the ownership or legal nature and by how priorities are set, or the executive management is elected (or changed); the values of the organization and its professionals; and obviously, its history and evolution. Others have synthesised these into five logics as they relate to profession, mission, bureaucratic, resource and business aspects of leadership and governance (Fjellvaer, 2010).

Thus, our starting rationale is an interest in assessing the efficiency and potential of one of the perspectives on plural leadership constellations that the literature has conceptualised: *managerial shared leadership* (Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021). How can managerial shared leadership help strike a balance between the paradoxical institutional logics management and leadership of creativity is premised upon? Is this constellation more resilient because they are considered more transparent, open, and generous? Our knowledge of creative and cultural sector organizations has yet to yield in-depth insight into the way co-leadership at the top is combined with other plural models at the embedded level of temporary projects. Most of the literature consider either plural leadership forms at the top and their impact [some examples are Roeseng (2008), Reid and Karambaya (2009), Nisbett and Walmsley (2016)] or leadership of teams managing an organisation's portfolio of temporary projects (Grabher, 2002; Müller et al., 2018). Combining levels of analysis, by considering plural leadership of an organisation in tandem with how leadership constellations at the top facilitate or hamper the leadership and management of intra-organisational project teams is less common. Drawing together these perspectives would enable the study of cultural leadership as a confluence of top-down (formally imposed) structural influence together with interactional and emergent bottom-up strategies.

An added benefit of combining perspectives is that it will enable us to focus on two issues in the broader literature on plural leadership, of which managerial shared leadership is a part that has received inadequate attention. The first is how cultural organizations combine and integrate multiple leadership models. The second is an inquiry into the evolution of leadership models in cultural organizations over time. This is especially important when an organisation transitions from a

startup to a successful enterprise and expands its operations internationally.

To examine these issues, we propose a case study based on the international architecture firm Snøhetta. The rationale for our choice is linked to some of the company principles—sustainability, uniqueness, generosity through shared public spaces, collaborative work, and co-creation inside the team and with the clients. These organisational values are not common either in creative industry firms or in society in general. Even as of 2019 before COVID, Snøhetta justifies the rationale of adhering to these principles by showing how an entrepreneurial creative studio can be successful in applying ‘soft’ values and approaches to work in very competitive market environments. We therefore believe the organisation provides an interesting setting for studying the use of managerial shared leadership and its potential resilience.

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, we outline the theoretical framework, based on a review of recent literature on plural leadership models. Following that, we detail our methodology, data collection and analysis procedures, the results from the case study, and the discussion and conclusions in the following sections.

Literature review

In this literature review, the concepts and approaches to researching leadership at the organisational or embedded project level will be presented and discussed. The review will then transition to a discussion of some of the competing logics and paradoxes that leaders and managers of cultural organizations will have to confront in the course of their work. Defining leadership and management functions, as justified by the tensions and paradoxes faced by cultural and creative organizations, may provide the framework and concepts for an analysis of managerial shared leadership within these organizations.

Whether “manager” and “leader” refer to the same or different categories of people remains a point of contention in the literature. People are split on whether or not these two functions are distinct jobs in and of themselves (Bolden, 2004). In the first case, there are those who take the position that leaders are distinguishable from managers because of their personalities (Burns et al., 2010) and exceptional ability to formulate organisational visions and direction, engender confidence, and effect the required change despite adversity (Kotter, 1996; Bolden et al., 2011, pp. 25–30). This approach may also include some who correlate leadership with a capacity to protect artistic autonomy and work from instrumental concerns and market imperatives (Royseng, 2008). In the latter faction, there are those who consider management to be a profession with numerous facets. As an illustration of this school of thought, Mintzberg (1973) asserts that leadership is only one of the many responsibilities of a manager. This is

congruent with the view articulated by Döös and Wilhelmson (2021) that some have a semantic preference for the term leader over manager, even though both jobs are linked in practise. Individuals’ placement in a given group is always specific to their circumstances and the context wherein the organisation they represent is active. In brief, this position implies that while we believe that not every leader is a good manager, some managers can have the makings of future leaders. For practical purposes, it is difficult to compartmentalise roles: people may, depending on the circumstances, need to act as either leaders, managers, or both. As the focus of the article is on the interrelationship between both roles, we will not seek to differentiate between leaders and managers. The second consideration is the usage of terminology such as *model* or *constellation* to describe how to arrange leadership and managerial functions. As an alternative to model, a *constellation* describes how and in what way the various tasks and responsibilities associated with these functions are being divided between people (Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021). The “executive role constellation” as a conceptual framework to analyse collective or shared leadership by teams consists of three dimensions: “specialisation,” “differentiation,” and “complementarity” (Hodgson et al., 1965). When combined, they yield a useful framework for analysing managerial configurations within the shared role space (Gibeau et al., 2016). Specialisation is the extent to which each individual’s roles are broad and comprehensive or focused on specific areas. The differentiation dimension is the degree to which roles overlap, creating (or not creating) zones of mutual replacement or duplication. Complementarity can be broken down into two components: how well the people’s duties overlap, and how well they are able to coordinate their efforts within the shared role area. Given that constellation, as defined, is a more conceptually dense term than the neutral model, the article uses constellation to refer to the way the responsibility for leading an organisation is distributed among people in leadership roles and implemented in practise.

Having established our understanding of leadership, management, and possible ways to assess constellations within which they manifest as managerially shared forms of leadership, we turn to the question of how to define and interpret the variety of so-called plural forms of leadership in the next section.

Plural forms of leadership—an overview

It is not an easy task to make sense of the concepts of leadership constellations that involve more than a unitary leader at the top of an organisation. As Table 1 indicate, there are at least five different conceptualisations, each with an established research stream, that partly overlap and do not always speak with one another. What binds them together is that they focus on forms of leadership and managerial practice in the *plural*, by which it is inferred that the actual responsibility can

TABLE 1 Examples of concepts and definitions of plural types of leadership.

Concept	Definition	Analytical perspective	Focus and emphasis	Contributions
Distributed Leadership	A leadership approach whereby responsibility is dissociated from formal organisational roles, and people at all levels are given the opportunity to influence the overall direction and functioning of the organisation. Bolden et al. (2011)	How to diffuse leadership away from the organization's apex to develop leadership practises throughout the entire organisation	- Focus on understanding and explaining the role and nature of distributed leadership and how the approach can contribute to organisational change - Emphasis on how leadership as a practice is developed interactively and situations where it is enacted (organisation as unit of analysis)	Spillane and Diamond (2007) , Bolden (2011) , Bolden and Donato (2011)
Shared Leadership	A dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both Pearce and Conger (2003)	How leadership responsibilities are shared or divided among project team members through either formal designation or interactive emergence	- Focus on leadership as an emergent group-based phenomenon where influence is dispersed and configuration is horizontal, whereby group members take on tasks usually handled by designated or elected leaders - Emphasis on room for individual action within the dynamic frame provided by group dynamics	Pearce and Conger (2003) , Pearce (2004) , Müller et al. (2018) , Zhu et al. (2018)
Co-Leadership	A leadership constellation where a group of two, three, or more people situated or pooled at the top leads an organisation Alvarez and Svejnova (2005) , Denis et al. (2012)	How co-leadership constellations can be considering effective managerial structures, adept at navigating intraorganizational complexity, and balance competing tensions	- Focus on acknowledging that leadership constellations can have more than two people, and that these constellations are plural in nature, e.g., leadership can be shared, distributed, or combined in different ways - Emphasis on the characteristics of the organizational context within which co-leadership takes place. These settings are defined as having multiple (organisational) objectives, diffuse power structures, and knowledge-based work processes (Denis et al., 2007)	Alvarez and Svejnova (2005) , Denis et al. (2012) , Sergi et al. (2017) , Reid and Fjellvæ (2022)
Dual Leadership	A management structure in which two leaders of equal standing divide the top management position and functions between them so that each is responsible for different organizational domains. Fjellvæ (2010)	How leaders relate to one another to achieve organisational goals and avoid conflict	- Focus on potential for conflict and how to avoid it. Largely premised on leader being mandated or appointed by a board - Emphasis on competing logics (e.g., tension between art and commerce)	Reid and Karambaya (2009) , Fjellvæ (2010) , Reid and Karambaya (2016) , Gibeau et al. (2016)
Managerial Shared Leadership	A constellation with a few individuals being mutually responsible for the tasks (administration, leadership towards goals, and organising working conditions for others) included in holding a managerial position. Döös and Wilhelmson (2021, p.717)	How leadership in practice either emerges within or is being imposed upon a constellation of any number of managers sharing responsibilities	- Focus on how leadership constellations are structured rather than the number of people and their relationship with one another - Emphasis on both how these structures relate to organisational aspects (equality (of standing), work tasks, and organisational units)	Döös and Wilhelmson (2021)

be shared or distributed throughout an organisation, always with two or more people involved as a part of the constellation ([Denis et al., 2012](#); [Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021](#)).

As an example of the confusion, take the article by [Gibeau et al. \(2016\)](#) that defines co-leadership as situations where “... two people might successfully share an organizational leadership role on an equal footing.” (p.225). Conversely, another definition

of co-leadership situates the practice as a constellation that also includes “...trios or other smaller groups” ([Reid and Fjellvæ, 2022](#)). This may be explained by the fact that co-leadership as a plural construct is an evolution of an earlier concept of dual leadership ([Reid and Karambaya, 2009](#); [Fjellvæ, 2010](#)) which focused on dyads of leaders in specific organizations from particular sectors, of which museums ([Fjellvæ, 2010](#)) and

performing arts organizations (Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021) are interesting and relevant settings in the present context. However, the literature on co-leadership (Reid and Fjellvæ, 2022) is critical of the concept of managerial shared leadership. This is because they see the concept as a conflation of shared leadership with co-leadership by a formally defined leadership constellation.

Part of the criticism can be explained by the previous research. The literature on management of cultural and creative organizations has put more emphasis in investigating different forms of behaviour relative to the more artistic and creative output rather than profile and strategies of managerial stratum (Peltoniemi, 2015). Another is the level of analysis and concerns of the different traditions detailed in Table 1. The older notions of shared and distributed leadership are primarily concerned with investigating and theorising leadership and management practise that diffuse horizontally, or bottom-up (Pearce, 2004; Bolden, 2011; Ebbes and Wijnberg, 2012), rather than models vertically imposed by the constellation leading from the top (Fjellvæ, 2010). Indeed, as others have pointed out, the co- and dual-leadership literature has a particular affinity with how to establish trust and/or avoid conflicts between leaders and managers of an organisation (Ebbes and Wijnberg, 2017). Thus, the overlap has in practice more to do with whether the level of analysis focuses on teams working on projects (Gann and Salter, 2000; Grabher, 2002) or an organisation (Reid and Fjellvæ, 2022), or whether the leadership constellation is imposed via selection or emergent (Denis et al., 2012). Thus, studying the efficacy and efficiency of managerial constellations, two aspects require consideration. First, the structural form of the constellation of leaders (i.e., whether the constellation has a joint, functional, horizontal, or vertical orientation) and the formal organisational aspects (i.e., if the managers are equals or non-equals hierarchically, if the area of influence is within or across organisational units, and if tasks are merged or divided) (Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021).

In brief, combining a perspective of the constellation with these organisational aspects is what distinguishes managerial shared leadership as a concept: it bridges these concerns. Since our interest is in analysing the resilience and potential of horizontal leadership models premised on autonomous teams that manage their work on temporary projects across units with a different constellation leading the organisation overall, we believe there is some purchase in adopting the plural concept of managerial shared leadership in the article.

In the next section, we turn to some of the challenges encountered by those with managerial responsibilities working within this model.

The challenges facing cultural leaders and managers: balancing paradoxes

As discussed in the preceding section, there are various constellations of plural leadership based on distributed (Ebbes and Wijnberg, 2017), shared (Bolden, 2011), or

collective (Reid and Fjellvæ, 2022) configurations with varying levels of embeddedness (Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021) in organisations. These constellations in and by themselves, however, do not explain why an organisation or a project fails or succeeds. Failure and success are heavily influenced by the type of organisation and the nature of the ventures. For example, entrepreneurial cultural organisations founded by one individual or a group of cultural entrepreneurs that become growing concerns over time (DiMaggio, 1982) differ from established non-profit arts and cultural organisations whose leaders are chosen and appointed by boards for a set period of time (Reid and Karambayya, 2009).

A richer analysis may therefore want to consider contextual issues that may or may not influence the performance of managerial shared leadership constellations. Some of these variables, frequently tied to organisational or project-specific objectives, are the geographical political and cultural framework an organisation is embedded in, cultural sector specificities, the legal form of entities (public, profitability), organizational philosophy/model (hierarchical, self-managed, by project ...), size of the organization, and maturity of the organization or project (start-up vs. consolidated organization). This section of the review will discuss some of these.

Whilst managers obviously want to realize organizational objectives, their ambitions for outcomes may conflict with some or all the plural objectives of the professionals involved in artistic or creative work (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Lampel et al., 2000; DeFillippi et al., 2007). In small or newly created organizations, i.e., entrepreneurial organisations, the objectives of teams and organization are generally well aligned. Differences are usually resolved with the departure of those partners who are dissatisfied with the developed mission and strategy adopted by the organization. As an organization grows and expands operations, the differences between its interests and those of its professional teams must by necessity be aligned to better ensure successful outcomes. This requires balancing the need to maintain and continue attracting talent while guaranteeing the sustainability and viability of the organisation's project. Thus, in situations faced by many cultural organisations where creativity is at the core and outcomes are both complex and uncertain, horizontal approaches to leadership work well because their use dictates intensive interaction among team members (Müller et al., 2018). These approaches develop naturally through practice in many cultural organisations because of the founders' natural drive and inspirational personalities. These character traits help cultural managers keep track of the overall vision and direction, manage fairness in leadership assignments, and trigger progression by asking the team for solutions (Bolden, 2011). Delegating some of the responsibility and initiative will thus provide a setting for working collaboratively to develop balanced solutions.

The management of creative resources, both tangible and intangible, is thus one of the most significant obstacles facing

managers of organizations in the cultural and creative sectors (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007). As a result of the difficulties inherent in carrying out these responsibilities (Lampel et al., 2000), management becomes a balancing act when trying to strike an equilibrium between either economic results or mission fulfilment, even in the case of cultural and creative for-profit organisations. Adding to the intricacy is the potential influence of exogenous factors on managerial performance, which further complicates the task of balancing these aspects. Differences in national contexts, policy regimes, governance models, organisational objectives, and the demand for transparency are just a few examples (Mandel, 2017; King et al., 2019).

Ambidextrous leadership has been discussed in the literature as one explanation of how to succeed operationally with leadership and management of creativity (Rosing et al., 2023). A style based on ambidexterity necessitates approaches that are both open enough to allow for creative experimentation while also closed enough to allow for effective implementation control. One example of what may constitute ambidextrous leadership and management is the development of organisational systems that encourage the efficient recruitment, retention, and performance of creative employees without stifling them (Cohendet and Simon, 2007).

Nonetheless, our concern is on the challenges faced by cultural managers when acting as ambidextrous leaders. Another strand of the literature has formally conceptualised these as the paradoxes of cultural management (DeFillippi et al., 2007), defined as:

“...a group of conditions that lead to contradiction or defy intuition. Paradoxes prompt exploration of whether the conditions that are inferred are actually true. A paradox sparks further inquiry and the recognition of assumptions and ambiguities. The exploration prompted by paradox leads to rethinking and considering the phenomena at hand.” (p.514).

Four paradoxes have been identified: the difference paradox (the need to craft or standardise practises; the balance between creativity and economic efficiency); the distance paradox (couple or decouple routine work); the globalisation paradox (reconcile or separate local and global arenas of activity); and the identity paradox (creating individual or collective identities, reputations, and careers). These are some of the issues that need to be considered by managers and leaders, whether they are at the “top” of the organisation (Denis et al., 2012) or are embedded as leaders of temporary projects (Grabher, 2002).

Furthermore, in the case of architecture, there is a need to reconcile the “Artist-Entrepreneur Logic” (emphasis on architects’ roles as artists and creative entrepreneurs) and the “Engineer-Manager” Logic (emphasis on architects’ roles as problem solvers and managers who prioritise technology, efficiency, and practicality in their work) (Thornton et al.,

TABLE 2 Overview of the informants.

Name	Function	Office
Informant 1	Chief Executive Officer	Main Office
Informant 2	Creative Manager of country office	Country Office
Informant 3	Country Executive Officer	Country Office
Informant 4	Senior Architect—Project Leader	Main Office
Informant 5	Senior Architect	Country Office
Informant 6	Architect—Board Member	Main Office
Informant 7	Junior Architect	Main Office
Informant 8	Intern	Country Office
Kjetil	Founding Architect	Main Office

2005). Depending on conditions, (e.g., the historical epoch, societal context, and economic factors) one of these logics becomes the most prominent, influencing the architectural styles and approaches of that time. In both cases, however, logics and paradoxes follow a cyclical nature of shifts, oscillating between prioritizing one pole of the continuum (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Peterson and DiMaggio, 1986; Thornton et al., 2005). This cyclical pattern has been a defining characteristic of not just the architectural profession’s evolution, but the cultural sector overall (Bonet and Donato, 2011; Bonet and Négrier, 2018).

Thus, being able to juxtapose and balance logics that require ambidextrous approaches (Rosing et al., 2023), through managerial shared forms of leadership is one theoretical explanation to successful leadership styles and organisational performance.

Methods

The study was conducted as a single case study with embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2018). By a single case-study with embedded units of analysis, we mean the identification of different groups within the organisation (e.g., top, and middle management, administrative staff, architects, and interns) across units. As an example, the cases and informants represented the managerial shared leadership of the organisation, the manager of a country office, architects and interns working on project teams with shared and distributed models, alongside administration in charge of defining and structuring management and leadership models. Who the informants were are detailed in Table 2.

A case study is a research method that focuses on the intensity (details and information richness) of an analysis of a defined bounded unit (a person, community, or organisation) in relation to developments and context (where and when of the setting) (Flyvbjerg et al., 2011). The exploratory dimension is prominent in this study because we seek to understand how a phenomenon (managerial shared leadership) can be used to

balance dichotomous conflicting logics. Furthermore, a case study elucidates the contextual conditions that may (or may not) cause a phenomenon to occur, thereby identifying links between processes and outcomes. Therefore, it is an appropriate and justified methodology for a study investigating managerial shared leadership constellations in an international architecture firm. This is because the case study approach has been found suited for answering questions about *how* something was initiated or occurred in a particular way (Flyvbjerg et al., 2011; Yin, 2018). In addition, the emphasis on data depth and richness provides a level of insight that may aid in the advancement of the research field by serving as input for the development of new hypotheses and research questions (Flyvbjerg et al., 2011).

Evidently, a qualitative case study approach has some limitations. While findings from one or a few case studies may contradict and thus call into question established knowledge and assumptions (Flyvbjerg, 2006), generalisations about a population or universe are not possible. Case study generalisation is typically based on contrasting findings to corroborate or refute established theory, also known as analytical generalisations (Yin, 2018).

To ensure transparency and possibilities for replication, the study was designed as a stepwise process with five phases. These were 1) negotiating access, 2) collecting data, 3) analysis and interpretation, 4) contrasting results and findings with theory, and 5) writing the case report. Rather than strictly following a predefined recipe (Pan and Tan, 2011; Yin, 2018), this simplified procedure took cues and inspiration from examples from best practice, premised on a belief that the most important methodological principle is transparency of processes to enable replication.

We began by negotiating access to Snøhetta, by pitching the idea of conducting research on their leadership constellations. The rationale for selecting Snøhetta was a lack of case studies on entrepreneurial creative organisations in the arts and cultural management literature, which, with notable exceptions (Alvarez and Svejnova, 2005; Cohendet and Simon, 2007; Ebbers and Wijnberg, 2017) primarily focuses on the arts end of the cultural and creative sectors, through empirical research into art museums and performing arts organisations (Royseng, 2008; Reid and Karambayya, 2009; Fjellvaer, 2010; Mandel, 2017; Byrnes and Brkić, 2019; Reid and Fjellvæ, 2022).

After being granted access, data was gathered through interviews and participant observations during two field trips: one to the main office and another to one of the country offices. In-person interviews lasting 60–120 min were conducted while we observed how people worked and interacted, through participating in communal activities such as having lunch with the staff.

The analytical strategy used was a proprietary take on thematic analysis that included manual coding and categorization of notes and interview transcripts. Thematic

analysis has been described as a “rather basic, flexible tool” that entails coding the data by assigning “labels to segments of potentially relevant data.” (Herzog et al., 2019) We used close reading to sort fragments and chunks of texts gradually and iteratively into different thematic categories. The purpose of iteration was to reduce the number of thematic codes and categories.

Two choices were made to avoid biases in interpretations. First, it was decided to incorporate triangulation of data sources into the research design by including informants with varying levels of managerial responsibility, from various departments and offices, and with varying levels of seniority. Second, based on the reporting rationale, it was decided to write up the case study in a narrative style, with extensive use of quotations. The justifications were, on the one hand, that the reporting style helped to better illustrate the analysis process (Eldh et al., 2020), while also ensuring transparency by allowing the reader(s) to make their own decisions about whether our interpretations of the findings of the themes accurately reflect the participants’ accounts (Noble and Smith, 2015).

Following this largely inductive approach to collecting and analysing data, the identified data categories and concepts were compared to literature and theories of cultural management and leadership. The rationale was to ensure alignment between theory and data, as well as analytical (theoretical) validity and generalizability relative to our interpretations (Pan and Tan, 2011).

Based on this process, it was decided to focus the case reporting on three thematic areas: Snøhetta’s (as an organization’s) leadership constellation, project management and leadership, and recruitment. The findings are presented in the following section.

Results from the case

Introduction and presentation

Snøhetta is an international architecture and design studio premised on a holistic, horizontal, and co-creative organisational model. It employed 230 professionals in 2019, located in seven permanent offices (Oslo, New York, Hong Kong, Adelaide, Paris, San Francisco, and Innsbruck) and multiple global project offices. These people were at the time simultaneously involved in 300 projects and 30 building sites.

Snøhetta is a conceptual and philosophical grounding of people taking part in projects. The studio is an unusual firm in a highly competitive world of professional architecture. The inherent high risk and uncertainties, and individual choices and preferences of some of the founders, led to some of the colleagues progressively leaving the firm and selling their part. To secure financial stability, Fritt Ord (a Norwegian foundation devoted to supporting freedom of expression and a free press)

became a minority owner in 2016, acquiring a twenty percent stake of the company.

Another particularity is that individual architects and designers do not sign off on their designs and buildings. Different professionals (from administrative staff to designers, architects, and technicians) work together in teams out of shared, mixed office spaces, with salaries based on a relatively horizontal and transparent pay scale. Instead, the people working for the studio engage in horizontally shared creative processes that lead to precise outputs as well as social outcomes, either in the form of products (the result of design processes and projects) or as places (in the case of architectural processes and landscapes).

The leadership constellations and organizational structures are essentially built on transparent and participatory values. Fortnightly, there are internal meetings where employees can learn about status for ongoing projects and get information on the company's position and financial situation. Additionally, employees have representation at the board level; everyone knows the salary table of the architects (designers' pay scale is governed to a larger degree by market prices).

The organizational leadership constellation of Snøhetta

The evolution of the current leadership constellation of Snøhetta has been shaped and formed by visionary entrepreneurs, based on a Nordic approach to work, and a generational spirit taking a holistic and collective approach to creativity, with emphasis on generosity and social responsibility.

The gradual transition from being an entrepreneurial start-up to Snøhetta's current complex international operation is the combined effects of three main factors. Primarily, the resilient capacity to overcome periodic difficult economic moments, with many high and low conjectures determined in part by the wider economy at large and demand from the construction sector. Secondly, an aptitude for maintaining an artisanal approach to work processes, compatible with developing a distinct brand value, based on a work model and interactions with clients at a very personal level. Thirdly, international expansion and a multidisciplinary approach compatible with strong, value-based local grounding. Those three elements are why Snøhetta has survived and existed for nearly 30 years.

To comply with the logics and demands of these factoring conditions, internal leadership and management of work at the company combines horizontal relationships (everybody's opinion and voice are taken into account, as it corresponds to a creative company) with projects concurrently running according to the specific scope and scale of the task (project managers, project leads, and creative leads working together in constellations premised by the size of the project).

Kjetil has never had any management training. *"I don't think I'd manage anyone. Motivation needs management. Leadership*

needs inspiration. . . How can you actually create game-changing architecture, for instance, that has a deeper meaning, is not game-changing only in the sense of aesthetics, or function, but as a total package and direction in society? How do you put people together that manage to think game-changers? And we found that cannot be managed.

Let me do maybe one diagram (see Figure 1). What I do on the management side is maybe just to create the bottle. And we know there is a bottleneck somewhere for a project, for an organisation. Up here somewhere, there is a goal, maybe. And then we let all the people within the boundaries that they'd been given, spread freely inside this bottle with only one condition. You must move upwards towards the top, like champagne. We sometimes even allow people to move out of the framework. As long as they come back in, it's okay. What we've seen is that those that go straight for this goal, they miss because, in time when you come to this point, the goal is here and not there. If you want to make a game-changer, you have to recognize that you have a moving goal. (. . .) Everyone move in their direction, and at some point, the least important sentence said in a room could be what solves the issue. (. . .) You have people coming together along the goal that is moved in the bottleneck and then actually pulling together into something that then becomes the project exploding out of the bottle. I think that's where we came from."

The company has thus far relied on strong leadership but potentially lacked some management tools in present operations (current projects, international expansion, multidisciplinary approach, and recruitment policy). In addition, Snøhetta appointed an executive leader (CEO), to fulfil some of the challenges. One of the significant challenges of the CEO is to maintain a good work environment, respecting the core values of the company and being able to maintain a competitive company with high brand recognition. This implied filling the position with someone able to put in place structures and oversee the legacy and transition of the company into the future, once the current directors and majority shareholders of the holding company (and the US Company) retire.

Here, the horizontal and communal organisational model, developed by the entrepreneurial leaders, in a specific geographic (Norway) and social (egalitarian) context may present challenges and tensions when transferred to different geographies.

Informant 1's view is that there is a risk that the company sometimes confuses the Norwegian social system with an organisational culture premised on generosity, transparency, and openness. As informant 1 comments: *"We move seats every other year, and we have one table where we all have lunch together, we share toilets. That's how we kind of show our open and transparent culture and then we have the stories we tell. (. . .) So, we start confusing labour issues, which is how much do you earn or about maternity leave, and our company culture."*

Some of these may stem from differences in the perception of roles and diffusion of power. Informant 2 sees his role as leader of a country office as *" . . . creating an environment so that the people*

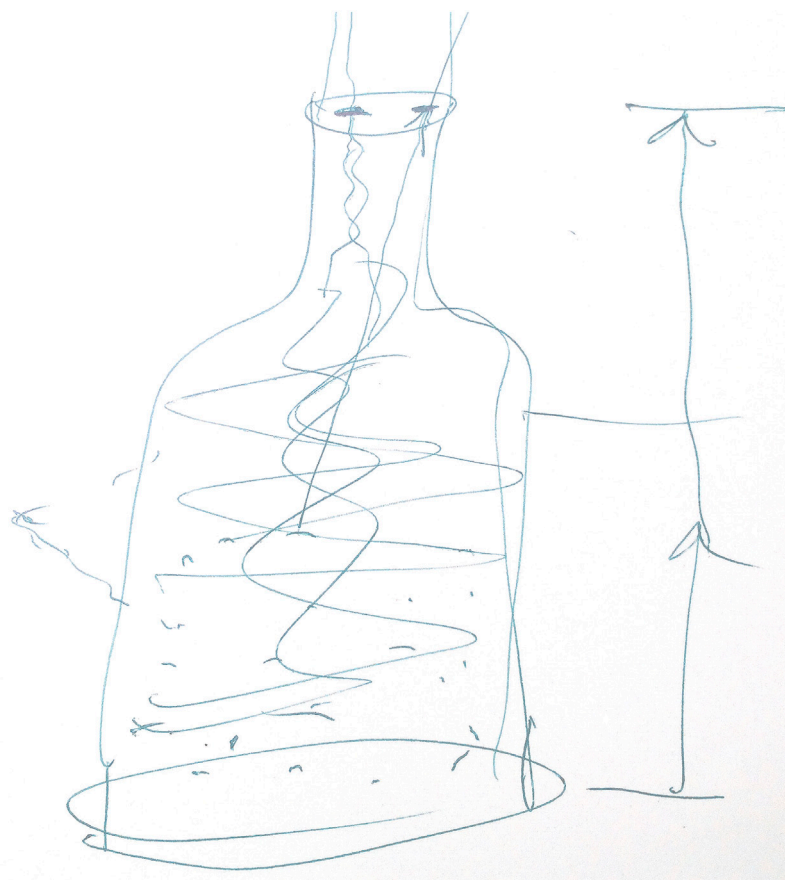


FIGURE 1
Leading creatives: the bottle approach.

who are here like to work together.” The leadership role resembles that of a facilitator, providing an operational space for the employees to unleash creative potential (see Figure 2) by “...organising the boundary conditions, atmospherically as well as economically for them to be able to work.”

The leadership of projects

The logic of projects requires execution and delivery in line with defined budgets and deadlines, something that requires assigning and assuming responsibilities. This has led many to flee from the self-organising chaos generated in very creative processes. Conversely, creative processes need motivation and inspiration, and both grow better in horizontal structures. The output of the balancing act is a tailor-made product, something idiosyncratically Snøhetta, reflecting Snøhetta’s conceptual core values: social engagement, generous features, and game-changing design.

Snøhetta has various categories of project leaders and managers. Small projects with a maximum of four team

members have a creative lead who “owns” both the creative work and the administration of the project. The next level up is a project that is larger in scale and scope and is managed by a project lead. Typically, the project manager does not participate in the conceptual design process, which is delegated to a creative director. Thus, on a functionally shared basis, two individuals will share the managerial responsibility for delivering the project. Larger initiatives involving multiple offices, subcontractors, and a contract value exceeding 10 million euros will be led by a constellation of a project manager, project lead, and a creative leader on their team. Nonetheless, whether the structure is vertical or horizontal is also person dependent. Informant 3 describes an architect working as a project manager in the country office in the following way: “...what (project manager) likes about his job is to make the decision. So, it’s rather conservative. People are working, and (project manager) organizing, structuring, saying yes or no. In other project teams, where the hierarchy is flatter... then they’re all discussing.”

However, there is room for optimisation of constellations. As informant 1 describes, the actual practice of assigning people to constellations is challenging because of the mismatch between



FIGURE 2

Snøhetta office Oslo- 2020.jpg by Gtit-Wiml retrieved and downloaded from Wikimedia Commons is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

capacities to creatively lead design processes and the necessary skills of managing projects. These choices may have economic consequences. *“For larger projects . . . you should probably not be an architect there, you should probably just be a project manager. . . what’s happened is that we’ve kind of mixed all of these things together. We’ve put a poor architect who is a creative lead into something like this. and that’s where money just goes down the drain.”* Cultural perceptions and values can also interfere with the leadership of projects. In the country office, implementing the constellation is challenging. *“We always have this problem of clients being very conservative and hierarchical, and they would only talk to the creative leader (informant 2) . . . , they never want to talk to the project leader”* says informant 3. *“As an example, they would not talk about everything openly with the project leader. About numbers, they mainly talk about numbers with informant 2”*.

For informant 4, the magic starts when everyone gets onboard, and the conceptual work gets underway. *“... It’s not about our creation, something already made by us for a special customer. It’s something we create together, and that is tailor-made for that customer. All our processes are tailored—we are a lot about how to design a process. Not only the buildings but to come up with the results, at the end of the process”*. Kjetil does not believe in the necessity to compromise between social qualities and aesthetically pleasing design. *“A lot of the qualities and the designs come out of the attitude of trying to implement exactly these things into the project, and that is what makes them aesthetically valuable. The offer could not become that part of an aesthetic understanding if it hadn’t been for the social approach. So the aesthetics follow the social approach in many*

ways.” In his opinion, *“there is no contradiction between aesthetics, great experiences, emotional settings and the social ambition of a larger architectural project.”*

Snøhetta is an expensive studio, due to the emphasis on creative processes grounded in the business and work models. People are allowed to spend more time on conceptual work in initial phases. This is, in essence, what brings the prices up. *“If we could get that in half, then we wouldn’t be expensive,”* Informant 1 comments. *“It is a fact here that everyone is allowed to spend a long time on developing a concept, on doing workshops . . . creating concepts and models. We allow that, which makes it more expensive. . . it’s not the fact that we have a huge overhead, it’s actually because we’re allowing people here to spend a lot more time”*. These cost structures are also not well understood by clients in all countries. Informant 3 describes a situation outside of Norway in the following manner: *“... we had one meeting with a client, . . . informant 2 told me that the client said, ‘Well you have no overview, or you always want to invoice, and now you’re here with three people. Why are you here with three people? One would have been enough, and then it’s not that many hours you need for the project.’ And then informant 2 said, ‘Yeah, but that’s how we work in Snøhetta. We take different people to have different perspectives on that. And that’s our creative process.’”*

Recruitment

Success is essentially dependent on one of the P’s: people. Snøhetta is in the lucky position that many professionals would

like to work for the organization. An important recruitment tool to identify suitable candidates for new openings is an expansive database of candidates. According to informant 4, Snøhetta looks for candidates with an ability to collaborate, and general receptiveness to the organisational culture and environment: *“Everyone that comes to our team should feel that they get responsibility. They can flourish, show their talent, and we immediately give everyone much responsibility. As soon as you are on-board, you start collaborating with us. Your skills, your opinions, everything is important to us.”* Part of the strategy is hiring young people *“We want to educate them our self, to grow slowly, with quality.”* The ambitions are to have a group consisting of *“Experienced people together with young people, creating our culture.”*

Recurrent methods are using the employee's networks and internships, in the Oslo as well as the country office. Informant 7 does not believe these strategies are exceptional, although timing and luck may play a part *“First, like everything in life, timing needs to be good. I was lucky because I did an internship while I was doing my diploma. When I delivered it, I was working already. I know that many people that were interns, the people in the company saw some potential in them and kept them tight”.*

Others were introduced to Snøhetta while studying. Informant 5, a senior architect, met Kjetil and informant 2 while at university. Snøhetta's conceptual approach and philosophy was what drew him in. Informant 6 had a similar experience *“Snøhetta had a big exhibition in my school. At the Royal Academy (Copenhagen). One of our landscape architects was there to open the exhibition. Jenny. She was telling me about the way of working, about Snøhetta. I came up afterward to the studio space where I was working and told my fellow students that, ‘Right, I know now where I am going to be working after I’m done here.’”* Informant 8, an intern in the country office, was third time lucky because there was an opening *“I had made a submission based on an advert two times before. After my internship in another company and my Bachelor thesis, I had better chances, so I got an invitation for a talk, they needed someone to start very quickly; we need help; please come on Monday.”*

The danger with this system, according to informant 1 is *“...we all become a bit too similar; we don't look at a broad enough portfolio of different people, skills, and ways of looking at things. It is very varying how we pick people, especially in the creative areas”.* Informant 3's take resonates *“...many of the architects that work here used to study together. Many of them are actually from one class. I remember we talked about needing different people. Then I thought about how we hire people. I'm not sure we'll get different people. It's always the safe decision you make when you hire a person that you already know, or that you heard positive things about.”* Informant 3 is clear that this system does work for the country office. It allows them to reach out to the right candidates more effectively than via a typical job advertisement *“Take this model builder position we advertised for instance. First, we tried to put an ad online only. ...we had an*

impression that many of the applicants had no relationship to Snøhetta ... We had many applications, but most of these people wanted to be architects. They just went for this model builder position because they wanted to work with Snøhetta.”

Remuneration and benefits, at least for architects, are according to a predetermined, transparent scale with progression dependent on seniority. Informant 7 seems to agree with the model. *“This idea that you are part of a democratic system, you earn depending on seniority, how many years you have been working here”* In his view, it has a conditioning effect on the work environment. People in Snøhetta are not there for the money or the positions. *“That prevents clashes between people, fighting against each other in the hope of reaching better positions and pay. It depends on how long you work here, if you have worked here for 10 years you earn this amount of money.”*

Informant 1 is more reserved. Partly because the set scale only applies for some of the employees, *“I have never really been a fan of everybody telling what they earn because I do not think we are here for the money. The danger is that we keep everybody on a scale, and we say you're not here for the money, and then we pay these people a lot and then they're here for the money. The market for architects is pretty much on scale everywhere you go. For designers, it is like; you pay what you're worth. It's very different. Very market driven. It's just a different way of doing business too.”*

For informant 2, it is a balancing act *“We have 40 paid effective working hours, in the main office in Oslo, they have 35 because they have 37 and a half hours, and a half hour lunch break, which is paid. Here the lunch break is not paid. It's a balance. Some things we have to do legally. We don't do precarious employment, everybody who works here has a contract, and of course, we have sensibly market-oriented salaries.”*

Discussion and conclusion

As previously discussed, findings from a case study that is both single and singular, such as the one presented here, cannot in itself explain the behaviour of managerial shared leadership in a sector as broad as that of the cultural and creative industries. However, from its uniqueness, our explorations allow us to understand some of the logics at play, in particular when it comes to how a project that remains resilient over time, without direct public support, is able to survive periodic crises in the sector, and moves in diverse international environments. What Snøhetta has in common with other cultural projects, and what distinguishes it from organizations in other economic sectors, is the artisanal and collaborative character of the creative process, the ability to attract new talent to the organization based on the recognition and artistic uniqueness of the project, and the interaction with the client and the local community in which each project is located. Part of the success lies in the act of balancing aesthetic sensibility and commercial viability, also known as the difference paradox (DeFillippi et al., 2007), a

recurring factor in most corporate cultural projects. All of these aspects are linked to the leadership model.

In this context, what makes Snøhetta a singular case, compared with other international companies in the creative economy, is the strong participatory and shared culture beyond the organisational leadership constellation. Further, the signature of the creative work is socialized: the outputs are credited collectively with the name of the firm instead of appearing with the names of the main creators. This fact contrasts with the dominant logic in the cultural and creative sector of highlighting the name of the main creative figures, despite the fact that most major projects are the result of the collective contribution of many creative people (Becker, 2008).

Initially, our case study of Snøhetta contemplated the following research questions. How can *managerial shared leadership* help strike a balance between the paradoxical institutional logics that management and leadership of creativity is premised upon? Is this constellation more resilient because they are considered more transparent, open, and generous?

Starting with the first, Snøhetta succeeds with the use of a particular kind of managerial shared leadership. At the top (Alvarez and Svejnova, 2005; Denis et al., 2012), the leadership constellation is distinguished by a division of labour between distinct yet interdependent roles for all intents and purposes. This is what the concept of managerial shared leadership refers to as functionally shared leadership (Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021). The leadership constellation for managing projects and teams is distributed among professionals in a way that varies with the complexity of the tasks at hand to promote adaptive problem-solving and forward momentum (Müller et al., 2018). The relationship between the approaches is that leadership becomes shared across units (projects, headquarters, and country office), and the model functions because of a set of values (the conceptual philosophy of the 3 p's people, places, and projects) held in common (Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021).

In relation to the second question, does a balance premised on openness, transparency, and generosity make these constellations more resilient? The difference in employment conditions, social benefits, and business culture between studios and countries, as part of different legislative models, generates a perception of inequality with a short distance between the highest and lowest salaries and titles. The incorporation of a design division, with their concurrent, market-based salaries, increases the feeling that the horizontal model is failing. How may Snøhetta at once resolve the imbalances between international expansion and the social compatibility between offices? In particular, when professionals move from one office to another.

This is a concern related to the second foci in the literature on paradoxes: managing creative processes (DeFillippi et al., 2007). Here, Snøhetta succeeds due to the idiosyncratic way by which it enables exploration (providing opportunities for creative and

inspirational work) and exploitation (making enough money to sustain the company's expansive and expensive conceptual line of working) (Cohendet and Simon, 2007).

Snøhetta, a place, as well as a name is a conceptual and philosophical grounding of people taking part in projects. However, the resilience is in part due to processes of recruitment, ensuring that people who come to work for the company understand and are willing to adopt and engage in proprietary ways of conducting architecture business. This model—as it goes beyond a leadership constellation (Hodgson et al., 1965)—is shaped and formed by visionary entrepreneurs, is based on a Nordic approach to work, and has a generational spirit taking a holistic and collective approach to creativity, with emphasis on generosity and social responsibility. Essentially, as Kjetil argues, the “bottle” model requires freedom so that people are inspired to come together and manage to think as game-changers. This involves providing an environment wherein creative processes can flow through the collective, in other words, resolving the identity paradox of creating a collective identity and brand (DeFillippi et al., 2007) that leads to precise outputs as well as social outcomes, either in the form of products (the result of design processes and projects) or as places (in the case of architectonic processes and landscapes). All the offices try to maintain the key cultural and social values of the organization, but here again, the local dimension is necessary to consider.

This is something that attracts creative talent, and is an essential resource of any creative, since a collaborative leadership style influences the career paths of people and organizations. However, not everyone is prepared to work for a creative company where output is collectively credited (individual people do not sign off on designs and buildings) and under specific conditions (which includes a collective annual excursion to the Norwegian mountain of Snøhetta or a skiing day). That said, recruitment is not an issue; the studio receives far more applications from prospective candidates than they can process. There are many people interested in and fitting the personality and profile required to function as a creative within the organisational set-up.

Our findings demonstrate that creative workers are drawn to Snøhetta because the studio provides high-quality employment in an environment that puts more emphasis on symbolic value, knowledge sharing, and learning as opposed to financial gains. Without necessarily being in thrall of art-for-art's sake motivation, there is a continuing match between their professional creative motives and the job opportunities (Lampel et al., 2000). For them, the ability to be part of the collective, the processes, and projects trumps financial motives. The cooperative spirit induces some of the creative employees to forfeit traditional benefits, such as individual recognition (stardom) and financial gain. The employees express similar attitudes to those of members of the art world when the discussion revolves around the collective production of

designs and buildings (Becker, 2008). The fact that they are working for a commercial private enterprise that in many ways differs from publicly funded cultural institutions of the art world does not seem to matter. That is also the answer as to what characterises some of the most important success factors as they relate to managerial shared leadership: contextual antecedents (organisation and culture), alongside selection and appointment (Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021).

To conclude, this article has—through a case study of the international architectural studio Snøhetta—sought to show how it may be possible to resolve the potential conflicts caused by paradoxical logics of attending to the needs of creative workers (architects as artists and creative entrepreneurs) and the need for efficiency and practicality at the organisational level (Thornton et al., 2005) through managerial shared leadership constellations (Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021). Snøhetta achieves success by 1) fostering an atmosphere that encourages creative freedom and 2) addressing the organization's need to continue operating profitably. (Cohendet and Simon, 2007). While there are issues and problems associated with translating constellations and horizontally shared practices across countries—a globalization paradox (DeFillippi et al., 2007)—the model is resilient because of a shared understanding of a common conceptual model and way of working (Döös and Wilhelmson, 2021).

Some literature on cultural leadership, notably those strands based on the visionary, charismatic approach often seen in the public sector institutions (Price, 2017), shows a need for management skills and structure when a private company seeks to control continuity and expansion. In line with Bolden (Bolden, 2004), it does not make sense to differentiate between the role of the leader and that of the manager, for specific ventures to succeed and grow. It is the dual capacity (ability to inspire and at the same time motivate) that is important. As Kjetil emphasized; motivation needs management, leadership needs inspiration.

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In brief, the capacity to manage the process of symbol creation is a form of continuous innovation (Lawrence and Phillips, 2002). This may be some of the hallmarks of what make managerial shared leadership come together in this particular study of management and leadership of cultural organisations.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because Employee data has been anonymized. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

AR: Concept development, literature review, data collection and initial analysis, writing LB: Concept development, data interpretation, analysis, writing.

Funding

The researchers received a grant from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture—Kunnskapsverket, with number reference 13/4343 and from the Research Council of Norway, grant number 301291.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 26 May 2023

ACCEPTED 17 November 2023

PUBLISHED 18 December 2023

CITATION

Sokka S, Ruokolainen O and Tohmo T (2023), Value of art and culture institutions: a case study of Jyväskylä, Finland.
Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 13:11618.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2023.11618

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Value of art and culture institutions: a case study of Jyväskylä, Finland

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This paper presents a case study about perceptions of residents about the value of publicly funded art and culture institutions (museums, city theatre, and symphony orchestra) in the Finnish city of Jyväskylä. In this study, the kinds of value that residents attribute to these local art and culture institutions and what kind of economic value the visitors' expenditure to these institutions illustrates are explored. The analysis in this study is based on a survey conducted in 2019 that included the visitors and non-visitors to these institutions as participants. The results illustrate several values of art and culture institutions, which also point to multiple policy domains related to art, economy, social, and wellbeing effects. According to previous studies on cultural policy, it is important to be aware of the various value dimensions of future cultural policy. Though there are conflicting aims regarding cultural values, varied value dimensions complement each other in future-oriented policies.

KEYWORDS

art and culture institutions, perceived value, economic value, cultural policy, Nordic

Introduction

This paper analyses the value of publicly funded art and culture institutions (museums, city theatre, and symphony orchestra, hereafter referred to as JI in this article) in the Finnish city of Jyväskylä. The evidence comes from Nordic context, where a variety of values have traditionally been attached to the functioning of art and culture institutions. Across all Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), art and culture institutions play a significant role in cultural policy, and they have been and still are considered important vehicles for promoting societal welfare. Therefore, a large share of public funding for culture is allocated to them (Kangas and Vestheim, 2010; Sokka et al., 2022).

One of the major reasons behind the official funding of art and culture institutions has been the aim to civilize, which was an essential part of the public cultural policy already in the nineteenth century (Sokka, 2005; Sokka and Kangas, 2006; Helminen, 2007; Ministry of Education and Culture and Finland, 2017). After World War II and especially from the 1960s onwards, institutions were integrated into municipal service production when the welfare aims of the developing welfare state became connected

with the evolving administrative branch of cultural policy (both in Finland as in other Nordic countries) (Duelund, 2003; Sallanen, 2009; Sokka et al., 2022). Furthermore, since the 1990s, economic aims have been added to the existing layers of cultural policy.

Currently, art and culture institutions are entwined in a variety of discussions, such as cultivation of art, democracy, economic importance, as well as local and regional development strategies and sustainability (Kangas, 2004). In the context of regions and cities, culture is nowadays said to boost economic development, regenerate neighbourhoods, increase the attractiveness of cities and regions, and make communities livelier and more cohesive (Florida, 2002; Gibson and Stevenson, 2004; Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007; Sacco et al., 2009; Anttiroiko, 2014). At least part of this development can be regarded as “defensive instrumentalism” that does not recognize the enabling functions of culture in society and culture as such; instead, it focuses on measuring without elaborating “a positive, confident and coherent notion of cultural value” (Belfiore, 2012, p. 106).

There is surprisingly little knowledge on how residents value art and culture institutions and whether their perceived valuations, for example, meet the existing motives of public cultural policy. Therefore, this study aims to generate such knowledge. We ask, what kinds of value residents attribute to JI and what kind of economic value their visitors’ expenditure illustrates. Based on empirical evidence, a spectrum of values are illustrated here. Because we believe that it is reasonable to consider value of institutions in all the dimensions we can trace from our data we include also values that are realized through cultural consumption. The approach in this study combines economic analysis and qualitative analysis of the perceived values, thus illustrating the interconnected nature of various value dimensions as well as their attachment to different kinds of argumentation and language within cultural policy.

Empirical evidence about the values reveals some of the expectations that the social environment of the JI poses for the functioning of these institutions in the contemporary society. Such a “mapping” of values may prove valuable when considering the role and development needs of art and cultural institutions in the future. To quote Kangas and Vestheim:

“Institutions are dependent on the social environment to survive, they must all the time prove that they are satisfying some societal need, and meeting some aims, expectations and functions that are not met by other institutions. It is only by fulfilling their aims (which may change, but usually that happens only slowly) that institutions can legitimise their existence” (Kangas and Vestheim, 2010, p. 272).

The significance of values and their perception and role in cultural policy argumentation must be situated in a specific

context. The context of this study, Nordic welfare state and its cultural policy, can be considered specific in the variety of various values it presents. Yet—because of this plurality of values—we believe that our results could be useful for cultural policy research in other contexts as well.

Next, we begin by explaining the concept of value and its various meanings. Then we describe the materials and methods used in this study. After that we describe the local and national context of this study. The analysis section begins with a rather traditional economic input-output analysis to show the realisation of economic value through the consumption of culture. After that, we proceed to a more qualitatively oriented analysis of other perceived values of the JI. Finally, the findings and their implications and conclusion are presented.

Value

Studying cultural value may be regarded as a means to understand the various aspects of supporting culture as well as to achieve gains through arts and culture across various policy sectors (Carnwath and Brown, 2014). The dimensions and categorisations of cultural values have been debated throughout the history of Western civilisation (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007a; Belfiore and Bennett, 2007b). The question of how value should be understood and approached has been discussed widely in research (Heinich, 2020; Kaufmann and Gonzales, 2020). There has been significant research focus on the topic in recent years. In the United Kingdom, the Arts Council England (Carnwath and Brown, 2014), the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value (Belfiore et al., 2019), and the Arts and Humanities Research Council have been active in this sphere of research (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2014; Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016). For example, Garnwath and Brown refer to John Holden’s conceptualization of “institutional value,” which concerns “the value that organisations provide above and beyond the value of their products” (Carnwath and Brown, 2014, p. 41–42,86). However, none of the mentioned researchers have specifically focused on the values that visitors and non-visitors attribute to art and cultural institutions.

Researching the value of culture is also a means of examining the relationship between culture and varied dimensions of public policies. In practice, there seems to be an increasing need for cross-sectoral public policies wherein the various dimensions of culture are recognised, supported, enabled, and developed in a collaborative manner (Gray, 2017; Mangset, 2020; Mujica, 2022). One, perhaps simplified, way to classify the various values of culture is to recognise its economic value, social value, and public value (Carnwath and Brown, 2014). Crossick and Kaszynska identify “components of cultural value” that signify the varied outcomes of cultural activity, including the basis of shaping reflective individuals and engaged citizens with the help of

culture (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2014). This implies that the arts and culture have cultural, political, and social effects. However, some dimensions of values can be hard to distinguish from impacts that in many cases become ambiguously attached to value generation. Still, it is not the task of this paper to dwell on the area of impact studies as the aim of this study is simply to recognize which kind of value dimensions can be found from the survey data.

As this study is aimed at empirically illustrating the kinds of values that residents attribute to local art and culture institutions, Armbricht's research about perceived values is a rare reference point to our approach (Armbricht, 2014). Based on a survey of visitors to cultural institutions (museums, instead of a larger set of institutions), Armbricht analysed the value of cultural institutions, recognizing six categories or value typologies for cultural institutions: economic, education and skills, social, identity, image, and health. Armbricht emphasises that his value-scale is based on individuals' perceptions and thus "grounded in individuals' knowledge about the studied institution" (Armbricht, 2014, p. 269). As such, it is "to be regarded as one complementary way of understanding the values that cultural institutions provide to society" (Armbricht, 2014, p. 269). From this perspective, the value of an object is not only contextual but also based on several categories of intrinsic and extrinsic resources, observable, for example, in verbal expressions (Heinich, 2020).

Each of the values presented in the following chapters is based on experiences and attitudes of individual survey respondents. In this sense, they could be thought as illustrations of "intrinsic values," regardless of what kind of value dimensions may be found: the individual relationship with the institution comes close to that given by John Holden, who calls "intrinsic value" as the "set of values that relate to the subjective experience" (Carnwath and Brown, 2014, p. 86). It is not, however, in the interests here to consider either the "intrinsicity" or the "instrumentality" of the values found in the data of this study. That will be left for future research. Despite acknowledging their importance, this study has not focused on the actual valuation processes, either at the individual or at the social level. The aim of this study was only to recognise the kinds of values that could be tracked from the study's data.

Materials and methods

This study is based on a survey of existing and potential visitors to the JI that was conducted in 2019. The study's data represents valuation by individual respondents in the context of Jyväskylä, and it is bound in this context. Yet, these results can provide comparison points for other localities in other Western countries, especially in other Nordic countries, which share similarities in the organisation of art and culture institutions (Kangas and Vestheim, 2010).

We conducted the survey¹ as part of a city centre development and regeneration project (Heart of Jyväskylä/*Jyväskylän sydän*), funded by the Business Services Unit of the City of Jyväskylä. It had 834 respondents, of which 92.6% had visited the institutions during the previous 12 months. The majority (87%) of the respondents reported their place of residence to be in Jyväskylä. The median age of respondents was 68 years. Forty-four percent of the respondents reported university and 21% reported applied sciences as their highest level of education. The largest single category of respondents by occupation or status consisted of pensioners, who accounted for 24% of respondents. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents lived in households/family groups with children under 18 years of age. Eighty-one percent of the respondents were women, 17% were men, and 2.3% chose the option "other/I do not want to answer." This study's data thus consists of respondents who are known to attend cultural events and visit cultural facilities, i.e., elderly women with a higher degree of education (Van Eijck, 1997; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005; Stanbridge, 2007; Christin, 2012; Sokka et al., 2014). This would not have been optimal if the aim had been to have a representative study of who participates and why they visit the art and culture institutions. This was however not the intention, and the nature of the data does not as such affect the efforts made to find which kinds of value dimensions the respondents attributed to JI.

The questionnaire consisted of questions dealing with the institutions as a whole as well as individual institutions and visits to those institutions. The respondents were asked to answer questions based on their latest visit to the JI in the previous 12 months. If they had not visited any of the institutions, they were asked to consider the local institutions in general. The survey mainly targeted visitors to art and cultural institutions; however, some respondents who had not used the services of these institutions were also included by disseminating the questionnaire in both paper and digital formats through various communication channels (for example, the city's official media channels, social media, and on-site institutions, including public libraries).

The questionnaire included the following themes:

- Frequency of visits to the JI during the previous 12 months and respondent's relationship with arts and culture

1 The survey was conducted with the online survey tool SurveyPal as well as in paper form. The data was collected anonymously in the period from March to May 2019. An introductory text to the survey explained that data would be used for research purposes and anonymized. Research was conducted along the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK guidelines 2019 (https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2021-01/Ethical_review_in_human_sciences_2020.pdf): Participation in the research did not deviate from the principle of informed consent, and therefore, an ethical review statement from a human sciences ethics committee was not needed. Enquiries about the questionnaire can be directed to the corresponding author.

- Description of the most recent visit to the cultural institution: expenditure, company, reason/s for the visit
- Impressions about cultural facilities based on the latest visit: characteristics and quality of the cultural institution, perceived impacts of the visit to the cultural institution on the respondent's personal life, perceived impact of the cultural institution on the city as a whole
- Suggestions for development/improvement
- Views about roles and impacts of local public libraries
- Views about cultural institutions as part of the development and wellbeing of the city and its residents.

Various methods and data were employed for value analysis. As part of the methodology, we applied qualitative analysis, descriptive statistical analysis, and economical input-output-analysis to the data (see [Supplementary Appendix S3](#)). As mentioned, the survey data does not reflect a representative sample of the visitors, nor the entire population of the city. We cannot empirically illustrate any other values than those that are represented in the data. It still provides an understanding about the kinds of values that residents may attach to art and culture institutions. Most likely, we could find inequalities in who participates in JI, but it is not the task of this study. We will however discuss the value dimensions we found in our data from the perspective of equal participation and access to culture.

The opinions and experiences of visitors and the consumption patterns of visitors as well as their local and regional economic effects were analysed. Basic frequencies have been reported in [Ruokolainen et al. \(2019\)](#), but this is the first time any of those results have been presented internationally. Most importantly, for this paper, we engaged in descriptive analysis of the visitors' behaviour, for example, not just how often different types of institutions were visited by them but also why. Varied methods of analysis were applied in varying degrees to discuss different values. For example, economic value has been illustrated mainly using input-output analysis, whereas image and identity values have been chiefly analysed using descriptive and qualitative means based on written answers of the survey that until now have not been presented.

To a certain extent and by using open text response questions, this study has employed survey as a qualitative tool ([Braun et al., 2021](#)). The open responses revealed issues that the respondents valued as important and essential while consuming, enjoying, and/or creating art and culture. The first open question that provided data for this purpose was, "How would you describe yourself in relation to culture?" It received 696 answers, out of which 218 respondents expressed various values that attributed to culture in their lives. The second open question "How could we make the cultural facilities of Jyväskylä more attractive?" received 547 responses. It also revealed valuations through the perceived development of and problems related to the institutions. In analysing the

responses to these questions, we have used qualitative content analysis to recognise various value dimensions present within or underpinning the responses ([Miles and Huberman, 1994](#); [Silverman, 2001](#)).

Context: arts and culture institutions in Jyväskylä

The city of Jyväskylä is located in the Central Finland region. Jyväskylä fares quite well when compared with other Finnish cities. The total population of the city was 143,420 in the year 2020. The population growth has been steady (around 1,000 new inhabitants per year) during recent years ([The City of Jyväskylä, 2022](#)). More importantly, Jyväskylä is a centre of higher education as it has both a research university and a university of applied sciences. The city has a student population of approximately 40,000. In the year 2018, Jyväskylä ranked fourth among Finnish cities and towns with regard to overall image; its strengths included providing better possibilities for study and leisure, offering a healthy environment to grow up in, as well as having a pleasant living environment ([The City of Jyväskylä, 2019](#); [The City of Jyväskylä, 2021a](#)).

The analysis in this study included five of the most important publicly funded JI:

- Alvar Aalto Museum
- Jyväskylä City Theatre
- Symphony Orchestra (Jyväskylä Sinfonia)
- Jyväskylä Art Museum
- The Craft Museum of Finland

Four of the institutions are directly connected to the city of Jyväskylä's administrative and financial instruments, while the Alvar Aalto Museum is a local destination belonging to the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

All of the above institutions receive a considerable amount of funding from the city of Jyväskylä. According to official documents and decisions of the city council, these institutions may be linked to a variety of goals. Jyväskylä City Strategy presents the vision of a "growing and internationally recognised city of education and expertise" and aims at making the city "the best place to live, work and study" ([The City of Jyväskylä, 2021a](#)). This strategy, as well as other sector-specific strategies and plans, manifests various values related to the culture, art, and cultural institutions of the city ([Luonila and Ruokolainen, 2023](#)).

The strategy includes responsibility, trust, creativity, and openness ([The City of Jyväskylä, 2021a](#)). The four strategic goals of the city are as follows: 1) happy, healthy, and participatory citizens; 2) fresh, growth-oriented business policy; 3) wise use of resources; and 4) to emerge as the capital of sport and physical activity in Finland. As part of the

goal of “happy, healthy and participatory citizens,” several themes are emphasised: providing opportunities for children and young people to enjoy healthy growth and learn successfully; opportunities to influence decision-making; promoting equality; availability and accessibility of services; and building a strong sense of community to reduce loneliness through multifaceted leisure activities, arts, and culture. Through its aim of “a fresh, growth-oriented business policy,” the strategy seeks to develop Jyväskylä into an international city of culture, events, and tourism, with a charming city centre, and also a city that is capable of attracting employers.

The cultural plan of the city also focuses on four strategic themes: allocation of services, cultural facilities, business policy, and culture as a profession (The City of Jyväskylä, 2021c). In the Centre Vision of the City of Jyväskylä, the art and cultural institutions of the city provide open spaces for participation and venues for cultural events, enabling Jyväskylä to develop as an event city (The City of Jyväskylä, 2021b). Art and culture institutions are also mentioned in strategies and documents that concentrate on the social, health, and wellbeing aspects, such as the Wellbeing Plan, the Inclusion Programme and the Equality Plan of the city (Luonila and Ruokolainen, 2023).

Value dimensions of art and culture institutions in Jyväskylä

Economic value

Art and culture institutions contribute to economic value in various ways. For example, according to Throsby, the economic value of an art museum is derived from the asset value of the buildings and contents as well as from the service flows provided by these assets (Throsby, 2001). The JI buildings have their own accounting values. However, artworks, archaeological resources, or buildings of cultural importance (for example, buildings designed by Alvar Aalto) cannot be easily valued reliably. Consequently, this study focused on the flows of services provided by JI.

Throsby distinguished the economic flows of art museum services as follows: 1) excludable private goods, 2) non-excludable public goods, and 3) beneficial externalities (Throsby, 2001). The same classification has been used in the analysis of the economic value of the JI in this study. According to Throsby's classification, private goods include the consumption experiences of the visitors. These include economic use values, which can be measured by the value of the tickets sold. Moreover, the visitors may be willing to pay more for the visit than they actually pay. This reflects the utility a visitor receives while buying services. The consumer surplus is the highest if there are no entrance fees. If visitors buy merchandise at the art institution shop, it creates added value for the institutions.

Accordingly, the economic value and valuation of culture can be seen in the consumption patterns of individual JI visitors. For example, the average visitor² buys tickets, other services, and so on related to the visit. An estimate of these patterns was asked in the survey, and therefore, the following calculations are grounded in consumption patterns expressed by individual survey participants (a survey of existing and potential visitors to the JI that was conducted in 2019). In the case of JI, the median value of consumption was 37 euros (Table 1).

Moreover, the economic flows of art and culture institutions may generate economic impacts such as employment and income at their respective locations. These externalities are typically important at the regional level, as they create multiplier effects on the regional economy. Accordingly, in this study, analysis of the regional economic flows of visitors' consumption was based on the input-output tables of Central Finland for 2014. The effects of spending by visitors under the heads of production, employment, households' net incomes, and taxes are shown in Supplementary Appendix S2 (how to calculate the economic value of Jyväskylä Art institutions is shown in Supplementary Appendix S3).

The total number of visitors to the JI was 194,257 in 2019. Although foreign visitors contribute to the export income of Central Finland, domestic tourism expenditure is also a form of export income for the region. Athanasopoulos et al. suggests that the demand for domestic tourists has received little attention in the previous studies (Athanasopoulos and Hyndman, 2008; Allen et al., 2009; Athanasopoulos et al., 2014). Domestic tourism can contribute more to the tourism-related industry of the region than foreign tourism, since services aimed at attracting foreign tourists have often been built and tested based on domestic demands (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999; Athanasopoulos et al., 2014). Furthermore, domestic tourism may increase residents' cultural consumption. It is however difficult to predict the extent to which domestic tourism spending will replace foreign spending.

This study showed that financial spending by visitors living outside Central Finland has had an impact on employment, amounting to approximately 22.9 person-years in Central Finland (see Supplementary Appendix S2).³ The production impact of spending by visitors from outside of Central Finland totalled 2,287,205 euros. As a result of increased demand, state taxes increased by EUR 48,536 and municipal taxes by EUR 127,682. The net income from households

² Except for the Alvar Aalto Museum, the share of foreign visitors is low (see Supplementary Appendix S1).

³ Among the respondents in the survey, there were only a few from outside Central Finland. We used the cost structure of visitors to the entire audience as a basis for analysis. This underestimated the amount of consumption by visitors living outside Central Finland.

TABLE 1 Median spending per visitor.

Place of residence of JI visitors	Alvar Aalto Museum	Jyväskylä Sinfonia	Jyväskylä City Theatre	Jyväskylä Art Museum	The Craft Museum of Finland	All institutions (average)
Jyväskylä	13 €	43 €	45 €	15 €	22 €	35 €
All others	40 €	—	65 €	43 €	78 €	62 €
Average	16 €	45 €	47 €	20 €	30 €	37 €

increased by EUR 723,767 due to consumption related to art institution visits.

In this study, the economic impact of locals spending on visits to JI, for the entire region of Central Finland, across varied sectors, was also calculated. Such spending has a more significant impact on regional production and employment, compared with spending by visitors from outside of Central Finland. The estimated money flows from visitors to JI, who were living in Jyväskylä and elsewhere in Central Finland, totalled EUR 8.46 million. Spending by visitors living in Central Finland, during their visits to the JI, affected employment across different sectors in Central Finland by 122.9 person-years (Supplementary Appendix S2). Based on the regional input-output analysis, the production impact of spending by Central Finland inhabitants during JI visits totalled EUR 12,226 million, including the multiplier effect on various industries. The total impact on state taxes was EUR 260,615, whereas the impact on municipal taxes was EUR 685,560. Households' net income increased by EUR 2,623 million.⁴

The JI also provide collective benefits. The economic value of the benefits of these public goods may be evaluated using the contingent valuation method.⁵ In this study, we did not attribute economic valuation to these benefits. However, a previous research found that the residents of Jyväskylä were willing to pay more than what they actually paid for the existence of the Museum of Central Finland, through their taxes (Tohmo, 2009). Consequently, Jyväskylä taxpayers received value from the existence of the Central Finland museum, which exceeded the public funding used to pay for its existence.

⁴ Besides consumption experiences, private goods benefits include formal educational activities, curatorial and conservation services, and rewards to donors. Educational activities, which include, for example, instruction of school groups, can increase the stock of human capital in the short or long run. Increased human capital can lead to higher productivity, higher salaries, and higher consumption. For example, museums may display works of practising artists to the public, creating a utility value for those artists. Further, donors gain private utility for supporting art institutions.

⁵ As part of the contingent valuation method, individuals are asked directly about how much they are willing to pay for the existence of a cultural feature. In this study, we did not utilise the contingent valuation method. However, we asked visitors to the JI about the spending structure connected to their visit. We analysed the spending related to these visits through an input-output analysis.

Image and identity

The role of arts and culture in shaping local identities as well as in constructing the images or brands of places has been recognised by research studies and utilised widely in urban public development policies. Influential studies by Landry (2000) and Florida (2002), have highlighted the role of creativity and urban cultural amenities in attracting a skilled workforce and shaping cities into sites of innovation and economic activity, which may be concretised in various ways: cultural capital theme years, cultural events, public space art schemes, cultural flagship projects, such as impressive cultural buildings, and so on (Richards and Wilson, 2004; McCarthy, 2006; Grodach, 2008; Garcia, 2017; Richards, 2017). All this is done to “characterise cities as a unique urban space and create authenticity” (Ulldemolins, 2014, p. 3026).

The respondents of our survey valued the impact of the JI on the image and attractiveness of the city in various ways (Figure 1). The majority (92.6%) of the respondents were frequent visitors to these cultural institutions. Ninety percent of the respondents agreed, to at least some extent, that the cultural facility they had last visited during the previous 12 months helped make the city of Jyväskylä comfortable. Eighty-five percent of them thought that the cultural facility they had recently visited helped make the city attractive, whereas 76% thought that the facility helped to make the city well known. Eighty-five percent of the respondents agreed, to at least some extent, that the cultural facilities made Jyväskylä a city of culture.

The JI thus seems to play a role in constructing the image or brand of the city. Further, they also provide a basis for the identity of individual respondents as well as the local collective identity of Jyväskylä and its people. According to our data, culture manifests itself on a broad spectrum, emerging from the identities and self-perception of individual visitors and ranging all the way to the collective identity of Jyväskylä and its role as a city of culture. Our data highlighted the residents' own experience of their city and its art and culture institutions. The results presented are, therefore, more about the creation of the city dwellers' own urban identity through arts and cultural institutions than about the external image of the city. However, from the point of view of the city's attractiveness, the positive experience of those already living in the city is also important.

The apparently superficial image or brand related to a place is rooted in the deeper identity of the place or the collective identity

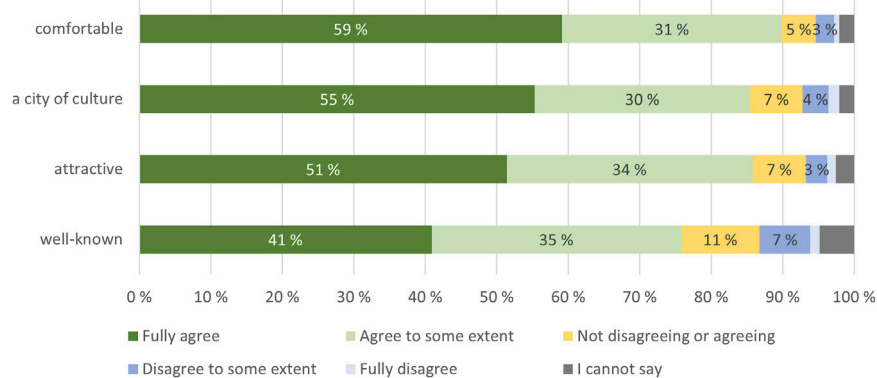


FIGURE 1

Cultural facility helps to make the city... (comfortable $n = 821$, a city of culture $n = 814$, attractive $n = 816$, well-known $n = 813$).

of people living in a particular place (Fan, 2010). Ulldemolins claims that place branding processes cannot start from scratch or banish the existing culture (Ulldemolins, 2014). Also, he states that branding should be based on local identities, instead of creating artificial narratives. Similarly, Bianchini and Ghilardi recommend that place marketing should be “cultured,” that is, there should be awareness of traditions of cultural expression, and rooted in history and socioeconomic realities as well as the cultural life and representations of a locality (Bianchini and Ghilardi, 2007). In our case, art and culture institutions may be regarded as places where individuals are offered opportunities to engage with the community and to influence how the city is perceived among both the residents and the visitors from outside. All this emphasises localised understandings of art and culture values, including the impact of art and culture on a person’s feelings and the ways in which they interact with place (Mackay et al., 2021).

Although our survey did not explicitly deal with issues such as self-perception, self-expression, or personal identity, many of the respondents (99 written responses to the question “How would you describe yourself in relation to culture?”) described these matters, which are also acknowledged in previous works (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007a; Radbourne et al., 2010; Azevedo, 2017). In these responses, enjoying art and culture is connected to fundamental aspects or verbs such as “being,” “breathing,” “opening up,” “being aware,” and “realizing.” Several respondents opined that art and culture were important parts of their selves.

“Culture is an important part of me.”

“I cannot imagine my life without it. Cultural pursuits are a key part of life. Through them, I guess, one exists...”

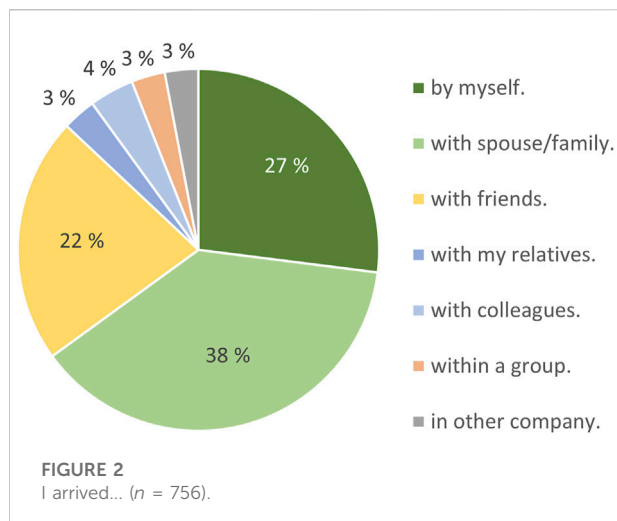
Some respondents also write in a manner that can be connected to the projection or image of oneself to the outside world, such as: “I am a cultural person.” In this case, art and culture are ways of constructing an identity and image of oneself. Further, the following responses were recorded for the question, “How could we make the cultural facilities of Jyväskylä more attractive?”:

“Jyväskylä is known as a cultural city. ... You should put more effort into it. To take it further. Advertise. Give opportunities to new actors. Maintenance and renovate already well-known and culturally valuable facilities.”

“I hope that at last a proper concert hall will be established here, the kind you can find in many smaller places. Embarrassing that it still lacks one.”

“City Theatre’s renovation is necessary; it is shocking that performances are cancelled when the technology in the house breaks down.”

Such responses bring out the concrete demands for cultural investments and simultaneously emphasise the importance and value of the JI, especially when these institutions seem to be neglected by the local decision-makers. The respondents were concerned about negative developments that could undermine the identity or image of Jyväskylä as a city of culture. There were critical comments about the state of funding and that the lack of investments in culture was “embarrassing” or “shocking” to the city. In addition, the respondents were concerned about the working conditions and facilities of artists and how the neglect of these could hinder the reputation of the city. These statements contest the identity of Jyväskylä as a city of art and culture.



While analysing the identity and image values present in the responses, we ended up considering the objectives underlying the activities and roles of institutions as part of the development of the city (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007). Art and culture institutions can relate to tourism promotion, image construction, and place-marketing measures as well as city centre development and regeneration. On the other hand, the role of institutions in urban development is also reflected in how they help create cosy, vivid, diverse, and participatory urban spaces. Consequently, institutions are not quite facade-like places of cultural consumption and “billboards” of the city’s image but can become part of the urban space, thus empowering urban dwellers with opportunities to express themselves and interact.

Social relations

According to our data, 80% of the respondents thought, at least to some extent, that visiting art and culture institutions promotes social relations. It may be summed up that visiting art and culture institutions was thought to be a collective and social activity among the respondents. Only 27% of those who had visited the institutions had come there alone (Figure 2). The most common forms of company cited were spouse or family (38%) and friends (22%).

Almost half of the responses to the open question “Why did you come to the cultural facility this particular time?” emphasised the cultural content provided by the institution. Only some respondents explicitly expressed the social aspects of culture in their written answers, summarising how these social aspects are present in the immediate moment of experiencing culture with others, connecting to the broader community through the cultural content, and regarding institutions as communal places.

“Culture, in my opinion, comes to be best experienced along with other people. Shared pleasure is the best pleasure.”

“I think museums and libraries are really important to myself. They are . . . places that make me strongly feel like I am part of the community.”

Previous research has covered a broad array of impressions that count as “social impacts,” mainly due to the importance of communal human actions in generating them (KEA, 2006; Belfiore and Bennett, 2007a; Belfiore and Bennett, 2007b; Council of Europe, 2017; Lindström Sol et al., 2022; MESOC, 2023). In the context of regions and cities, culture is said, for example, to regenerate neighbourhoods, make communities livelier and increase their cohesion (Matarasso, 1997; Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007; Sacco et al., 2009). Such “impacts” are however also stressed to “be complex relationships that sometimes cannot be measured directly” (MESOC, 2023, p. 17).

Armbrrecht (2014) sees the social value of culture profoundly entangled with social relations and networks (Bourdieu, 1973; Putnam, 2001; Bourdieu, 2008). According to him, “Cultural institutions are facilitators and catalysts of social interaction and the construction of social networks” (Armbrrecht, 2014, p. 255). From previous research, we already know that cultural facilities could (and should) be designed as enabling spaces that facilitate dialogue and participation (MESOC, 2023). Our case also illustrates that established institutions undoubtedly could contribute more than they do currently to their surrounding society if they could provide broader access to their actions and invite more diverse groups of visitors to participate in their actions.

Despite the evidence regarding the importance of social relations for our respondents, the JI were not considered to be especially inclusive in their actions (Figure 3). Most striking result was that only 59% of them thought that the JI affected all the citizens of Jyväskylä. Those who visited the institutions and used their services enjoyed and produced the social value of culture, but a large proportion of Jyväskylä residents seemed to be left out (cf. Stevenson and Balling, 2017). This evidently is an important issue that requires further research.

Capacities and skills

Cultural institutions are also known to help in transmitting and disseminating skills and knowledge; an example of this is the role of cultural institutions in (arts) education. We did not however come across capabilities and skills in our data through instances such as arts education, school visits, or enabling of cultural participation. Instead, acquisition of occupationally relevant knowledge and maintenance of skills needed for creative activities were mixed with genuine personal interest in arts and creative content offered by institutions.

In our data, 94% of the respondents acknowledged the role of art and culture institutions in human development, when they agreed that visiting a “culture institution civilised” them. Further,

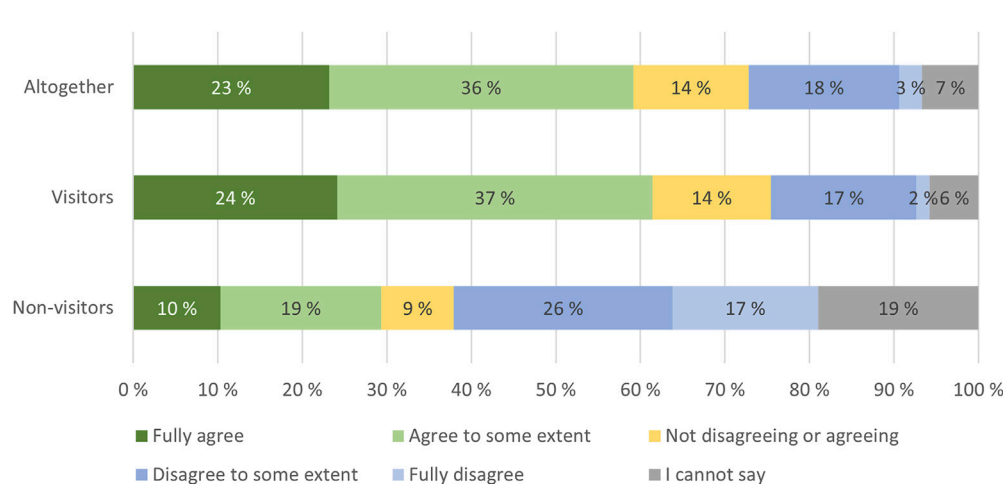


FIGURE 3

The facility and its activity affect all citizens ($n = 820$, visitors $n = 761$, non-visitors $n = 58$).

for 84% of the respondents, visiting institutions inspired one to cultivate art as a hobby, whereas for 58% of the respondents, such visits inspired the creation of art. The growth of professionals and occupational development in the fields of art and culture can thus be regarded as one of the means of realising capabilities and skills generated by cultural institutions (Mackay et al., 2021). The capabilities and skills approach to cultural value came across as essential, both for occupational terms and as a human way of living, developing, and experiencing.

“(Culture is a) (p)rofession and hobby, a lifeline in many ways.”

“Work, hobby, whole life, among which now the emphasis is work.”

Art and culture institutions are also reported to play a part in other creative processes that generate new knowledge and enhance new skills (Armbrecht, 2014). Recently, for example, the OECD has emphasised the importance of “cultural and creative sectors” as “a source of creative skills” that “also have a role to play in increasing educational performance generally” (OECD, 2021, p. 2). Similar views have been expressed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2023).

A recent EU-report states how “analyses of population surveys support a clear link between participation in cultural activities and patterns of engagement with key civic and democratic activities as well as democratic and civic values” (Hammonds, 2023, p. 74). OECD experts suggest how creative thinking “can improve a range of other skills and capabilities, from metacognitive capacities to inter- and intra-personal and problem-solving skills” (OECD, 2021, p. 16). This can be linked to capacity building and the positive impacts of having opportunities for self-representation. Such

impacts are not easily measurable (Sacco et al., 2013; Mackay et al., 2021; OECD, 2022), which becomes no easier after acknowledging the differences between capacities and capabilities: the former generally refers to knowledge and skills in “development speak,” whereas the latter can be regarded as a central element in human development (Sacco et al., 2013; de Beukelaar and Spence, 2019). Still, based on our survey, the capability approach, in particular, could be further developed also in the context (though not limited to them) of established art and culture institutions—through widening the access and participation in the activities they produce, institutions could have profound meaning for the functioning of democracy (Hammonds, 2023).

Health and wellbeing

In our data, as many as 95% of the respondents agreed, at least to some extent, with the proposition that visiting a cultural facility is good for one’s wellbeing. Obviously, we can talk about health and wellbeing only related to JI here; many modes of culture deserving attention remain unexplored. Our results however show that JI are perceived as important for health and wellbeing even among those who did not visit them.

A total of 77% of those respondents who had not visited any of the institutions in the past 12 months agreed, to at least some extent, that visiting institutions would be good for their wellbeing. Perhaps, they were aware of the discussion around the impact of culture and art on wellbeing, or they may have reflected on their previous visit to an art or cultural institution more than a year ago, which was excluded from the period of our questionnaire.

In any case, in the previous year, both visitors and non-visitors to the JI recognised the importance of the institutions for their own wellbeing. Further, there were 51 health-related open

responses to the question, “How would you describe yourself in relation to culture?” The respondents talked about how culture helped them cope with the struggles of everyday life and how culture somehow transcended everyday life to give them strength. The responses ranged from descriptions of “lighter” effects, such as the role that culture played as a relaxing, delightful, empowering, and invigorating activity in everyday life, to more fundamental and perhaps even sinister meanings of culture in the lives of the respondents, such as coping with the help of culture and seeing culture as an absolute necessity to oneself or a way to survive.

“I enjoy culture! It empowers, in many ways . . .”

“Cultural events invigorate and relax.”

“Culture helps me to cope with everyday life.”

There were also several explicit expressions of the word “wellbeing” in relation to culture and the arts:

“I use culture to maintain my mental wellbeing!”

“Cultural services bring wellbeing and contentment to life, at all stages of life.”

Interest in research around the area of culture, health, and wellbeing has grown over the past decade, although leaving the role of everyday cultural participation under-explored (Dowlen, 2023). Broadly speaking, arts and culture have been found to generate positive effects on the wellbeing of a person (Wheatley and Bickerton, 2019). In 2019, the WHO published a scoping review focusing on the evidence base of the role of arts in improving wellbeing. The scoping identified over 900 publications, of which several were systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and meta-syntheses, covering over 3,000 different publications (Fancourt and Finn, 2019). Several health effects were identified, which were related to visits to art and culture facilities. According to the evidence base, visiting museums, theatres, galleries, concerts, and operas resulted in lower rate of cognitive decline, lower risk of dementia in older age, enhancement of self-worth, and development of coping mechanisms.

The Finnish term for “wellbeing” (“hyvinvointi”), which was used in our questionnaire, refers both to physical health and “feeling good,” covering both the physical and mental sides of health. Further, it also refers to “material wellbeing”.⁶ The Finnish language, therefore, encompasses a wide understanding of wellbeing, wherein an environment viable

for actualising one’s social, psychological, and physical resources is crucial for experiencing wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012).

In practice, perceived physical and mental health are often used interchangeably with wellbeing, and both are used to imply the quality of life (McCrary et al., 2022). The general effects of art attendance on happiness have also been found (Hand, 2018). Parallel to our results, there is evidence that higher attendance results in greater levels of happiness; in fact, even less frequent attendance in some activities has been found to indicate positive association with life satisfaction (Wheatley and Bickerton, 2017).

Wellbeing may even be considered to result from the participation of city dwellers in institutional activities, since the experience of inclusion may be considered a significant part of the experience of wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012). As mentioned earlier, 40% of respondents disagreed with the proposition that institutions impact all citizens (or did not know how to answer the question regarding the inclusiveness of institutions). This creates a somewhat contradictory picture of the impact of institutions on urban residents’ wellbeing. Viewed through the lens of inclusion of citizens, it appears that institutional activities do not include all residents and not all welfare impacts take place fully. The results however remind us of the possibility of developing the established institutions towards more participatory ways of functioning. In the context of our case, this is feasible, as we recall that access and participation are recognized as important development goals (The City of Jyväskylä, 2021a).

Discussion of the results: from strictly economic to broader values of culture

In Finland, as in all other Nordic countries, art and culture institutions occupy an important, institutionalised place in cultural policy (Duelund, 2003; Kangas and Vestheim, 2010). In Finland, the establishment of these organisations dates back to civil society activities aimed at social development (Sokka, 2005; Sokka and Kangas, 2007). Art and culture institutions in Jyväskylä have historically fulfilled several societal functions, which have been tied to various kinds of values over time. Based on the obvious importance of these institutions, it could be hypothesised that we might find several kinds of values intertwined with our institutions. Still, we do not know much about how residents value these institutions.

An earlier article by Armbricht gave us a feasible reference point. As anticipated, we detected several perceived values of the JI, closely resembling Armbricht’s findings in Austrian data (Armbricht, 2014). For further studies, it is however important to note that different communities with different degrees of immigration and diversity, for example, might

⁶ <https://www.kielitoimistonsanakirja.fi/#/hyvinvointi?searchMode=all>

provide different kinds of emphases of the value dimensions that were found in Jyväskylä.

Based on our data, the JI generate economic value; they impact regional production and employment, exceeding the amount of public funding they receive. However, the JI also have other significant values. For example, they shape local identities and the image of the city: our respondents opined that the JI make their native city comfortable, attractive, and well known; they also felt that the JI are important in social relations. Visiting institutions is often a collective and social activity, highlighting the importance of art and culture institutions as communal places, which, through social relations, can help generate several kinds of positive impacts. However, such impacts affect only those who visit these institutions and not all citizens, as indicated by several respondents, especially non-visitors.

When discussing the perceived values of art and culture institutions, one of the most obvious questions is: Whose value are we talking of? We are aware that, in Finland, as elsewhere, both higher level of education and gender meaningfully impact visits to museums, theatres, and symphony concerts (Van Eijck, 1997; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005; Christin, 2012). It must be conceded that elderly women with a degree have been over-represented in our data. However, our study did not focus on the socioeconomic background of the visitors: we aimed simply at identifying the kinds of values of art and culture institutions available in our data and using this knowledge in the discussion about such values.

It is obvious that the valuations of varied groups should be examined in future in relation to several forms of culture, and not just the institutions our case covers. Recently, this has been done in the EU-funded research project, INVENT. Initial results of the project reveal how the Finnish people hold institutions, especially museums, in high regard, overall.⁷ We have no reason to believe that Jyväskylä residents were somehow different in this respect. The respondents in our data, at least, were not.

Our results have shown that publicly funded art and culture institutions, which form the backbone of Finnish cultural policy, have multiple values attached to various kinds of public policy aims pointing to multiple policy domains: it is not just about art, nor is it just about economy or social and wellbeing effects. In fact, the value dimensions that we found in our data seem important for the legitimacy of public funding allocated to these institutions.

Perception of values links them to individual knowledge and experiences, which apparently vary among individuals as per their social contexts. Art and culture institutions also relate to the

principles according to which value is bestowed upon an object (e.g., “the beauty of a thing”) (Heinich, 2020, p. 87–88). This means that our analysis, to use Heinich’s terms, includes “value-as-worth,” as well as “value-as-goods,” and “values-as-principles” (Heinich, 2020, p. 88). Some respondents, for example, perceive value in the virtues they attribute to the JI. Our analysis did not directly answer Heinich’s call for generating more emphatic methodology in researching the actual valuation processes, because it would require a different kind of research setting and data (Heinich, 2020). This question also connects the valuation of culture to processes of shared knowledge and social learning, which lead further to questions about participation in value formation (Kenter et al., 2016; Klammer, 2016). Participation—who participates, where, and how (on whose terms?)—is an obvious question for further discussion that was not however the focus of this study.

As stated by an earlier research on cultural policy (Gray, 2017; Mangset, 2020; Mujica, 2022), it is important to be aware of various cultural dimensions in developing a future cultural policy. Both in economics and culture, the notion of value can be seen as an expression of worth in a static as well as a dynamic way, as both a negotiated and a transactional phenomenon (Throsby, 2001). For ensuring future legitimacy, studies should focus on openness of the institutions and their social relationships. This is even more crucial, as the respondents view JI to be important for health and wellbeing, and even for human development, as a way of living, growing, and experiencing.

Other researchers have also acknowledged how values are fundamentally plural (Kenter et al., 2016). The plurality and contextuality of value appreciation deter adopting normative approaches to realising value (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2014). When values are complex, inter-subjective, relational, and multidimensional, understanding of contexts and different levels of value realisation is also important for understanding the direction of cultural policy. There exist conflicting aims around cultural values; however, various value dimensions also complement each other in case of future policies (Throsby, 2001). This also implies that, ignoring cultural forms other than publicly funded, established cultural institutions can lead to unequal policies overlooking the heterogeneity of cultural values in modern societies.

As Armbricht stressed, the contribution of this kind of study “lies in a deeper understanding of why cultural institutions are valuable rather than how the value should be measured” (Armbricht, 2014, p. 268–269). In this sense, we scrutinised the social context wherein contemporary institutions survive: which kind of needs they are thought to satisfy. All of this has evidently much to do with how the institutions can remain legitimate and important in the face of cultural policy and related public funding (Kangas and Vestheim, 2010). Today, this is especially important when we know that established modes of cultural policies, at least in the way they have been organised in the Nordic countries, are facing several challenges (Sokka et al., 2022).

⁷ Based on INVENT, public funding for cultural institutions, such as community centres, museums, and libraries, is regarded as important by Finnish citizens. Theatres and orchestras were not included in the survey (<https://inventculture.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Infographic-How-important-do-europeans-find-public-funding-of-culture.pdf>).

Conclusion

This paper, based on a survey that we conducted in 2019, presented a case study about the value of city museums, city theatre, and public symphony orchestra in the Finnish city of Jyväskylä. We asked what kinds of value residents attribute to JI and what kind of economic value their visitors' expenditure illustrates. The Nordic context of our case study emphasized the plurality of values: In the Nordic countries, a large share of public cultural funding is directed towards institutions, and a variety of values has been attached to the functioning of cultural institutions at different historical phases of (cultural) policy development.

In previous research studies, it was common to consider the meaning of cultural actions for a certain value (e.g., economy or wellbeing) in a single study. However, further research is needed on the diversity of various, and often intersecting, values people attach to certain cultural organizations in particular contexts. Our results show that visitors—and perhaps somewhat surprisingly even the non-visitors—attribute many positive values to art and culture institutions in Jyväskylä. We found that the residents attribute a multitude of value dimensions to these institutions that they see having not only economic value but also value for image and identity, social relations, building capabilities and skills, and maintaining health and wellbeing.

The survey was aimed at the visitors and non-visitors alike, but it must be specified that most of the responses were gathered from residents who had visited at least some of the institutions during the last 12 months prior to the time of response. Our data does not represent the population of Jyväskylä, but neither did we aim to do participation study nor consider the meaning of social background for consumption of cultural offerings organized by our case institutions. Our intention was simply to find which kinds of value could be found from the data. We believe that the empirical evidence—especially through our qualitative analysis—about the current values attributed to the institutions in Jyväskylä not only helps to consider the value of established, traditional institutions for contemporary and future policies but also illustrates the broadness of possibilities the institutions have for developing their actions.

Despite the positive value attributions throughout the data (including non-visitors), it was striking how a large share of the respondents (including visitors) felt that these institutions were not inclusive enough in their actions. It is easy to think of cultural policy in which these institutions would partake more strongly in fulfilling the city's strategic aims, including the attractiveness of

the city, its economic development, and widening access and broadening the chances for participation. This however most likely would require new kinds of collaboration between the institutions and other cultural actors and some kind of re-organizing of the existing working methods throughout the city organization and the institutions.

The several values of art and culture institutions we found from our data also point to multiple policy domains related to art, economy, social, and wellbeing effects. Although we know that conflicting aims also exist regarding cultural values, the varied value dimensions can complement each other in future-oriented policies. All this shows the potential that is embedded in the established institutional structure, not only for the art and culture institutions themselves but also for considering cross-sectoral policies that are needed to answer the growingly complex questions existing in the society.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because Dataset may contain information that is potentially identifiable. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to olli.ruokolainen@cupore.fi.

Author contributions

SS, OR, and TT have all worked in a project where the data was gathered. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontierspartnerships.org/articles/10.3389/ejcmp.2023.11618/full#supplementary-material>

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The European
Journal of Cultural
Management and Policy
(EJCMP) | 2022-2023
Retrospective

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