

Fostering the creation of cross-sectorial networks: key drivers for culture-related collaborations in Italy's Po Delta Region

Elena Borin

*Department of Economics and Management, University of Ferrara,
Ferrara, Italy*

brnlne@unife.it

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the implications and potential of implementing cross-sectorial networks related to culture by means of empirical research in the Po River Delta area of Northern Italy. The aim of the research is to provide insights into the main difficulties that may arise and action that could be taken to implement successful collaborations between subjects belonging to different sectors. The investigation provides useful information for cultural players and at the same time contributes to the academic debate on the possibility of rethinking the current governance systems and management models in the cultural sector in favour of participatory approaches involving multiple stakeholders, citizens and communities on the basis of shared cultural identity and common goals and objectives.

Keywords:

Cultural networks

Cross-sectorial networks

Cultural cooperation

Governance systems

Introduction

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the importance of cross-sector collaborations and cross-sectorial networks in different disciplines, among which are management and governance (Camarinha-Matos & Macedo, 2010; O'Flynn & Wanna, 2008; Starkey, Barnatt & Tempest, 2000), public policy delivery and public management (Osborne, 2010), and organisational research (Keast, Mandell & Agranoff, 2013).

Over the years, the idea of creating networks has also strongly entered the cultural field and has been called for as a tool for reforming the whole sector. Networks and partnerships at the *meso* (territorial) level based on the cultural identity of a territory and involving its diverse subjects and inhabitants are advocated both as means of overcoming traditional issues related to the cultural field, such as its self-referential attitudes and problematic financial sustainability, and as ways to deal with the new challenges posed by the ongoing economic and financial crisis (Bonet & Donato, 2011). Indeed, sharing resources and pooling skills through networking could help decrease costs related to common activities, enhance effectiveness in pursuing shared goals and unlock the innovative capacity of cultural organisations through innovative synergies. This paper investigates the theme of cross-sector networks based on culture focusing on the perceived levers for designing and implementing them in a specific area in Northern Italy, the Po Delta territory. The Po Delta is an area surrounding the Delta of Italy's most important river, the Po; it is located in two regions¹ – Veneto and Emilia Romagna – and stretches across three provinces (Ravenna, Ferrara and Rovigo).

The research continues the discussion launched by significant research on the drivers and “facilitators” of cross-sector collaborations (Brinkerhoff, 1997; Crosby & Bryson, 2005 & 2010) and is related to the ongoing debate among the cultural sector's academics and professionals on the need to rethink the current models of cooperation and networking, as well as the existing governance systems and management models (Bonet & Donato, 2011; Donato, 2013).

After a theoretical analysis of the existing literature on cross-sectorial networking and on the current developments of the cultural sector, an empirical investigation was carried out in three main phases: preliminary research on the state of the art of network collaborations in the area and its main cultural networks performed through document research and interviews with cultural managers working for the most relevant cultural networks or cultural organisations in the area; a second empirical investigation carried

out through semi-structured interviews (following a research protocol based on the results of the previous analysis) with potential “facilitators” for the implementation of a local cross-sectorial network. The research ended with the analysis of the collected data in light of the potential rethinking of governance and management models in the cultural field.

The investigation aimed at answering the following research questions:

- What is the attitude of potential key facilitators towards the possibility of implementing prospective cross-sector networks in the cultural sector?
- How can cross-sectorial networks be created? What are the difficulties and the actions that may be taken to overcome those difficulties?
- How can the gathered data contribute to the debate on the shifting paradigms of the cultural sector and, more specifically, how do they contribute to the debate on the creation of cross-sector collaborations and networks? How does the research help policymakers and professionals in the cultural sector understand when cross-sector networks make sense and how to design and implement them?

The article has both a theoretical and a practical purpose. From a theoretical perspective, it aims to provide data that could stimulate the debate on the perception of cross-sector networks by their potential facilitators, and on the role of key actors in the rethinking of the governance systems and management models of the cultural sector towards *meso* (i.e. territorial) perspectives based on more collaborative, cross-sectorial approaches that insert culture and cultural actors into their broader socio-economic context. From a practical perspective, it aims at providing research-based guidance to policy makers and cultural professionals regarding the design and implementation of cross-sectorial networks related to culture, identifying the leverages and the actions that could create the necessary conditions to foster cross-sectorial understanding and cooperation.

The paper is developed into five main parts. This section provides an overview of the research objectives and framework; section two analyses existing literature on the concept of networks and cross-sectorial networks with references both to the cultural sector and to the ongoing debate on the rethinking of its governance systems and management models. The third section presents the research methodology and is followed by the presentation and analysis of the results of the investigation in section four, and section five critically discusses research results and makes some concluding remarks.

¹ Regions are the first-level administrative divisions of the Italian state. There are 20 regions, each of them, except for Valle D'Aosta, is divided into provinces.

Theoretical background

The variety of approaches and perspectives in analysing networks and cross-sector networks underlines their inherent complexity and their adaptability to a variety of subjects and disciplines. In general, there is overall agreement that networks substantially differ from other forms of collaboration such as public-private partnerships because of their focus on trust, reciprocity, mutual gains and common goals. What keeps the different partners together is the “mindset” and the commitment created between members (Mandell, 1999). O’Toole (1997) defines networks as structures of interdependence involving multiple organisations and underlines how each unit is not the formal subordinate of others in some hierarchical arrangement, but is rather related to other partners in a horizontal perspective.

Therefore, networks take the form of organisations coordinating their joint activities through different types of peer-to-peer relations (Turrini et al, 2009). Nevertheless, they cannot be considered just to be “serendipitous contacts” among subjects but as goal-directed and consciously organised and bounded groupings (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). Indeed, the concept of a network is often associated with that of “network structures”, e.g. “linkages” between a number of organisations that have become stable and more formalised, going beyond informal types of relations (Kickert et al, 1997; Kickert & Koppenjan, 1997; Mandell, 1999; McGuire, 2002; Keast et al, 2004; Huang & Provan, 2007).

The “trust basis” of networks does not imply that there is no lead agency, task force, chairperson or formal governance body that leads the collaboration, but that rather than relying on contractual arrangements (although contracts may be a part of the collaboration), networks rely on interpersonal relations, mutual understanding and trust as core values for their design and implementation (Mandell, 1999; Davis & Rhodes, 2000; Considine, 2005). Authority comes mainly from the recognition of a common purpose for whom embeddedness and interdependence among the members is preferable to carrying out the different tasks alone. According to this perspective, networks require a change of framework, from a hierarchical authority approach to management and governance forms based on more relational, horizontal and equalitarian perspectives (Ansell, 2000; Chisholm, 1996; Rhodes, 1996; Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Keast et al, 2004; Mandell & Keast, 2008; Mandell & Steelman, 2003; Provan & Milward, 2001; Milward & Provan, 2003).

In the framework of the studies on networks, cross-sector networks have increasingly attracted attention from both academics and professionals. Cross-sector collaborations are defined as the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities and capabilities by organisations in two or more sectors (e.g. ICT, the cultural sector, the tourism sector, environmental protection, the creative industries, etc.), often belonging to different domains (public,

not-for-profit, private, civic, etc.) to jointly achieve an outcome that could not be achieved by organisations in one sector alone (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Mandell, 1999). In setting up this type of networks, holistic perspectives are considered necessary: to be effective, members should be part of integrated systems, recognise themselves as interdependent and thus work towards systemic change (Keast et al, 2004).

The research on cross-sector networks has been manifold and part of the intellectual challenge in addressing this subject is blending multiple theoretical and research perspectives (Rethemeyer, 2005). Among the different approaches, two trends seem particularly significant for our research: investigation of cross-sector networks in public policy design and implementation and studies of potential key players in the promotion and implementation of cross-sector collaboration. On the first, public policy has recently been interpreted under participative perspectives that could also be carried out through cross-sectorial networks. Mandell (1999) argues for the importance of networks (interpreted mainly as cross-sectorial networks involving public, private and community actors) in public policy design and implementation, highlighting how over recent decades there has been a worldwide effort to achieve more effective public policy outcomes through innovative and participative approaches to the delivery of public programmes (Cristofoli et al, 2014; Salamon, 2002; Osborne, 2010). Brinkerhoff highlights the potential of cross-sectorial networks in creating “virtuous circles” where local companies, non-profits and citizens are asked to express their preferences, building an idea of empowerment of various stakeholders, citizens and communities (Brinkerhoff, 1997). In the framework of the research on multi-stakeholder partnerships (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Flinders & Skelcher, 2012) cross-sector networks are often recognised both as a necessary characteristic of pre-partnership collaboration and as underlying structures in all partnership implementation phases.

As for the literature on leadership and drivers in cross-sector collaborations, studies have explored the role of the so-called “facilitators”, “movers” or “sponsors” of cross-sector collaborations (Linden, 2002; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Morse, Buss & Kinghorn, 2007; Crosby & Bryson, 2005 & 2010; Feldman & Khademian, 2007). They are defined as those politicians, leaders of already existing networks, or generally influential people that have the power to stimulate groups of individuals, companies, etc. in a local area to start special types of actions and initiatives. The identity of these facilitators is of course strictly related to the territory in which they operate and to the type of collaborations or initiatives to be implemented. Feldman et al (2006) stress the importance of what they call “boundary groups”, groups of people who can create boundary experiences (i.e. shared or joint activities) that can facilitate the success of the network in the long term.

Crosby and Bryson underline the key role of sponsors and leaders of existing networks in creating “linking mechanisms” and promoting trust-building activities to nurture cross-sector cooperation. They also argue that cross-sector collaborations are more likely to form in turbulent environments when problems are more complex and affect organisations operating in diverse sectors and socio-economic domains. Key players are crucial not only in promoting network formation but also in ensuring participatory drafting processes involving various stakeholders (Page, 2004) and governance bodies that ensure an equal distribution of power between more and less powerful partners (Crosby & Bryson, 2005).

These developments of the general debate on cross-sector networks resonate with the ongoing discussions in the cultural sector, in particular those on the need to move towards more integrated approaches and models of cooperation that consider culture as part of the broader socio-economic environment. Many studies have focused on networks and collaborations that were established within the cultural sectors and among cultural institutions, both private and public (Bagdadli, 2003; Guintcheva & Passebois-Ducros, 2012; Scrofani & Ruggiero, 2013) arguing that networks could work as effective means to promote strategic collaboration between sectorial arts organisations (Scheff & Kotler, 1996). As far as culture is concerned, cross-sectorial networks have been often associated with integrated tourism systems (Jackson & Murphy, 2006; Bhat & Milne, 2008; Augustyn & Knowles, 2000; Hall, 2000; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2004), highlighting the importance of creating links between arts organisations and companies belonging to other sectors, such as IT, transport systems, the wine and food industries, etc. (Burrows et al, 2007) to promote more coordinated and sustainable models for cultural tourism development of specific areas. Emphasis has been put on the importance of participatory approaches to tourism development (Tosun, 2000) and on interpreting the different organisations operating in a territory as embedded in a social context of relationships with their communities (Gulati, 1998). Blasco, Guia and Prats underlined the importance of overcoming conventional administrative and sectorial borders when working on projects of cross-border destination enhancement and similarity-stressing (either cultural, functional or organisational) as a useful factor in implementing collaborations, finding “bridging actors”

and institutions and building on the creation of close relationships between the partners (Blasco, Guia, & Prats, 2014).

As far as cultural heritage is concerned, Scrofani and Ruggiero underline how heritage and cultural activities could play a relevant role as drivers for cross-sector collaborations in territories, cities and regions (Scrofani and Ruggiero, 2013). In such contexts, museums are among the structures that receive greatest attention from local and state authorities: the role of museums has gone beyond the cultural and educational field and they have become instruments for strengthening the image of cities and regions and the sense of belonging of their various stakeholders (Scrofani & Ruggiero, 2013). Museums can become a driving force for tourism, being at the same time closely tied to their territory and open to creating links with the outside world (Plaza & Haarich, 2009; Atzori, 2009). It is also argued that some cultural networks have the objective of creating an integrated image of the cities or regions through their museums interpreting them as vehicles for the promotion of the cultural values and of the whole cultural heritage of the territory, enhancing the advantages that derive from their physical proximity to various culture-related institutions. Cultural networks have also been described as “vectors for integration” in Europe and, in particular, since 2007 the European Commission has tried to encourage the cultural sector to work in a more cross-sectorial way, promoting dialogue between cultural networks and stakeholders belonging to other fields (Littoz-Monet, 2013).

Some authors also hinted at the potential of networks as a means to successfully deal with the impact of the ongoing economic and financial crisis on the cultural sector (Bonet & Donato, 2011). In order to overcome the decrease in public funding in the cultural field and the related threats to cultural institutions, new governance and management models based on networking and partnerships should be created at the *meso* level, implying cooperation between subjects coming from different sectors. This interest in cross-sector networking based on culture has also been associated with the concepts of interdependency, co-operation, collaboration and dynamism linked with the ecology of culture approach (Holden, 2004 & 2015) and also with calls for setting culture in its broader context and moving towards ecosystem perspectives. Cross-sector collaborations have been identified as part of the debate on governance and management

“THE ‘TRUST BASIS’ OF NETWORKS DOES NOT IMPLY THAT THERE IS NO LEAD AGENCY, BUT THAT RATHER THAN RELYING ON CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS, NETWORKS RELY ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS”.

models in the cultural field, as well as steps in a general movement towards new multi-level, multi-stakeholder governance systems and management models (Donato, 2013). Calls for cross-sectorial networking and collaborative approaches have also increased in European policy documents: recent communications and reports (European Council, 2011; Council of the European Union, 2014; European Commission, 2015) have indeed underlined the need to reinterpret the role of culture, cultural heritage and cultural organisations in terms of their existing and potential collaborations not just inside the cultural sector but also with society and citizens, with other public and private actors and with related sectors. Cultural networks that cut across several domains (public, private and non-profit) and create cooperation between related fields such as tourism, education and sustainability are interpreted as enhancers of the intrinsic value of culture in a changing scenario.

As far as Italy is concerned, many cultural networks are in place and they are often sectorial (e.g. museum networks, library networks, theatre networks, etc.). Some studies have highlighted the positive spillover effects of cultural districts and networks based on culture (Cuccia & Santagata, 2004; Valentino, 2003) and recent initiatives have tried to create permanent links between existing sectorial networks (e.g. the MAB project launched in 2012²). In recent years – also in Italy – the creation of territorial cultural systems has been advocated as a possible solution to the negative impact of the crisis on the cultural field (Donato, 2013).

Research methodology

Starting from the above theoretical framework, an empirical investigation was developed to understand the necessary conditions and potential of implementing cross-sectorial networks in the cultural sector in Italy.

The literature review both on the subject of cross-sectorial networks and on the debate on the rethinking of the paradigms of cooperation in the cultural sector provided the background for designing the research. In particular, the research on leadership, facilitators and the role of pre-existing networks as key factors in cross-sector collaborations (Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006) seemed particularly significant. This led to the choice of focusing on an area that not only had a strong cultural identity but also where cultural networks were already in place; moreover, the literature review convinced us to study the perception of local key movers in order to explore the potential and difficulties for the practical implementations of cross-sectorial networks. The current debate on the need to move towards cultural ecosystem approaches

at the *meso* level, bringing the actors together on the basis of shared cultural identity (Donato, 2013) led to the decision to look for an area with a multiplicity of subjects – public, private and non-profit – operating in the cultural sector or in related fields.

An area with all these characteristics was the Po Delta in Italy, and it was therefore selected for the research. The area includes three provinces (Rovigo, Ferrara and Ravenna) belonging to two administrative regions (Veneto and Emilia-Romagna) that over the years have received important recognition for their cultural and natural heritage and landscapes (Ravenna, Ferrara and the Po Delta have been added to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites List). Two territorial museum networks were already operating in the area, the *Sistema Museale Provinciale Polesine* (Provincial Museum System of Polesine), in Rovigo province, and the *Sistema Museale della Provincia di Ravenna* (Network of the Museums in the Province of Ravenna). Moreover, culture not just as cultural heritage and cultural and creative industries, but in its broader interpretation (e.g. intangible heritage, landscape heritage, traditional wine, food and agriculture, etc.) has been among the drivers of the socio-economic development of the territory. Implementing a cross-sectorial network in this area could potentially build on the existing museum networks and cultural institutions (that to some extent are already trying to promote collaborations among themselves) and, through the support of local political authorities, attempt to involve local industries related to culture (in particular, the local companies belonging to the tourism sector, to the transport sector, the local enterprises related to the food and wine industry, IT companies and creative industries such as design companies and architecture firms, etc.), as well as the many associations in the area operating for cultural promotion and the citizens and communities through their local representatives. Cross-sector cooperation between these subjects could aim at promoting an integrated and sustainable model of local development through culture, generating positive spillover effects on the local economy, creating jobs, social growth and different opportunities to engage local communities and citizens.

The selected research method was qualitative, since this allowed for a more flexible approach and was considered more suitable for in-depth exploration of the complexity of the perception and involvement of the different stakeholders in the creation of a cross-sectorial network. The empirical research was carried out in two phases.

The first phase of the research aimed at understanding the state of the art of the networks in the area of the Po Delta in order to identify the potential key subjects/facilitators of cross-sectorial networks. This was carried out both through document

² MAB – the *Musei Archivi Biblioteche* project is promoted by the three main national associations of libraries (AIB – *Associazione Italiana Biblioteche*; ANAI – *Associazione Nazionale Archivistica Italiana*, and the Italian Section of ICOM International). Further information is available at: <http://www.mab-italia.org/>

analysis and web research and through structured interviews with significant cultural stakeholders, e.g. managers of the two local museum networks and officers in charge of the cultural collaborations of the informal cultural network of the area of Ferrara. This first round of interviews allowed a deeper understanding of the current situations in the Po Delta region and permitted a more consistent selection of the interviewee sample for the second phase of the empirical research. Based on the results emerging from this phase, the initial interview protocol was amended with questions deleted or added as the researcher's knowledge of the cases increased and as additional questions arose from the data collected, according to the flexibility to make adjustments whenever needed during the data collection process that academics identify as a key aspect of case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995; Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

The second phase of the empirical research aimed at answering the research questions more specifically by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews with a selected sample of participants. The selection of the interviewees was based on the criteria of variety and representativeness required by qualitative analysis (Patton, 2002) and, though it did not have a statistical character, it aimed to represent the main categories of subjects that could be the sponsors of a culture-based cross-sectorial network.

We started by focusing on some of the key movers mentioned in the analyses on leaderships and facilitators (Crosby and Bryson, 2010), such as politicians, managers of existing networks, leaders of influential groups operating in areas related to the theme of the network; then we tried to identify them in the Po Delta context in reference to the creation of a potential network inspired by culture. As a result, we focused on the three following categories of what we called "key movers" in this prospective network: political representatives of local authorities, i.e. politicians in charge of the design and implementation of cultural policies; managers of existing cultural networks or cultural organisations that have proven to be particularly active in the area; representatives of relevant associations or non-profits operating in sectors related to the cultural field which were in some cases already experiencing cross-sector cooperation. An interviewee for each category of key players was selected in each of the three provinces of the Po Delta in order to better represent the three main administrative domains of the area; a total number of nine interviewees was contacted and asked for availability to participate in the empirical investigation.

All agreed to be interviewed. Considering that most of them were in highly demanding work periods and dealing with challenging tasks at the time the research was conducted, the response could

be considered significant and perhaps an indicator that the topic was of interest to the participants. We initially tried to set up focus groups involving at least two of the three key players for each province in order to observe their interaction during the interview and tap the potential dynamics of the cross-sectorial network: however, this was possible only in two of the three provinces involved, Rovigo and Ravenna, which were also the provinces where formal projects for cross-sectorial networks were already ongoing. Each interview lasted between one and three and a half hours and two researchers were present and took notes during the interviews in order to ensure a more objective transcription of the content.

The last phase of the research was based on the critical analysis and interpretation of the data collected through document and web research, interviews and focus groups. Stake (1995) distinguished between intrinsic and instrumental case research. Our research could be placed in this second category, since the case of the Po Delta was used as a means to get a first hint of the dynamics and mindset among key players in a cross-sectorial network. Our aim was to place the results in a broader debate on the reforms of the cultural sector and on the readiness of its main subjects to embrace the changes needed to rethink the entire cultural field.

Empirical research: results and discussion

A previous empirical investigation on the state of the art of the cooperation between cultural heritage institutions, cultural tourism and transportation authorities in the region of the Inner Adriatic in Northern Italy was performed between 2011 and 2013 in the framework of a European-funded research project focused on the potential of creating an integrated system in the Inner Adriatic area³. The data that emerged during this analysis encouraged further investigation. As a result, the present research was started with the aim of understanding the potential to create cross-sectorial networks based on culture. The research allowed us to get a first insight into the possibility to change the current approaches of management and governance in the cultural sector towards a cultural ecosystem at a local level aimed at unlocking the potential of culture in the area and generating positive spillover effects in the territory.

First phase: state of the art of networking and cross-sectorial networking

In the first phase of the project, the research was performed through document and web research

³ The *ADRIA A project – Accessibility and development for the re-launch of the Inner Adriatic area*, funded under the Cross-border cooperation programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013 aimed at contributing to the accessibility and transport reorganisation in the entire cross-border area in order to form an integrated Italian-Slovene metropolitan area. For further information, see <http://www.adria-a.eu/en/>

and focused on identifying the main existing cultural networks in the territory; it was instrumental in understanding the framework for the development of the following phases. This phase highlighted the fact that the territory was not homogeneous in terms of existing networks and their tendency towards cross-sectorial approaches. In the area the most prominent networks were two museum networks, the first in the province of Rovigo and the second in the province of Ravenna, while in the province of Ferrara no institutionalised museum network was in place, but the municipality's Department of Culture and Tourism was progressively developing a relevant role in the promotion of networking (formal as well as informal) between various actors in the territory, focusing on culture but bringing together different sectors (in particular, private companies operating in the tourism field, small artisanal and craft enterprises, creative industries and IT agencies).

Based on these results, it was decided to conduct preliminary interviews with the staff or managers of the museum networks in Rovigo and Ravenna and with the manager of the Department of Culture of the Municipality of Ferrara. The interviews were based on a questionnaire aimed at understanding the extent and models of their cross-sectorial networking. The questionnaire was filled in by the interviewer with the answers provided by the interviewee during a face-to-face conversation. This approach allowed a certain degree of flexibility, since it was possible to clarify the doubts of the interviewees, partially amending the questionnaire to the specific case or adding further questions as relevant additional information emerged during the conversations. The results of this part of the research provided a clearer overview of the state of the art of cross-sector networking in the area, which will be presented in the following paragraphs.

Ravenna was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1996 because of its outstanding universal value being of remarkable significance by virtue of the supreme artistry of the mosaic art contained in its monuments, and also because of

the crucial evidence that they provide of artistic and religious relationships and contacts in an important period of European cultural history⁴. In 1997 the provincial council of Ravenna promoted the creation of a museum network in the province⁵, with the aim of helping the local museums with their development projects, promoting joint, structured programmes and attracting more resources (interpreted both in terms of shared know-how and competences and in terms of funding – especially that from the region and from the EU – and economies of scale). The museum network, currently composed of 42 museums (including state museums and museums belonging to local authorities, to foundations, to

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associations or private owners), is an institutionalised network with a governance structure formed of the directors of the museums that meets periodically (at least 2-3 times a year) to discuss the strategies to be pursued by the network. There are specific offices created for its management that coordinate communication (including its website and social media communication), while also offering meeting spaces, offices and various materials for the network members. Each member must comply with quality standards and criteria. From the questionnaire it emerged that this network is particularly open to collaborations with external subjects, both in the cultural field and in other sectors. It cooperates with two smaller local museum networks (the museum network of the City of Faenza and that of the Lower Romagna region), and with other networks and associations in the province and region (in particular the provincial libraries and archives networks), promoting the following categories of activities: cultural and educational,

outreach, communication and marketing, and fundraising. The network joined the *Visit Romagna Card*, a collaboration that includes not only cultural organisations but also tourism associations and companies operating in different sectors (the transport sector, hotels, restaurants, food and wine companies, craftsman and SMEs, etc.). The level of involvement of the citizens seems still to be at an initial stage: the network has no specific platforms

⁴ The full description of the criteria met by the city of Ravenna for its inscription in the UNESCO World Heritage List is available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/788>

⁵ Further information is available on the website of the *Sistema Museale*: <http://www.sistemamusei.ra.it/>

for citizens' engagement, and its initiatives aim only to spread knowledge about the activities of the network.

Rovigo is a smaller province compared to Ferrara or Ravenna but strategically located in the area of the Po Delta. Since 2003 (formalised in 2005) a museum network for the province was established, the *Sistema Museale Provinciale Polesine* (Provincial Museum System of Polesine), bringing together 28 museums both public (owned by state or local authorities) and private or those belonging to local associations. The network was formalised by means of an agreement and promoted by the cultural department of the province in association with some of the most important museums in the area, both public and private. Its governance committee is composed of the directors of the member museums; the Province of Rovigo plays a leading role, working as coordinator and pivot in the network. Regular meetings and an annual conference are organised for knowledge sharing and strategic programming, but, as argued by the interviewees, the decisions taken during these meetings are not binding and the assemblies aim more at knowledge and experience sharing than at real strategic planning. Specific offices and staff are dedicated to the management of the various activities of the network, which are mainly cultural and educational activities, communication (including website and social media), marketing and fundraising. As for the external collaborations, the museums cooperate with local tourism associations and with other cultural networks and groups, especially on cultural activities. However, the promotion and signing of agreements with other parties is mainly left to the initiative of the individual museums in the network. The most interesting cooperation has been established with the *Comitato Permanente per la Conservazione e la Valorizzazione dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali in Polesine*, a permanent committee/working group created in 1995 that represents an interesting example of cooperation between public and private actors comprising more than 58 subjects from different sectors (the cultural sector, creative sector, IT, tourism, craftsmen and small enterprises). Especially over the last three years the committee has been particularly active in creating dialogue and knowledge flow with cultural policy decision makers and with the museum network of the province. This emerged in particular during the interviews, when the committee was frequently mentioned as a privileged partner for many of the activities and policies in the Rovigo area. The level of citizens' engagement is still to be developed; the network promotes outreach activities towards the local communities but there is no specific cooperation in the planning and programming of the network's strategies.

As for the Province of Ferrara, it was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1996 as an outstanding planned Renaissance city which has retained its urban fabric virtually intact⁶. The recognition was extended to the Este ducal residences in the Po Delta, since they testify to the influence of Renaissance culture on the natural landscape in an exceptional manner and later also to the whole Po Delta area, as an outstanding planned cultural landscape which retains its original form to a remarkable extent. The many museums in the province of Ferrara could be grouped into an informal network guided by the province of Ferrara (in the province there are 28 municipality museums, four state museums, and three private museums), but there is no institutionalised museum network as in the provinces of Ravenna or Rovigo. The municipality is often active in promoting cooperation between a variety of cultural institutions (both private and public), as well as among subjects operating in different sectors, in order to organise cultural events in the territory. It must be noted that the two formalised museum networks operating in the Po Delta area (Rovigo and Ravenna) were mainly promoted by the cultural departments of local authorities. Therefore, the network of collaborations promoted by the municipality's Department of Culture could be considered an example of an informal network with the potential to evolve in a more formalised and institutionalised structure. Indeed, as argued by the interviewees, although no institutionalised network is currently in place, the creation of a network could be considered *in fieri*, since frequent meetings between museums, cultural organisations, tourism associations and various other stakeholders are organised for planning activities and initiatives, mainly cultural, educational and those related to marketing, communication and fundraising. Although there is no office and specific staff for the network, the municipality manages the website and communication of the common initiatives and works as pivot for the agreements and joint activities. The level of citizens' involvement seems higher than in the other provinces of the Po Delta; the interviewees argue that they try to involve representatives of the citizens in their meetings.

Second phase: the potential of a cross-sectorial network in the Po Delta area

The second phase of the research aimed at understanding the basis for the creation of a cross-sectorial network in the area, investigating the perception of the potential for a cross-sector network and the key factors perceived by the prospective "facilitators" potentially influencing and driving a project of this type (policy makers, cultural managers

⁶ The full description of the criteria met by the city of Ferrara and the Po Delta for their inscription in the UNESCO World Heritage List is available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/733>

“THE MAIN ADVANTAGES OF CREATING A CROSS-SECTOR NETWORK ARE THOUGHT TO BE ITS POTENTIAL FOR POSITIVE SPILLOVER EFFECTS ON THE SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME CREATING SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH CITIZENS’ PARTICIPATION”.

and other stakeholders operating in culture-related sectors). The first phase of the empirical research was instrumental for identifying these facilitators, and they were subsequently contacted and asked whether they were available to participate in the research. As previously explained, the interviews were carried out either as face-to-face individual interviews or as focus groups designed to stimulate debate between the key players, to allow a more flexible flow of ideas between them and to observe potential dynamics between the different interviewees.

The research interviews were semi-structured, allowing space for collecting additional information, and were carried out as open-ended questions addressing the three following research topics:

1. What do you think about the possibility of implementing a cross-sectorial network with culture as its main framework that involves the participation of different sectors in the area of the Po Delta? What could its potential and main advantages be?
2. What are the main difficulties in creating and implementing such a cross-sectorial network in the area of the Po River Delta?
3. What practical actions would help overcome the difficulties in implementing this network in the area?

The restricted research sample allowed manual content analysis. Confronting the data, we noticed that the open answers presented common points and many similarities. This allowed us to classify the answers in macro-categories of answers. The data were later analysed both as a whole and separately, according to the three categories of facilitators (policy makers, cultural managers, and other stakeholders) and their province. The results of this analysis are discussed in the following paragraphs.

As for the first research question (see table 1), an almost unanimous positive response was given, with all the interviewees declaring themselves in favour of the establishment of a cross-sector network in the territory. Only one cultural manager, though agreeing on the positive potential of such a network,

argued that it would not be easy to implement and would therefore require significant efforts from all the partners and the local authorities involved.

The overall analysis of the answers highlighted the fact that the main advantages of creating a cross-sector network are thought to be its potential for positive spillover effects on the socio-economic development of the area in terms of job creation, growth of new and existing enterprises and better enhancement of the resources of the territory, while at the same time creating social capital through citizens’ participation (both answers were given by 100% of the sample). Indeed, participants argued that coordinating the different subjects of culture-related sectors (such as IT, food industry, tourism, events organisation, PR, transport companies, etc.) will create a more integrated offer, making the area more attractive not only for tourists, but also for private companies and citizens, while also creating social value for the local communities. Other relevant responses regarded the possibility of reinforcing the tendency for cross-sectorial perspectives based on synergies between different sectors on the basis of common goals (56%), prospective better knowledge flow in the area and the enhancement of its innovative potential (both 67%), followed by improved communication between the different actors in the territory, better knowledge management among the actors (joint knowledge management in the area) and better relations between them. Analysing the results per category of stakeholder, all policy makers of the sample considered the possibility of establishing better knowledge flow mechanisms in the area as relevant advantages, whereas better knowledge management among the members in the area and the enhancement of the innovation potential of the territory were indicated as advantages by all cultural managers. In terms of geographical area, the potential of reinforcing cross-sectorial perspectives was perceived as highest in the Province of Ferrara; significantly, Ferrara was the province where the implementation of cross-sectorial collaborations by the municipality emerged as particularly developed in the first phase of the empirical investigation.

		<i>Positive spillover effects on local socio-economic development</i>	<i>Creating social capital for the territory also through citizens' participation</i>	<i>Better knowledge flow mechanisms in the area</i>	<i>Better communication between the subjects of the region, including citizens</i>	<i>Enhancing the innovation potential of the area through networking</i>	<i>Development of better relations among the different subjects of the area</i>	<i>Reinforcing the tendency to cross-sectorial perspectives</i>	<i>Joint Management of HR</i>	<i>Better knowledge management between the members</i>
Ravenna	Policy makers	1	1	1		1	1		1	
	Cultural managers	1	1			1		1		1
	Other stakeholders	1	1	1			1		1	
Rovigo	Policy makers	1	1	1	1		1	1		
	Cultural manager	1	1	1	1	1			1	1
	Other stakeholders	1	1	1	1	1				1
Ferrara	Policy makers	1	1	1	1			1		
	Cultural manager	1	1			1	1	1		1
	Other stakeholders	1	1			1		1	1	
Total %		100%	100%	67%	44%	67%	44%	56%	44%	44%
% of answers given by each category of interviewee with reference to each topic										
	% of the total answers given by policy makers	100%	100%	100%	67%	33%	67%	67%	33%	0%
	% of the total answers given by cultural managers	100%	100%	33%	33%	100%	33%	67%	33%	100%
	% of the total answers given by other stakeholders	100%	100%	67%	33%	67%	33%	33%	67%	33%

TABLE 1. PERCEIVED POTENTIAL OF A CROSS-SECTOR NETWORK IN THE PO RIVER DELTA

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The analysis of the answers to the second research question (see table 2) highlighted that the most common problem in implementing a cross-sector network is the mistrust among potential members (indicated by 100% of the total sample of the interviewees). Indeed, interviewees argued that there is general lack of confidence mainly between public and private partners, the first blaming the second for paying attention almost exclusively to profits, whereas the second often accuse the first of inefficiency and ineffectiveness. These biases among the members could prevent them from cooperating and lead to general discontent in the network. Other significant drawbacks could be: the differences in domains and sectors that lead to different procedures and approaches; technical problems related to knowledge

flow; the lack of appropriate communication tools, infrastructure, human resources and professional profiles for working in a cross-sectorial environment (all these issues were pointed out by 89% of the interviewees); the lack of managerial tools (56%); problems related to the fact that the potential members are not used to identifying common goals and objectives and are not accustomed to involving citizens and communities in the process of definition of goals and missions. Focusing on the results given by the different categories of interviewees, it is relevant to point out that the fact that potential members are not used to identifying common objectives and that they might lack managerial tools was not indicated as a potential problem by the "other stakeholders" participants.

		<i>Diverse administrative and bureaucratic domains and sectors</i>	<i>Mistrust between potential members of the ecosystem</i>	<i>Technical and administrative problems related to knowledge flow between different institutions</i>	<i>Subjects are not used to identifying common goals and to engaging community and citizens</i>	<i>Lack of managerial tools (including financial management tools) for the network</i>	<i>Lack of entrepreneurial and innovative mindset</i>	<i>Technical and administrative problems related to knowledge flow between different institutions</i>	<i>Lack of human resources and professional profiles apt to work at a meso network level, or of facilitators</i>	<i>Incomplete presence of communication tools and infrastructure to facilitate the management of the network</i>
Ravenna	Policy makers	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1
	Cultural managers	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Other stakeholders		1	1			1	1	1	
Rovigo	Policy makers	1	1	1		1	1		1	1
	Cultural manager	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1
	Other stakeholders	1	1	1			1	1	1	1
Ferrara	Policy makers	1	1	1			1	1	1	1
	Cultural manager	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Other stakeholders	1	1	1				1		1
Total %		89%	100%	89%	33%	56%	89%	89%	89%	89%
% of answers given by each category of interviewee with reference to each topic										
	% of the total answers given by policy makers	100%	100%	67%	33%	67%	100%	67%	100%	100%
	% of the total answers given by cultural managers	100%	100%	100%	67%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	% of the total answers given by other stakeholders	67%	100%	100%	0%	0%	67%	100%	67%	67%

TABLE 2. PERCEIVED DIFFICULTIES OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A CROSS-SECTOR NETWORK IN THE PO RIVER DELTA REGION

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Finally, the answers to the third research question (see table 3) provide interesting information on what could be done to overcome the potential difficulties and establish the necessary basis for cross-sector networks in the area. There is total agreement (100% of the interviewees) on the fact that the network implementation should be preceded by activities aimed at enhancing networking approaches such as focus groups and consultation plans that would allow the potential members to get to know one another and fully explore the impact that networking could have on the development of the local economy. Identifying common goals and shared cultural identity

were indicated as having the same importance: as one of the interviewees argued, "pointing out what unites the subjects, their common values, identity and objectives could really be the basis for creating a cross-sectorial network" since it could enhance the sense of belonging and motivate the subjects to work together. A significant sample of interviewees (89%) argued that the network should attempt to solve the potential mistrust among its members through the implementation of action plans and initiatives to promote better relations between the subjects. Other common answers were related to the development of a long-term plan of educational

and training activities for the staff (again to increase the general tendency to networking and peer-to-peer confrontation), and the setting up of an incentive scheme to promote a different view of public funding as a means to encourage an entrepreneurial mindset. Creating a suitable governance structure was also a key point, while other answers underlined the need to use digitisation and sharing economy tools as means to increase communication among the members and interaction with the citizens. As for the differences among the responses given according to the category of facilitator and province, it is interesting to note that the need to develop a suitable governance structure

was perceived more strongly by policy makers than by the other categories, stressing the politically-perceived importance of maintaining balance among the different subjects. All policy makers also pointed out the need to rethink the role of public funding, arguing that cultural institutions are funded mainly through public money and that, in times of crisis and decrease of public cultural budgets, it is necessary to promote a more entrepreneurial attitude and encourage other sources of revenues based on partnerships between public and private subjects. Cultural managers, along with the actions previously identified, perceive the need to develop innovative educational policies as a priority.

		<i>Focus groups and consultation plans for networking approaches and impact on the local economy</i>	<i>Action plans for enhancing mutual understanding and better relations among members</i>	<i>Common cultural identity and common goals as the basis and criteria for network</i>	<i>Staff training programmes to increase the tendency to networking</i>	<i>Creating a suitable and participatory governance structure</i>	<i>Development of innovative educational policies and plans for staff in the long term</i>	<i>Implementation of an agenda for the use of digitisation and new technologies tools for innovation and better communication</i>	<i>Incentives to stimulate the development of an entrepreneurial mindset, rethinking the role of public funding</i>	<i>Agenda for the use of sharing economy tools to facilitate interaction with citizens</i>
Ravenna	Policy makers	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Cultural managers	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1
	Other stakeholders	1	1	1					1	1
Rovigo	Policy makers	1	1	1		1			1	1
	Cultural manager	1	1	1		1	1			
	Other stakeholders	1	1	1		1	1			
Ferrara	Policy makers	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	
	Cultural manager	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	
	Other stakeholders	1		1	1					1
Total %		100%	89%	100%	56%	67%	67%	22%	67%	56%
% of answers given by each category of interviewee with reference to each topic										
	% of the total answers given by policy makers	100%	100%	100%	67%	100%	67%	33%	100%	100%
	% out of the total answers given by cultural managers	100%	100%	100%	67%	67%	100%	33%	67%	33%
	% out of the total answers given by other stakeholders	100%	67%	100%	33%	33%	33%	0%	33%	67%

TABLE 3. ACTIONS AND STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTING A CROSS-SECTORIAL NETWORK

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Concluding remarks

The purpose of this article was to investigate the meaning, drivers and potential of implementing cross-sectorial networks based on culture by means of empirical research in a northern Italian area (the Po River Delta) characterised by a strong cultural identity, significant cultural heritage and a variety of stakeholders related to culture.

The theoretical analysis highlighted an increasing interest in cross-sector collaborations and networks both in the framework of the literature on networking and in the debates going on among academics and professionals in the cultural sector. The literature review on cross-sectorial networks, though adopting manifold approaches and perspectives, underlined two interesting research trends: the first inserts cross-sectorial networks into a broader rethinking process of public policy design and implementation that interpreted them in the framework of a worldwide effort in promoting innovative synergies and participatory approaches. The second stresses the key role of leaders and “facilitators” in designing and implementing cross-sector collaborations and the fact that cross-sector networks are more likely to be established in “turbulent times” when the different sectors understand that they are unlikely to successfully solve complex problems operating in a sectorial way.

These issues are also debated in the cultural sector, where growing calls are made for rethinking the current models of governance and management: according to this research the cultural field should move towards *meso* and ecosystem perspectives based on networking not only among cultural organisations but also between cultural institutions and subjects belonging to other sectors, both private and public, trying also to involve citizens and communities. This rethinking process becomes particularly significant in the current period of difficulties and changes due to the crisis: promoting cross-sector networks in the cultural field based on common cultural identity and common goals could promote a reinterpretation of the role of culture in its broader socio-economic context and encourage resource and competence sharing for creating more effective strategies for local development and overcoming both the new and traditional challenges to the cultural sector.

The first phase of the empirical research highlighted the Po River Delta’s inhomogeneous nature as a region, having both formalised and informal networks in place, thus constituting a typical example of the Italian territory; the second phase of the empirical investigation was carried out by means of semi-structured interviews with representatives in each province of three categories of potential key movers in the implementation of a local, culture-related cross-sectorial network.

The results of the research were encouraging: the majority of the movers shared a positive attitude towards the creation of a cross-sector network and believed in its potential for local socio-economic development and creation of social value. Nevertheless, there are interesting differences related to the geographical province to which the respondents belonged and to their category: significantly, the benefits of cross-sectorial synergies and perspectives are seen to be greater in the province of Ferrara, where informal cross-sectorial networks and systems are already *in fieri*, than in other provinces where cross-sectorial collaborations are still not so widespread. The fact that one of the most regular perceived benefits for cultural managers is innovation potential and better knowledge management among the subjects might be indicative of the perception among cultural institutions that new models of collaboration with diverse subjects could be key to innovation and to better responding to traditional and emerging challenges. There is also general agreement on the difficulties that are currently preventing or that may arise in the implementation of cross-sector networks, with some significant differences in the perception by other stakeholders that do not see a problem in the fact that the subjects are not used to identifying common goals and that they lack managerial tools. Finally, there is agreement on the way to overcome potential difficulties: the majority of the interviewees pointed to the need to implement activities that will work on the mindset of the different stakeholders, such as focus groups, meetings and training initiatives that aim at enhancing the sense of belonging to a common cultural identity, and that allow the members to get to know each other and learn how to network. Other possible actions are the implementation of training programmes for the staff and the use of digital tools to facilitate the interaction with citizens and communities, along with the establishment of governance structures based on participatory approaches and equally representing the members.

“THE CULTURAL FIELD SHOULD MOVE TOWARDS *MESO* AND ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVES BASED ON NETWORKING NOT ONLY AMONG CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS BUT ALSO BETWEEN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND SUBJECTS BELONGING TO OTHER SECTORS”.

Overall, our findings reinforce the academic debate on the perceived necessity for cross-sectorial networking in the cultural field and on the desire to adopt common cultural identity and common goals as bases for rethinking the governance and management models of the cultural sector. Through such actions the sector could move towards more holistic and cross-sectorial approaches, inserting culture into its broader environment and promoting participatory processes with citizens, communities and the other public and private stakeholders. At the same time, the research provides useful information for cultural players to better understand the key drivers and actions for implementing cross-sector collaborations. Since a potential obstacle to cross-sectorial networking is the mistrust among subjects belonging to diverse sectors, a change of mentality and initiatives to increase the sense of belonging should be considered key actions. Though not of statistical character, our results also show significant insights about the differences of perceptions and interests of the key local stakeholders in cross-sectorial projects, identifying the various levers that could bring them to network across sectors.

However, the results of the research are specific to the geographical area where the investigation was carried out and therefore their application on a broader scale should be further investigated. Future research could be developed in a broader geographical perspective, using comparative analysis in an international framework, and attempt to include a wider sample of interviewees to better represent the real composition of the potential network and provide more comprehensive insights into the potential role of facilitators and sponsors in promoting “structured” cross-sector collaborations.

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