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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, legitimation, 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

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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

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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.

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).

(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

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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 augurated 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 coincise 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 flourishment 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*

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

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-creativeness.

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

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

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