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- Special Issue: Cultural entrepreneurship and cultural initiatives challenges
- Strategic adaptations in cultural management
- Mapping cultural heritage for optimal resource management
- Creative industries and the innovative urban milieu
- Social impact influence on cultural entrepreneurship
- Cultural resources and organizational rebirth
- Public financing to support female entrepreneurship



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EDITORIAL

CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AND CULTURAL INITIATIVES CHALLENGES
IN A NEW CONTEXT

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Keywords: Cultural entrepreneurship, culture-driven sustainable development, cultural ecosystems, cultural business models and governance of cultural initiatives.

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Abstract

Purpose: The editorial of the Joint Special Issue between PISB - Piccola Impresa - Small Business and the EJCMP - European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy explores how cultural entrepreneurship and initiatives address contemporary challenges, foster innovation, resilience and sustainable development.

Design/methodology/approach: The editorial synthesizes findings from nine contributions, using diverse methodologies—including spatial analysis, case studies, and comparative research—focused on cultural ecosystems, governance, entrepreneurship, and heritage-driven development.

Findings: Cultural initiatives serve as transformative connectors across sectors, supporting innovation, resilience, and inclusivity. Their impact varies contextually, influenced by governance models, entrepreneurial mindsets, and socio-cultural embeddedness, showing culture's potential in driving sustainable urban and regional development.

Practical and social implications: The studies highlight culture's capacity to foster equitable development, revitalize urban and peripheral areas, support inclusive governance, and enhance the sustainability of creative ecosystems by linking tradition, innovation, and community engagement.

Originality of the study: The editorial presents a unique multi-journal collaboration offering diverse, context-rich perspectives on cultural entrepreneurship, emphasizing the role of culture as a catalyst for systemic transformation in policy, practice, and research.

In contemporary society, cultural initiatives not only offer a stage for artists and cultural practices but also act as systemic connectors of diverse institutional domains. They provide special intellectual resources as well as a connecting infrastructure that enables a transformative interaction across artists, academic institutions, scientific communities, cultural entrepreneurs and other individuals and groups. The resulting transformative processes foster innovation, inclusivity, and resilience in our complex societal systems.

Cultural initiatives serve as hybrid platforms where disciplinary boundaries are reflected, reconfigured and broken down (Demartini et al., 2021). They can imply that universities engage with artists, that scientists collaborate with cultural institutions to enhance public understanding or that entrepreneurs draw on artistic practices to reimagine economic models creating complex cultural ecosystems (Bergamini et al., 2018; Dobрева & Ivanov, 2020; Magkou, 2024). An increasing number of studies take a contextualized approach, underlining the relevance of local embeddedness, neighborhood networks, and the social structure of cities as arenas for novel business models, organizational structures, and start-ups (Vestrum, 2014; Summatave & Raudsaar, 2015; Borin & Delgado, 2018; Ben Hafaïedh et al., 2023). These linkages are neither incidental nor can they be easily enforced by directing interventions - but can be observed in their multifaceted contexts (Pagano et al., 2021; De Bernard et al., 2022).

This joint issue between the EJCMP -European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy and PISB - Piccola Impresa - Small Business aims to address these issues through nine international contributions. It seeks to provide insights into the changing realities of cultural and creative activities and their implication towards sustainable development. The objective is to analyse these dynamics in action in various geographical locations and contexts.

In the contributions published in the PISB journal, the debate revolves around adaptive strategies, resilience and innovation in cultural ecosystems, with reflection on sustainable urban development and the tensions between urban and peripheral areas (especially in the context of Rome).

Strategic Adaptations in Cultural Management: Organisational Resilience and Innovation in Creative Industries in Rome by Pastore and Corvo investigates how Rome's cultural institutions cope with the underlying challenges through adaptive approaches. Combining quantitative statistics and a qualitative interview analysis, the research illustrates the value of organisational flexibility and the supportive roles of infrastructure for resilience and innovation in urban creative ecosystems.

From Insights to Strategy: Mapping Rome's Cultural Heritage for Optimal Resource Management and Promotion by Masili, Conigliani, and Ad-dis applies spatial analysis and cluster techniques to investigate the distri-

bution of Rome's cultural heritage. The study reveals significant disparities between the historic centre and peripheral areas, pointing to context-sensitive strategies to promote the diversification of cultural offers, ensure equitable resource allocation, and foster the sustainable development of the urban landscape.

Lelo's Creative Industries and the Innovative Urban Milieu: The Case of the Metropolitan City of Rome analyses the spatial concentration of creative industries in Rome. Employing spatial regression modelling, the study highlights the significance of localised knowledge spillovers, providing empirical evidence that supports policy interventions aimed at fostering creative entrepreneurship and innovation within the urban context.

How Does Social Impact Influence Cultural Entrepreneurship? by Opioli, Lanzalonga, and Biancone examines the adoption of digital solutions for the evaluation of social impact within the cultural and creative industries. Building on the insights derived from an action-research case study, the authors propose a framework that synthesizes the Theory of Change with Business Intelligence systems. This integrative model provides a replicable approach for aligning cultural activities with the objectives outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

From Poltrona to Centro Studi Poltrona: How to Pivot on Cultural Resources for Organisational Rebirth by Fioravante, Cau, and Piccioni investigates how organisational renewal can be fostered through the strategic use of cultural resources. The study introduces the concepts of the "artist-based enterprise" and the "project-based model," emphasising the transformative potential of artistic heritage as a catalyst for economic and cultural resilience.

Among the four papers published in the EJCMP, we find contributions exploring governance, entrepreneurial dynamics and creative entrepreneurship, and sustainable regional development.

Kostica's Does Network Governance Really Work? Evidence from Cross-National Comparative Research on Urban Regeneration in Belgrade and Amsterdam examines governance systems regarding urban regeneration. By comparing the governance approaches employed in Belgrade's Savamala district and Amsterdam's NDSM Wharf, the research outlines distinct governance pathways and their respective impacts on processes of urban transformation. The study points out the effectiveness of stable, inclusive network governance in fostering resilient and sustainable cultural ecosystems while critically identifying the inherent limitations of hierarchical governance structures.

In Becoming a Craft Entrepreneur: Reviving Heritage by Means of Tradition, Innovation, and Community in the Nove's Ceramic Ecosystem, Leonardi and Pareschi undertake an analysis of the career of ceramist Pol Polloniato, proposing a model of artisan entrepreneurship that encompasses

es rootedness, experimentation, legitimation, and return to the community. Their findings highlight how craft entrepreneurship intersects tradition, innovation, and community engagement, thereby emphasizing its significance for regional development and the long-term sustainability of cultural ecosystems.

Knowledge Co-Creation in Arts Universities: An Entrepreneurial Mindset, by Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitch and Ranzcakowska, offers an in-depth examination of the integration of entrepreneurial thinking within the context of arts universities. On the basis on the theoretical framework of Communities of Practice and empirical data gathered from two European institutions, the authors explore how fostering an entrepreneurial mindset can enhance processes of knowledge co-creation (while also facilitating the alignment of artistic and institutional values) and investigate the inherent tensions emerging between entrepreneurial imperatives and artistic identity.

Lastly, *Fashioning Cultural Entrepreneurship: Heritage's Role in the Dissemination, Didactic and Research Activities Among Stakeholders*, by Vandi and Vacca, addresses the function of fashion heritage in cultural entrepreneurship through the case history of the Gianfranco Ferré Research Center. It illustrates how the archive functions as a hub for didactical, cultural, and social sustainability, providing a model for replication in the utilization of heritage in the service of the creative and cultural industries.

In a nutshell, the contributions included in this joint Special Issue present a multi-dimensional analysis of how culture serves as a driver for change, shedding light on challenges, opportunities, and emerging patterns. They highlight the multifaceted nature of cultural and creative initiatives and their embeddedness within specific socio-spatial contexts. They reflect how different interventions can contribute to fostering resilience, driving innovation, and supporting sustainable development by promoting collaborative and adaptive practices. The intersection between governance models, entrepreneurial dispositions, and cultural resources emerges as a key driver for systemic transformation.

However, the modalities of the connections differ significantly across projects, cities and regions. Each article offers a specific case of how culture can unfold this potential. We invite the readers to explore, engage with the cases and understand their specific connecting contribution.

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RESEARCH ARTICLES



STRATEGIC ADAPTATIONS IN CULTURAL MANAGEMENT: ENHANCING ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION IN ROME'S CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

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Abstract

Purpose. This study explores the dynamic interplay between organisational resilience and innovation within Rome's cultural and creative industries (CCI) amid significant urban dynamics and cultural policy reforms. The research aims to understand deeper systemic challenges and transformations affecting CCIs and uncover strategies that enhance organisational resilience and foster innovation.

Design/methodology/approach. The study employs a mixed-methods approach to synthesise quantitative data from a specially designed questionnaire and derive qualitative insights from 33 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in Rome's CCI. This methodological mix, supported by NVivo software for data integration and analysis, facilitates a holistic understanding of how cultural organisations navigate both longstanding and emergent challenges.

Findings. The findings reveal significant organisational agility across Rome's CCIs, with entities exhibiting various degrees of innovation in response to shifting environmental pressures. Their strategic pivot towards more sustainable and resilient operational frameworks challenges traditional views on innovation that are linear and prescriptive.

Practical and Social Implications. The study underscores the importance of supportive infrastructure and financial mechanisms in the sustainability and growth of CCIs. Further, it explores how cultural organisations transform these challenges into opportunities for systemic growth and enhancing sectoral vitality, thereby emphasising a nuanced understanding of the complex interdependencies between cultural policy, organisational resilience, and innovation.

Originality of the study. This study highlights how adaptive resilience and targeted support can coalesce to foster vibrant and sustainable urban cultural ecosystems and provides a fresh perspective on managing cultural industries through a crisis, emphasising the role of innovation and strategic adaptation in sustaining cultural vitality.

1. Introduction

Rome's cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are integral to the city's identity and its economic and social framework. Amid the backdrop of significant urban dynamics and cultural policy reforms, these industries navigate a complex landscape marked by rapid transformation and increased complexity. Understanding these transformations requires a clear conceptual framework for analysing how CCIs operate and evolve within urban environments.

CCIs emerge from the convergence of artistic expression, intellectual property, and economic activity, representing a distinct sector in contemporary urban economies. While traditional economic classifications often struggle to capture their unique characteristics, CCIs are distinguished by their capacity to transform creative and cultural capital into both tangible and intangible outputs. This transformation process operates through multiple channels: direct cultural production, creative service provision, and the generation of intellectual property rights.

The conceptual framework for understanding CCIs has evolved significantly, moving beyond simple industry classifications to recognise their role as complex adaptive systems within urban environments. This evolution reflects a growing recognition that these industries operate through distinctive value-creation mechanisms that combine cultural, social, and economic dimensions. Their operational logic differs from traditional industrial sectors in several key aspects:

1. **Value Creation:** CCIs generate multiple forms of value simultaneously – cultural, social, and economic – making their output measurement and evaluation distinctly complex.
2. **Resource Utilisation:** These industries rely heavily on intangible assets, particularly human creativity and cultural knowledge, alongside traditional physical and financial resources.
3. **Market Structure:** CCIs operate within hybrid market environments where public good characteristics coexist with commercial imperatives, creating unique organisational challenges.

This conceptual understanding is particularly relevant in historically rich contexts where traditional cultural production intersects with emerging creative practices. Rome exemplifies these dynamics, as its cultural organisations must balance heritage preservation with contemporary innovation.

Within this framework, the resilience of Rome's CCIs represents not just survival but strategic adaptation that leverages both traditional and emerg-

ing tools to foster sustainable growth. This study explores these strategies, emphasising the importance of infrastructural and financial support systems, as illuminated by our review of the organisational characteristics and operational challenges derived from an extensive mapping and ontology assessment of the sector. These assessments revealed deep-rooted structures and emergent needs that shape the operational capacities and strategic responses of cultural organisations.

While this study's primary data collection occurred during 2020–2022, a period marked by unprecedented challenges, the transformations observed during this time have proven instrumental in understanding longer-term patterns of adaptation and innovation in Rome's CCIs. The strategic responses developed during this period continue to shape organisational practices and policy approaches, offering valuable insights into the sector's evolving resilience mechanisms and innovation capabilities.

Furthermore, this study extends beyond immediate pandemic-induced disruptions to consider the deeper systemic challenges affecting CCIs and the long-term effects that influence their current evolution. By integrating insights from a comprehensive ontology of the cultural landscape and a nuanced understanding of organisational needs, this study seeks to uncover strategies that bolster resilience and drive innovation, thereby ensuring the sustainability of cultural enterprises in an ever-changing urban milieu.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study synthesised both quantitative and qualitative data, drawing on the rich theoretical landscape of urban resilience and cultural innovation. This analysis aims to enhance the understanding of how Rome's cultural organisations navigate the intricacies of their environment, adapting to both longstanding challenges and the rapid shifts that define modern urban development.

2. Theoretical Background

Rome's CCIs are integral to its economic vitality and social cohesion, which seamlessly blends traditional artisanship with contemporary cultural expression. These industries serve as economic drivers and custodians of cultural heritage, highlighting the complex interplay between preserving historical legacies and fostering modern innovation. This dual role positions CCIs as essential elements in shaping urban identity and contributing to the broader social fabric (European Commission, 2018).

A nuanced understanding of CCIs requires an examination of the diverse types of cultural activities within the sector, which are often categorised through a taxonomy that includes traditional arts, digital media, design, and heritage conservation. In Europe and Italy, this taxonomy helps distinguish between various cultural forms, each with its own operational

dynamics, economic models, and developmental needs (UNESCO, 2009). This classification is crucial for developing targeted policies that support the distinct characteristics and challenges of each cultural domain, from commercially oriented creative sectors to public cultural offerings that emphasise accessibility and education (KEA European Affairs, 2006).

The resilience of cultural organisations in Rome is a testament to their ability to adapt to shifting economic and social landscapes. Organisational resilience is not merely about surviving crises but involves strategic innovation and adaptation to changing environments. This adaptability is evident in how cultural entities navigate rapid urban transformations in Rome, while balancing the conservation of heritage with the demands of modernisation. Healy (2002) discussed how cultural organisations adjust to new economic realities, emphasising the role of innovation in sustaining cultural vibrancy. Innovative capabilities are particularly critical, as cultural organisations often face the pressure of maintaining their historical roots while embracing contemporary cultural dynamics.

Innovation in Rome's CCIs is influenced by a combination of necessity and opportunity. The integration of digital technologies and collaborative practices has allowed organisations to expand their reach and engage with diverse audiences. This shift towards digitalisation is part of a broader trend across Europe and Italy, where cultural organisations are increasingly leveraging technology to enhance their offerings and remain competitive in the global market (European Commission, 2020). Li (2020) and Bergamini et al. (2018) emphasise that creativity and innovation are vital for sustaining cultural enterprises, particularly in a digital era which is reshaping the production and consumption of cultural goods.

Cultural entrepreneurship is closely linked to changes in governance models that influence the production and consumption of cultural goods and services. Recent reforms in Rome aim to foster entrepreneurial activities within the cultural sector by adapting governance structures to better support the dynamic nature of cultural production (Council of the European Union, 2019). These changes are reflected in the evolving landscape of cultural funding and policy, which increasingly recognises the need for flexibility and innovation in supporting diverse cultural initiatives.

Community networks and local embeddedness are important for sustainable cultural entrepreneurship. In Rome, these networks facilitate collaboration among stakeholders and ensure responsiveness of cultural initiatives to local needs and sustainability in the long term (Vestrum, 2014; Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2023). A robust cultural ecosystem benefits from unrestricted ideas and resources, which fosters a collaborative spirit that is essential for resilience and innovation.

However, the growth of the CCI sector is challenging. The "creative class" theory (Florida 2002) is criticised for oversimplifying the relation-

ship between creativity and economic development, often neglecting the socioeconomic inequalities and displacement that accompany CCI-driven urban development. To address these broader socioeconomic impacts, Peck (2005) argues for cultural policies that advocate for a more equitable distribution of the benefits of urban cultural economies.

The theoretical background incorporates insights from academic literature and EU cultural policies to provide a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities within Rome's cultural and creative industries. It emphasises the need for governance models to promote innovation and resilience and address the complex socioeconomic dimensions of urban cultural development to ensure that the sector continues to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

3. Methodology

This study utilised a mixed-methods approach to investigate resilience and innovation within Rome's cultural and creative industries (CCI). Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies were integrated to capture how these organisations navigate their operational and strategic environments amid evolving urban dynamics. Data were collected using a detailed structured questionnaire and in-depth semi-structured interviews.

The participant base was drawn from an extensive database comprising 520 organisations that had engaged with Rome's Department of Cultural Activities and Zetema Project Management.

The study's core data collection phase (2020–2022) captured a critical period of transformation in Rome's CCIs, documenting organisational responses during a time of intense adaptation and innovation. This timing provided a unique opportunity to observe how cultural organisations develop and implement strategic changes under pressure, revealing patterns that continue to influence the sector's development. The database of 520 organisations established during this period serves as a valuable baseline for understanding organisational adaptation and resilience in Rome's cultural sector.

These organisations form a critical part of Rome's cultural ecosystem, characterised by their close interactions with public institutions and reliance on municipal funding mechanisms. To gain insights into the operational strategies and adaptive capacities of these organisations, a survey was distributed to the entire database, with a response rate of approximately 10%, resulting in 49 completed surveys. Although modest, this response rate provides a highly representative snapshot of organisations deeply embedded in the public cultural landscape of Rome.

The survey itself was structured to capture a broad range of informa-

tion regarding the challenges and opportunities faced by these organisations. The first section gathered baseline data related to the organisational characteristics, including size, scope, and primary areas of cultural activity. This allowed for an initial understanding of the diverse operational realities within the sector, ranging from small, locally focused entities to larger organisations with a broader reach across national or even international cultural scenes.

In alignment with the ESSnet-Culture framework, the study focused on key sectors, including performing arts, books and publishing, audiovisual and multimedia, and social promotion associations. These categories were selected to emphasise content creation and cultural output, particularly focusing on activities with direct audience engagement and community impact. Additionally, two new categories were introduced to address innovative production and accessibility: innovation hubs and coworking spaces, and socio-cultural centres, highlighting the role of multifunctional and collaborative spaces in cultural production.

Following this, respondents were asked to provide details on their financial structures, with particular emphasis on their reliance on public funding. This section explored how public funding shaped their operational strategies, long-term planning, and capacity for innovation. The reliance on public funds, while providing financial stability, often limits the flexibility and entrepreneurial spirit of these organisations, an issue that emerged as a central theme in the findings.

The survey also addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a critical disruptor for cultural sectors globally. Organisations were prompted to reflect on the specific challenges they encountered during the pandemic, particularly in terms of financial stability and operational continuity. This section explored how cultural entities in Rome responded to the constraints imposed by social distancing measures, with many having to pivot towards digital platforms to maintain audience engagement and continue their programming.

Another important focus of the survey was the exploration of resilience and strategic innovation. Respondents were asked to describe the strategies they adopted to navigate the crisis and ensure long-term sustainability. This included the use of digital tools, the diversification of revenue streams, and the formation of collaborative partnerships with other cultural organisations or public institutions. The responses shed light on the various ways organisations adapted to maintain relevance and operational stability in an uncertain environment.

The final section of the survey examined institutional support and future expectations. Organisations were invited to assess the level of support they received from government institutions and to express their expectations regarding future funding and policy reforms. This provided a criti-

cal perspective on the effectiveness of existing institutional frameworks in supporting the sector's resilience and highlighted areas where further intervention might be needed to ensure the long-term viability of cultural organisations.

To complement the closed sample and capture a broader range of perspectives, an open sample was gathered through a social media campaign conducted across multiple platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram). The campaign targeted cultural organisations in Rome through relevant hashtags, group postings, and organic sharing. This approach resulted in 29 responses from organisations with diverse financial structures and operational models. While this sampling method was inherently random due to the nature of social media engagement, it captured organisations operating outside traditional public funding structures, providing valuable comparative insights into different operational models within Rome's cultural sector. The self-selection nature of this sample, while introducing potential bias, offered authentic perspectives from organisations actively engaged in cultural production but operating independently of municipal funding mechanisms.

Alongside the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 33 representatives selected from the closed sample. Informed by the initial findings from the questionnaires, these interviews followed Saldaña's (2015) qualitative research practices to explore deeper themes.

The interviews began by asking participants to describe their organisational profiles, including their activities, geographic reach, and relationships with local institutions. Participants discussed key challenges they faced, particularly in areas such as management, human resources, financing, and bureaucratic hurdles.

The interviews further explored how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted their operations, prompting many to pivot towards digital platforms and rethink their strategies for maintaining audience engagement. Discussions also covered the professional skills most in demand within their organisations and the potential for greater collaboration with other sectors. Digital transformation was highlighted as a crucial tool for innovation, with participants sharing their experiences and insights on the opportunities and challenges of adopting digital tools. Lastly, the interviews touched on gender dynamics in the cultural sector, with participants offering recommendations on addressing gender-related issues through policy reforms.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify patterns and trends within the data and provide a quantitative understanding of the operational realities of CCI in Rome. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically using NVivo software. This analysis involved rigorous coding to identify and categorise emergent themes, accurately reflecting the complex dynamics within cultural sectors.

Stringent ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study. Participants were fully informed about the research objectives, data confidentiality, and their rights concerning voluntary participation.

The study recognises potential limitations, particularly regarding the representativeness of the closed sample. While these organisations benefit from their proximity to public institutions, this reliance on public funding can limit entrepreneurial capacities and lead to project-based activities with less long-term stability. To address this limitation, the inclusion of an open sample provided a broader perspective on the diversity of financial and operational models within Rome's CCI.

By combining structured quantitative methods with rich qualitative interviews, the methodology ensured the study's robustness, comprehensiveness, and suitability for providing meaningful insights into cultural management and policy discourse. These insights reflect the complex interplay between cultural organisations and their urban environments, as discussed by Healy (2002) and Li (2020).

Table 1: Rome's CCI Sector Classification and Study Sample Distribution

Cultural Domain (As per ESSnet-Culture)	Database (N=520) %	Closed Sample (n=49)	Open Sample (n=29)	Interviews (n=33)
Performing Arts	35	12	8	8
Books and Publishing (Including Libraries)	15	8	5	5
Social Promotion & Cultural Centres*	15	8	5	5
Cultural and Natural Heritage	12	6	4	4
Visual Arts	10	5	3	3
Audiovisual & Interactive Media	10	5	2	3
Innovation Hubs, Coworking Spaces*	2	3	1	2
Associations of Associations/Networks*	1	2	1	2
ICT	-	-	-	1

** Categories extending beyond traditional ESSnet-Culture framework to capture emerging forms of cultural production*

Note: The database comprises organisations engaging with Rome's Department of Cultural Activities and Zetema Project Management (2020–2022). The closed sample was drawn directly from this database, while the open sample was gathered through a social media campaign to capture organisations operating outside traditional funding structures.

4. Findings

This study examines resilience and innovation within Rome's CCI through a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of data. Our research aimed to uncover how these organisations have navigated the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, their strategic responses, and their broader implications for operational sustainability and growth. The findings were divided into several thematic categories, each addressing a critical aspect of the organisational landscape within the CCI.

Organisational Characteristics: The foundational attributes of organisations within the CCI, including their size, scope, and operational reach.

Impact of COVID-19: The impact of the pandemic on organisations' operations and finances and their immediate adaptations.

Resilience and Strategic Innovations: The long-term strategies that organisations had developed to enhance their resilience and foster innovation.

Differences Between Closed and Open Samples: Comparison of the responses and strategies of organisations more closely tied to governmental structures (closed sample) versus those operating more independently (open sample).

Institutional Support and Future Expectations: The current level of support received by the organisations from the government and other institutions and their expectations for future support.

This structured approach allows us to methodically dissect the sector's dynamics, providing a granular understanding of how cultural organisations within Rome are shaped by their environment. The subsequent sections delve into each of these categories, presenting a rich tapestry of data that reflects the complex interplay of challenges and opportunities within Rome's CCI.

4.1 Organisational Characteristics

The diversity within Rome's cultural and creative industries is reflected in the range of organisations that participated in this study, from small, independent entities to larger, more established institutions. This diversity is crucial for understanding the varying capabilities and challenges faced by these organisations.

The survey data indicates significant differences in operational scope

and size between the closed and open samples. The closed sample, comprising organisations with close ties to government funding and support, generally included entities with larger operational scales and more employees.

Table 2: Organisational Characteristics

Characteristics	Closed Sample (%)	Open Sample (%)
Local Operation	65	75
National Reach	25	15
International Reach	10	10
Average Employees	20	5

Note: Percentages are illustrative based on survey responses.

Table 2 illustrates that while the majority of organisations in both samples operate locally, a notable portion of the closed sample has a wider reach, both nationally and internationally. This expanded operational scope is often associated with increased resources and capacity, which influence strategic choices and resilience capabilities.

The qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts provided deeper insights into the organisational culture and ethos that underpin these operational characteristics. For example, themes such as “community engagement” and “organisational mission” were prevalent among smaller organisations, particularly in the open sample, indicating a strong focus on local impact and social values. These qualitative data enrich our understanding of how organisational characteristics influence operational strategies and priorities.

This detailed examination of organisational characteristics sets the foundation for understanding how different types of organisations responded to the pandemic, adapted their strategies, and devised plans. This highlights the importance of considering organisational diversity when designing policies and support mechanisms to aid the sector’s recovery and growth.

4.2 Impact of COVID-19 and Organisational Responses

The COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably caused significant disruptions to all sectors, but its impact on Rome’s CCIs is particularly profound because they rely on public gatherings and events. The survey and interviews provided a comprehensive view of how these organisations were affected and their immediate responses to mitigate the impact.

The survey data portrays a stark picture of the financial and operational disruptions caused by the pandemic. The vast majority of organisations re-

ported substantial declines in revenue, with many trying to maintain their workforce and operational continuity.

Table 3: Impact of COVID-19

Impact Category	Closed Sample (%)	Open Sample (%)
Revenue Decrease	80	90
Shift to Digital	60	70
Operational Disruption	85	95

Note: Percentages are illustrative based on survey responses.

Table 3 shows that while both samples experienced significant impacts, the open sample, which generally comprised smaller and less financially secure organisations, reported a slightly greater revenue decline and operational disruptions. However, both samples demonstrated a substantial shift towards digital platforms, indicating a sector-wide pivot toward on-line engagement and service delivery in response to lockdown measures and social distancing guidelines.

The qualitative insights from the interviews add depth to the findings. Many organisational leaders considered the rapid transition to digital platforms not only as a temporary fix but also as a broader strategy to diversify their engagement methods and potentially reach a global audience. For example, one interviewee mentioned, “The move to digital technology has opened new pathways for us to reach audiences we never thought possible before. It’s become a core part of our strategy now, not just a response to the pandemic.”

The qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts highlighted several themes related to resilience and adaptation. Themes such as “digital innovation” and “community support” were frequently mentioned, with many leaders emphasising the role of digital tools in maintaining community engagement and continuing cultural activities despite physical barriers.

This section of the findings reveals the depth of the pandemic’s impact along with the dynamism and adaptability of Rome’s cultural organisations. The shift to digital technology, while initially a response to an unprecedented crisis, began to reshape operational models within the sector, promoting lasting changes in how culture and creativity are consumed and delivered.

4.3 Resilience and Strategic Innovations

As Rome’s CCIs were confronted with the immediate challenges posed by the pandemic, their responses evolved into strategic innovations aimed at enhancing long-term resilience. Both the survey and interviews provid-

ed insights into the mechanisms adopted by organisations to survive and potentially thrive in a post-pandemic landscape.

Table 4: Resilience and Innovation Strategies

Strategy	Closed Sample (%)	Open Sample (%)
Diversified Revenue Streams	50	30
Enhanced Digital Capabilities	70	80
Development of New Business Models	40	60

Note: Percentages are illustrative based on survey responses.

The survey data indicate a significant embrace of digital capabilities across the sector, with a higher incidence in the open sample. This reflects a broader trend in which smaller, more agile organisations adapt quickly to changing circumstances and leverage technology to open new operational and revenue-generating avenues. The diversification of revenue streams was more pronounced in the closed sample, likely because of their larger structures and greater access to various funding sources, which allowed them to explore different financial strategies without abandoning the traditional ones.

The interview’s findings enriched these insights, revealing that the adoption of new business models often involves creative collaboration across sectors and rethinking audience engagement strategies. Many organisations have started leveraging online platforms for content delivery interactive and immersive experiences to expand their reach and deepen audience engagement.

The qualitative analysis highlighted interconnected themes such as “sustainability,” “community resilience,” and “innovation.” Leaders frequently mentioned how fostering a resilient organisation requires a balance between immediate adaptive strategies and long-term sustainability planning. For instance, one leader noted, “Adaptation has become a continuous process. We are always looking for ways to innovate our offerings and engage with our community, ensuring we remain relevant and financially viable.”

In addition, the qualitative data showed an association between resilience and community support, with several organisations emphasising the role of local networks and partnerships in navigating crises. These relationships provided moral support along with practical assistance, such as shared resources and joint funding initiatives, which were crucial during the most challenging periods.

This section underscores the adaptive capacity of cultural organisations in Rome, highlighting their ability to integrate new technologies and busi-

ness models into their operations. The strategic innovations adopted are not merely reactive measures but comprise a broader strategy aimed at fostering organisational resilience and ensuring sustainability in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

The analysis of resilience and innovation strategies reveals important variations by sub-sector and organisational size. For example, performing arts organisations, being more dependent on physical spaces and live audiences, showed different patterns of digital adaptation compared to multimedia and publishing sectors that had existing digital capabilities. Similarly, organisation size influenced the ability to implement strategic innovations - while larger organisations (particularly in the closed sample) had more resources for digital infrastructure, smaller organisations often demonstrated greater agility in adopting new operational models, albeit with resource constraints affecting their sustainability.

4.4 Differences Between Closed and Open Samples

The distinctions between the closed and open samples of cultural organisations provide critical insights into how different types of organisations within Rome’s CCIs navigate challenges and leverage opportunities. The closed sample primarily comprises organisations having established relationships with government funding bodies and more stable operational frameworks, whereas the open sample includes more independent operating entities, which are often smaller and have less direct access to public funding.

Table 5: Sample Differences

Factor	Closed Sample	Open Sample
Financial Stability	Higher	Lower
Innovation Adoption	Moderate	Higher
Dependency on Public Funding	High	Low

Note: Descriptive categories based on survey and interview data.

Table 5 illustrates key operational differences. Financial stability was notably higher in the closed sample, reflecting more consistent access to public funds and larger structural buffers. Conversely, organisations in the open sample, although less financially stable, are often quicker to adopt innovative practices. This agility is partly because of necessity; without the cushion of regular funding, these organisations must be creative in finding new ways to generate revenue and engage audiences.

Interviews with leaders from both samples revealed that while closed-

sample organisations benefit from predictability and security, this can sometimes slow their response to market changes and technological advancements. On the contrary, leaders from the open sample expressed their lack of dependency on public funding, while challenging, has fostered a culture of innovation and flexibility that is crucial in rapidly changing environments.

For instance, one leader from an open-sample organisation mentioned, “Our independence from steady public funding has forced us to be more dynamic and responsive to the community’s needs and the digital marketplace. It is tough, but it also drives creativity and rapid adaptation.” This sentiment was echoed in the NVivo analysis, where the themes of “independence” and “agility” appeared more prominently in the open sample’s responses.

Additionally, the resilience strategies employed differed significantly. Organisations in the closed sample tended to focus on strengthening existing structures and expanding them within their established networks. In contrast, open-sample organisations were more likely to explore new partnerships and cross-sector collaborations to extend their operational horizons and tap into new audience segments.

The differences between the closed- and open-sample organisations underscore the importance of tailored support strategies for policymakers and cultural advocates. For closed-sample organisations, enhancing the flexibility of funding allocations and encouraging innovation within secure frameworks could help them remain competitive and vibrant. For open-sample organisations, increasing access to resources, training, and start-up funding could support entrepreneurial initiatives and stabilise operations.

These insights highlight the dynamic nature of Rome’s cultural ecosystem and the need for policies that recognise and adapt to organisational types, considering their specific challenges and strengths. This understanding is crucial to foster a resilient, innovative, and inclusive cultural sector that can thrive during future disruptions.

4.5 Institutional Support and Future Expectations

Exploring institutional support and the future expectations of organisations within Rome’s CCIs reveals a complex landscape of needs and desires that vary significantly across the sector. The survey data and interviews highlighted both appreciation for existing support and the need for enhancements to meet the evolving demands of these cultural entities.

Table 6: Institutional Support Feedback

Support Quality	Closed Sample (%)	Open Sample (%)
Satisfactory	40	20
Needs Improvement	60	80

Note: Percentages are illustrative based on survey responses.

As illustrated in Table 6, satisfaction with current institutional support was notably higher among the closed sample; however, most closed-sample organisations felt that improvements were necessary. This sentiment is even more pronounced in open-sample organisations, in which most organisations find the current level of support to be lacking. These differences reflect varying degrees of engagement and reliance on public funding and support structures between the two groups.

The qualitative analysis revealed several themes that detailed the specific areas where cultural organisations depend on their institutional counterparts. Common requests include more flexible funding arrangements, reduced bureaucracy in the grant application process, and greater inclusivity in policymaking to ensure support for a wider array of cultural activities and organisations.

For example, one interviewee from the open sample stated, “We often find ourselves excluded from larger funding opportunities due to the rigid criteria that favour more established institutions. A more inclusive approach would help bridge this gap and foster a more vibrant cultural landscape.”

In addition, the qualitative analysis revealed that organisations across both samples seek support that goes beyond financial assistance. They expressed the need for partnerships that offer strategic advice, technological support, and assistance in expanding their digital presence. These findings suggest growing recognition of the importance of comprehensive support that addresses both immediate financial needs and long-term strategic development.

Regarding the future, organisations expressed a desire for a supportive framework that adapts to the rapid changes in the cultural sector, particularly in terms of digitalisation and global reach. There is a clear expectation of policies that not only react to current trends but also anticipate future developments.

For instance, many leaders emphasised the importance of a “future-proof” support system that considers the increasing demand for digital technology in cultural production and dissemination. They prefer initiatives aimed at technical training, developing digital infrastructures, and supporting innovation in digital content creation.

These expectations reflect a sector that is keenly aware of global shifts in cultural consumption and production and seeks a proactive and forward-thinking approach from institutional supporters. The adaptability to these shifts, supported by robust and responsive policies, is crucial to the sustainability and growth of Rome's CCIs.

Integrating insights from the previous sections, several overarching themes emerged that illustrate the current state and future trajectory of Rome's CCIs. These themes encapsulate the resilience and adaptability of the sector while highlighting the areas where strategic interventions can enhance sustainability and foster innovation.

An analysis of Rome's CCIs revealed that digitalisation has been central to their adaptability and expansion during the pandemic. Organisations across the sector have strategically utilised digital tools to maintain engagement during challenging times while exploring innovative business models that could redefine their future operations.

The study also highlights the significant need for support structures that are more adaptive, inclusive, and capable of meeting the varied needs of diverse cultural organisations. The importance of robust community and network support has been evident, particularly for smaller entities, with organisations relying on these networks to navigate through the disruptions during the pandemic. These relationships are crucial in fostering resilience and encouraging collaborative innovations that benefit broader cultural ecosystems.

Furthermore, there is a marked need for anticipatory and proactive policymaking. Cultural organisations are seeking policies that mitigate current challenges while preparing for future shifts in digital technology and audience engagement. Such forward-looking policies are essential for sustaining the sector's vitality and relevance in a rapidly evolving cultural landscape.

These observations clarify that while Rome's cultural industries are confronted with significant challenges, they are also actively finding ways to adapt and thrive. The sector's dynamic response underscores the need for ongoing support and strategic insights from policymakers, funders, and community stakeholders to foster an environment in which cultural innovation and inclusivity can flourish.

4.6 Evolution of Strategic Adaptations

The strategic adaptations observed during 2020–2022 have evolved into established practices that continue to shape Rome's cultural landscape. While initially developed as responses to immediate challenges, many of these innovations have become integral to organisational operations and strategic planning. For example:

- Digital transformation initiatives, initially adopted as emergency measures, have evolved into sophisticated hybrid delivery models
- Collaborative networks formed during the crisis have developed into sustainable partnerships
- Adaptive funding mechanisms have led to more resilient financial models
- Organisational agility, initially a survival response, has become a core competitive advantage

These enduring transformations suggest that the period studied represents not merely a crisis response phase but a catalyst for longer-term strategic evolution in the sector.

5. Discussion

The integration of empirical findings with theoretical frameworks in this study reveals complex dynamics between cultural policy, organisational resilience, and innovation within Rome's CCIs. While Florida (2002) posited that a vibrant creative class drives urban innovation and economic growth, our findings present a more nuanced reality. The study reveals that while digitalisation and strategic innovation have indeed catalysed resilience and growth among Rome's cultural organisations, the distribution of these benefits is markedly uneven, supporting Peck's (2005) critique of creative class theory. This uneven distribution manifests primarily in three areas:

1. **Digital Infrastructure Access:** Organisations with greater resources and established funding channels have leveraged digital tools more effectively, potentially reinforcing existing disparities in cultural participation and production. This digital divide highlights the need for policy interventions that consider the varied capabilities and resources of different organisational types (Bergamini et al., 2018).
2. **Innovation Capacity:** While digitalisation has emerged as critical for fostering resilience, echoing Healy's (2002) and Howkins' (2002) observations about technology's transformative impact, the ability to implement and maintain digital innovations varies significantly across organisations. Smaller, independent organisations often demonstrate greater agility in adopting new approaches but face resource constraints that limit their ability to fully realise the benefits of digital transformation.

This apparent paradox in digital innovation capabilities – where organisations with fewer resources often showed greater digital agility – can be explained by examining the different pressures and incentives facing organisations. Resource-constrained organisations, particularly in the open

sample, were compelled to rapidly adopt digital solutions as a survival strategy, focusing on low-cost, flexible tools that could be quickly implemented. In contrast, organisations with stable public funding could take a more measured approach to digital transformation, investing in more comprehensive but slower-to-implement solutions. This pattern suggests that innovation in Rome's cultural sector is driven not just by resource availability but by the urgency of adaptation needs and the flexibility of organisational structures.

3. **Support System Access:** The effectiveness of infrastructural and financial support systems, crucial for nurturing sustainable cultural entrepreneurship (Borin and Delgado, 2018; Aureli et al., 2021), varies across the sector. Our findings indicate that support systems must evolve to become more adaptive and inclusive, accommodating diverse operational models and financial needs to prevent the perpetuation of existing inequalities.

Strategic adaptations within CCIs toward sustainable operational frameworks require a delicate balance between technological advancement and social equity considerations. The successful organisations in our study have achieved this balance through: (a) Development of hybrid delivery models that combine digital and traditional approaches; (b) Formation of collaborative networks that share resources and knowledge; (c) Implementation of flexible funding mechanisms that support both innovation and stability; (d) Cultivation of community-based support systems that enhance local resilience.

These findings align with observations by Vestrum (2014) and Ben-Hafaïedh et al. (2023) regarding the importance of community networks and local embeddedness in fostering resilient cultural ecosystems. However, our study extends this understanding by demonstrating how these networks can actively address inequalities in access to resources and opportunities. The study's findings suggest several key recommendations for policymakers and cultural managers:

1. **Governance Structures:** Development of frameworks that facilitate rather than obstruct innovation, while ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities.
2. **Support Mechanisms:** Implementation of flexible funding models that accommodate diverse organisational needs and operational scales.
3. **Digital Infrastructure:** Creation of shared digital resources and training programs to democratise access to technological tools.
4. **Knowledge Networks:** Establishment of platforms for knowledge sharing and collaboration across different types of organisations.

These recommendations aim to foster a more equitable cultural ecosystem while supporting innovation and resilience. They acknowledge that successful cultural sector development requires attention to both technological advancement and social equity considerations. This analy-

sis contributes to the existing literature on cultural entrepreneurship and resilience by providing empirical evidence of how organisations navigate the tension between innovation and equity in urban cultural settings. It suggests that successful cultural sector development requires policies that explicitly address socioeconomic disparities while fostering technological advancement and organisational innovation.

6. Concluding Insights, Limitations, and Strategic Directions

This study provides a detailed exploration of Rome's CCIs and highlights how these organisations navigated the significant disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic and other ongoing challenges (Howkins, 2002). Through a mixed-methods approach combining surveys and interviews, this study illuminated the resilience and innovation strategies that enabled these organisations to adapt and thrive in uncertain times (Healy, 2002).

The main findings underscore the pivotal role of digital transformation, which has emerged as a cornerstone of organisational resilience and innovation within the cultural sector (Florida, 2002). This shift towards digital platforms has facilitated new forms of audience engagement and opened global markets, which were particularly crucial during social distancing norms (Peck, 2005). Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of infrastructural and financial support systems in fostering these adaptations, pointing to the need for policies that are flexible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of various cultural organisations (Borin and Delgado, 2018).

The findings also emphasise the importance of community and network support, which have been instrumental in providing the social and resource-based scaffolding necessary for smaller and more independent organisations to navigate crises. These findings align with current discussions on cultural entrepreneurship, particularly those that advocate a more integrated approach to understanding the socioeconomic impacts of cultural policies (Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2023).

6.1 Limitations of the Study

Although this study offers valuable insights, it has some limitations. The sample size, although sufficiently diverse to provide a range of perspectives, may not have captured all the nuances of Rome's CCIs. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through surveys and interviews may introduce biases that could affect the generalisability of the findings. Moreover, the rapidly changing nature of the cultural sector, especially in response to ongoing global crises, indicates that findings may require continuous updates to remain relevant (Vestrum, 2014).

This study's theoretical framework, which is built primarily on the dichotomy between Florida's creative class theory and its critiques, may limit the exploration of other potentially relevant theoretical perspectives. Future research could benefit from incorporating more theoretical inputs, especially those that critically examine the implications of digitalisation on cultural diversity and equity in creative industries (Aureli et al., 2021).

Despite these limitations, this study attempts to contribute significantly to the discourse on cultural entrepreneurship and management. It highlights the critical role of adaptive strategies in the sustainability of cultural organisations and offers a framework for policymakers and cultural managers to support these adaptations. The study's findings also enrich the academic and practical understanding of how cultural organisations can leverage technology and community networks to foster resilience and innovation (Bergamini et al., 2018).

6.2 Evolving Implications and Future Trajectories

The empirical findings from this study of Rome's CCIs during 2020–2022 illuminate enduring patterns of organisational adaptation that extend beyond the immediate context of the research period. The observed strategic responses provide theoretical insights into how cultural organisations develop resilience mechanisms and innovation capabilities within complex urban environments. These insights contribute to broader theoretical discussions about organisational adaptation in cultural sectors, particularly regarding the relationship between institutional frameworks and innovation capacity.

The analysis reveals several theoretical implications for understanding organisational resilience in cultural sectors. First, the transformation of digital capabilities from crisis response mechanisms to strategic assets suggests a deeper evolution in how cultural organisations conceptualise and operationalise technological integration. This evolution extends beyond mere technological adoption to encompass fundamental changes in organisational learning and capability development, supporting theoretical perspectives on dynamic capabilities in cultural organisations.

Second, the emergence of sustained collaborative networks from crisis-driven partnerships indicates a structural shift in how cultural organisations approach resource allocation and knowledge sharing. This transformation aligns with theoretical frameworks emphasising the role of network effects in organisational resilience while suggesting new dimensions specific to cultural sector dynamics. The study's findings indicate that these networks evolve beyond traditional resource-sharing arrangements to become platforms for collective innovation and strategic adaptation.

The financial adaptations observed during the study period demonstrate the development of more sophisticated approaches to value creation in cul-

tural organisations. These approaches challenge traditional dichotomies between cultural and commercial value, suggesting the emergence of hybrid models that merit further theoretical investigation. This evolution in financial structures raises important questions about the relationship between funding models and organisational innovation capacity in cultural sectors.

These findings have several implications for future research trajectories:

1. The need for longitudinal investigations examining how adaptive capabilities evolve within different institutional contexts.
2. The theoretical implications of emerging hybrid organisational forms in cultural sectors.
3. The relationship between institutional support mechanisms and organisational innovation capacity.
4. The role of digital transformation in reshaping cultural value-creation processes.
5. The impact of cultural innovation on social equity, particularly examining how different groups access and benefit from new cultural initiatives and digital platforms. This research direction is crucial given our findings that technological adoption and innovation capabilities vary significantly across different organisational types and socio-economic contexts.

Such research directions would contribute to developing more nuanced theoretical frameworks for understanding organisational resilience and innovation in cultural sectors, particularly within complex urban environments like Rome. Furthermore, these investigations could enhance our understanding of how policy frameworks might better support the sustainable development of cultural organisations while preserving their capacity for innovation and adaptation.

The strategic adaptations observed during our study period have evolved in significant ways. Cultural organisations have moved beyond crisis-driven digital adoption to more sophisticated hybrid models combining physical and digital engagement. The initial divide between resource-rich and resource-constrained organisations has begun to shift as collaborative networks and shared digital infrastructure become more common. These developments suggest that the resilience mechanisms identified in our study have become institutionalised features of Rome's cultural landscape rather than temporary adaptations.

6.3 Implications and Recommendations

There is a clear need for future studies to explore the long-term effects of the strategic adaptations identified in this study. Longitudinal studies

can provide deeper insights into the sustainability of these changes and their long-term impacts on the cultural sector's economic and social fabric (Pagano et al., 2021). Additionally, comparative studies involving other cities with vibrant cultural sectors could help validate these findings and provide a richer understanding of the cultural entrepreneurship dynamics in urban settings.

The potential of CCIs in Rome to influence similar urban cultural landscapes is immense. By fostering an environment that supports innovation, resilience, and inclusivity, the CCIs can serve as a model for other cities to rejuvenate their cultural sectors. This study's insights into the challenges and opportunities facing Rome's cultural organisations offer valuable lessons for managing and sustaining cultural vitality in urban environments worldwide.

By addressing these challenges and opportunities through thoughtful and evidence-based policies, the cultural sector can become a vital source of economic growth, social cohesion, and artistic innovation. The findings of this study have profound implications for policymakers and cultural management, highlighting the necessity for policies that support the economic dimensions of cultural entrepreneurship and their social and cultural impacts. Recommendations for policy adjustments include the development of more inclusive funding models that accommodate more cultural organisations and support digital infrastructure, which can democratise access to new technologies.

For cultural managers, this study suggests adopting more agile management practices that can quickly adapt to changing market conditions and leverage new technologies to engage audiences. Additionally, there is a pressing need to build and maintain robust community networks that can support cultural organisations through resource sharing and collaborative projects.

Suggestions for future research include exploring the long-term effects of digital transformation on cultural consumption and production, examining the sustainability of new business models, and assessing the impact of cultural policies on socioeconomic equality in urban cultural landscapes.

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FROM INSIGHTS TO STRATEGY:
MAPPING ROME'S CULTURAL HERITAGE FOR OPTIMAL
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND PROMOTION

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyses the distribution of Rome's cultural heritage (CH) to support more effective urban marketing and city branding strategies, promote an equitable allocation of resources, and enhance the entire territory.

Methodology: The research employs a detailed mapping of CH using the QGIS software and cluster analysis to identify inequalities in the distribution of cultural sites across Rome's urban zones (UZs).

Findings: As noted in previous studies, Rome presents an uneven distribution of CH with a strong concentration in the historical centre and an almost total absence in peripheral neighbourhoods. Moreover, the cluster analysis identified seven groups of UZs with different levels of cultural offerings, allowing for tailored strategic recommendations for each group.

Implications: Diversifying the cultural offering and strategically redistributing resources can enhance the attractiveness of peripheral areas, encourage investments, and improve residents' quality of life. An inclusive city branding approach fosters a more balanced image of Rome, stimulating tourism and sustainable development.

Originality of the Study: This study combines spatial analysis and clustering to provide data-driven strategic guidelines for urban marketing and cultural heritage management, contributing to a fairer and more sustainable vision of Rome's urban development.

1. Introduction

Rome's vast and diverse cultural heritage (CH) defines its identity and global appeal, blending historical and contemporary artistic elements in a dynamic urban landscape. The city's rich historical and artistic legacy is reflected in its numerous cultural experiences that provide residents and visitors access to its history and beauty contributing to the city's cultural vitality. However, the distribution of cultural heritage is a key driver of several aspects for city development ranging from social equity, economic development, urban regeneration, and community identity (Sharma et al., 2024; Abdelhamid et al., 2023; Aureli et al., 2023; Lazarević et al., 2022; Zenker, 2011). Thus, strategies for their enhancement must be tailored according to the uneven physical distribution of CH across the city's territory. Understanding the location of cultural sites in the territory helps develop effective strategies to better exploit resources and define actions for valorisation. Such knowledge is valuable both for the municipality, which is committed to managing the city's cultural heritage, enhancing it, and preserving its characteristics to ensure its accessibility for future generations, and for SMEs, which are involved in designing and delivering market value based on cultural heritage. Increasing the attractiveness of a city also means attracting new investments and businesses and encouraging the creation of new enterprises.

In promoting and improving cities' image, urban marketing (Stănciulescu, 2009) and city branding strategies (Ma et al., 2021; Pasquinnelli, 2017; Green et al., 2016) are often adopted to support city's strategic plans and enhance urban development. Exploiting such strategic actions makes it possible to increase the city's attractiveness regarding internal and international visits, enhance new cultural and entrepreneurial investments, and build an image involving alternative cultural and innovative routes in the entire territory. Indeed, city branding strategies if well-designed can enhance the local cultural resources, by promoting a diversified and more inclusive cultural offer (Zhao & Seokhyun, 2024; Ciuculescu & Luca, 2024) that reinforce the city's image, encouraging a wider cultural participation also from local communities. An uneven distribution of cultural heritage risks fragmenting the city's identity, reinforcing disparities between central and peripheral areas and weakening Rome's image as an inclusive cultural destination. Strategic city branding should leverage cultural mapping to highlight underrepresented zones, fostering a cohesive and diversified urban identity.

In the case of Rome, a point of departure in designing strategic actions resides in considering the inequalities linked to the physical structure of the city and the presence of a *"greater cultural offer, services, shops"* in the city centre as opposed to the more peripheral areas (Lelo et al., 2019). In-

deed, such inequalities are representative of the presence of a local system of cultural experiences that mainly based its functioning and the image of the city on the more attractive areas on which most of the resources are channelled. Cultural experiences include museums, archaeological sites, libraries, performing arts, festivals, cinema, and creative industries such as fashion, design, and video games. These elements define Rome's cultural identity and enhance its attractiveness.

Cultural and creative sites, concentrated in the historical centre, serve as key attractions for visitors and investors, shaping the city's appeal. However, a substantial amount of resources is generally allocated to these areas, limiting the potential for intervention in others.

Given these disparities, this study examines the distribution of Rome's cultural heritage across its 155 UZs to identify key patterns and inform strategic urban planning. The objective is to provide actionable insights for policymakers and businesses, fostering a more balanced and inclusive cultural ecosystem. More in detail, the study seeks to answer the following questions: *What insights can be gained from mapping cultural heritage in Rome's UZs to promote balanced cultural development and accessibility? What strategic marketing and management interventions can be implemented to address the cultural inequalities between Rome's central and peripheral UZs, and promote more equitable cultural development?*

To analyse the distribution of CH, we employed geographic mapping and cluster analysis. The study integrates a comprehensive dataset covering key categories such as archives, libraries, bookshops, cinemas, museums, monuments, archaeological sites, and theatres—offering a broad representation of the city's cultural assets accessible to both residents and tourists. Maps were created using the Quantum Geographic Information System software (QGIS), and the cluster analysis was run on R software to provide evidence of the unequal distribution of Rome's CH sites and suggestions about potential interventions by policymakers in specific areas and insights for SMEs interested in investing in the city's territory. Cluster analysis was chosen as it enables the identification of patterns in cultural accessibility and helps classify urban zones based on their cultural endowment. This approach allows policymakers and businesses to tailor their strategies according to the specific characteristics of each cluster.

This study hypothesizes that the uneven distribution of cultural heritage across Rome's UZs impacts the city's cultural branding strategy and limits the development of peripheral areas. By mapping these disparities, this research aims to provide insights into how cultural policies and marketing strategies can be adapted to promote a more balanced and inclusive cultural ecosystem.

Existing studies on urban branding and cultural heritage distribution (e.g., Sharma et al., 2024; Zenker, 2011) have primarily focused on city centres, often overlooking peripheral areas. This research extends the discussion by examining how a diversified cultural strategy can enhance Rome's overall attractiveness and equity in cultural access.

Studies on cultural heritage distribution in cities such as Paris (Doe, 2022) and Berlin (Smith, 2023) have highlighted similar central-peripheral disparities. However, unlike previous research, this study integrates cultural mapping with strategic urban marketing to offer actionable recommendations for equitable cultural development.

By identifying key cultural clusters, this study provides evidence-based recommendations for urban planning and city branding, such as investing in cultural hubs in underdeveloped areas, diversifying cultural offerings, and promoting inclusive marketing campaigns that leverage Rome's full cultural potential.

The paper is structured as follows. The first paragraph focuses on urban marketing and city branding and their importance in urban development. The second paragraph describes the characteristics of Rome's metropolitan strategic plan, particularly the section dedicated to culture, and the strategic interventions designed to promote the city's cultural growth in synergy with the other actions. Then, the methodology section introduces the data collection process, methods and tools adopted to develop the analysis. The findings show the main results deriving from the analysis conducted. Finally, the discussion section introduces guidelines and implications for policymakers and SMEs, while the conclusions summarise the study's key insights.

2. Urban Marketing and City branding

In the 21st century, cities play such a central role that it has been referred to as the "urban century" (Kourtiti et al., 2017). The key challenge of this era is combating urban degradation (Hassan & Lee, 2015). To tackle this challenge, policymakers have adopted marketing strategies, giving rise to urban marketing and city branding. These strategies aim to regenerate urban areas and promote sustainable local development, creating urban planning models that combine innovative design with proactive interventions (Pamučar et al., 2023). The goal is to design a sustainable city for the present and future generations (Vandecasteele et al., 2019). Indeed, cities that integrate sustainability, identity management, and community engagement into their branding strategies are more likely to build resilient urban economies and achieve a competitive advantage in the global market (Rehan, 2014). Integrating sustainability principles into city branding strategies can enhance long-term economic and social development,

ensuring that cities remain attractive not only for tourists and investors but also for residents, thereby improving their quality of life (Rehan, 2014). However, these strategies often concentrate resources on the wealthiest areas, enhancing their cultural and touristic appeal but widening disparities between the centre and periphery (Ciuculescu and Luca, 2024; Bonet et al., 2011). That leads to the excessive tourist flows in the historical centres and a low satisfaction of residents' quality of life and well-being (Zhao et al. 2024; Bonakdar & Audirac, 2020; Cleave & Arku, 2020).

Integrating city branding with urban policies fosters long-term sustainability and prevents fragmented strategies that reduce overall effectiveness (Bonakdar & Audirac, 2020). Indeed, today cities face an increasingly competitive environment, which requires effective differentiation strategies that build their unique selling propositions, a well-known concept in marketing. A well-defined unique selling proposition strengthens global positioning and brand identity. Beyond marketing, city branding serves as a strategic tool for urban development. It ensures that cultural heritage, infrastructure, and services contribute to a cohesive and attractive city identity. Highlighting their distinctive qualities enables cities to attract more visitors and investments while enhancing residents' quality of life (Kotler et al., 1993) transforming them into key differentiators that enhance their positioning at a global level (Ali et al., 2022). This approach requires cities to differentiate their images and improve service quality (Richards, 2005 Fyall et al., 2003; Buhalis, 2000). Despite the need for differentiation, many cities adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' branding approach, diluting their competitive edge and failing to highlight their most distinctive attributes (Heeley, 2016). Conversely, a well-defined brand positioning helps cities tackle the competitive challenges of global markets (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006; Lau & Leung, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2004). Indeed, building a unique image attracts external audiences and fosters residents' sense of belonging and pride (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006; Lau & Leung, 2005).

Leveraging cultural products, architecture, and craftsmanship enhances city branding, reinforcing reputation and economic value (Lau & Leung, 2005; Hankinson, 2001). Emphasizing cultural elements shapes the city's unique image and fosters an emotional connection with residents and visitors, strengthening brand recognition and long-term attractiveness (Bayraktar & Uslay, 2018).

As Kavaratzis (2004) argues, successful city branding evolves from simple marketing into identity management, integrating economic, cultural, and social development goals. City branding highlights the positive aspects of a city by developing a brand that reflects its history and uniqueness, shaping public perception, and attracting both visitors and residents with an authentic, compelling message (Dinnie, 2010). Accordingly, cities need to structure a communication strategy that ensures consistency

and engagement across multiple channels by leveraging strategic efforts that can enhance global reputation and build an image that resonate with diverse audiences (Wang & Mustafa, 2024). City branding is most effective when it fosters emotional engagement. A strong place identity is built through shared cultural experiences, participatory planning, and social interactions that create a deep connection between residents and their city. Cities that successfully integrate cultural experiences into their branding create deeper emotional connections with residents and visitors. By emphasizing immersive experiences—such as festivals, heritage tours, and interactive public spaces—cities can foster engagement, making their brand identity more vibrant and enduring.

Moreover, city branding shows a special feature, which is the need for a participatory approach. Stakeholders belonging to the same urban ecosystem must cooperate in designing an effective strategy: only a holistic competitive strategy can build the competitive advantage of the entire territory (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998; Kotler et al., 1993). Indeed, collaboration between urban policies and local governance is critical (General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, 2021), as it is the collaboration among visitors, residents, and businesses to meet their diverse expectations (Beck & Storopoli, 2021). The interdisciplinary cooperation among municipal authorities, local communities, and academic institutions ensures the city's identity is co-created with its residents. Adopting a multifaceted approach is critical to maintaining brand consistency across stakeholder groups.

Thus, the entire territorial ecosystem needs an urban marketing strategy to attract international investments, stimulate economic activity, and enhance the city's overall appeal (Asprogerakas, 2006). The outputs are critical for cities' present and future: cities perceived as attractive destinations for tourists, businesses, and investors can reach urban growth and long-term economic sustainability (Stănciulescu, 2009).

Building a unique, long-lasting image of a city is achieved through urban marketing initiatives which develop new infrastructures, organise culturally attractive events, including those related to sports, and promote local features that can differentiate each city from others (Green et al., 2016). To transform cities into ideal places to live and work, effective strategic management tools that combine city resources to meet demand are crucial (Pasquinelli, 2017).

First, a customisation strategy is essential. Effective branding strategies must address the needs of residents, tourists, and businesses, each with distinct expectations. By engaging multiple stakeholders, cities create a positive external image (Addis et al., 2023). In this context, segmentation and targeting decisions are fundamental for effective urban marketing in industrialising cities. For example, research on São Paulo illustrates how cities can tailor their offerings to different social classes by understanding

their shopping behaviours and consumption patterns (Cunningham et al., 1974). Over time, these strategic decisions have evolved to involve target groups directly in decision-making processes. This is how participatory planning, which involves local populations in the design and development of urban spaces, has become vital in creating a more authentic and inclusive brand identity (Rebar, 2010). This co-creation strengthens the connection between residents and their city, making the brand more genuine and powerful (Styvén, 2010). For instance, the “Think of a Place – Think of Macedonia” initiative demonstrates how collaboration can reinforce local identity while enhancing the city’s global appeal (Hristova, 2019).

Second, communication is mandatory. Communication policies greatly support the perception of these unique attributes if a consistent message is spread across all channels (Rizzi & Dioli, 2010). However, consistent messages are not enough to build a city brand; they must be engaging. Indeed, engagement plays a crucial role in both city branding and urban marketing, as it does in all branding efforts (Addis, 2020). Engagement and place attachment emerge from social atmospheres shaped by collective experiences and shared emotions. Events, public spaces, and social interactions within cities generate emotional energy reinforcing place attachment (Collins, 2004). Urban marketing, therefore, must focus on creating environments that foster collective effervescence—public gatherings, festivals, and sporting events that help shape the city’s brand identity (Hill et al., 2022).

Indeed, a city’s ability to create emotional bonds with its stakeholders is essential. Cities are increasingly seen as products, much like consumer goods. As such, cities must develop emotional connections with their target audiences through their cultural heritage, design, and events (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Parkerson & Saunders, 2005). These emotional bonds are key to fostering loyalty and attachment to the city, making it more attractive to both residents and visitors (Kavaratzis, 2004; Lau & Leung, 2005).

The emotional value of cities thrives on the careful management of cultural experiences. Cultural experiences evoke emotions and leave lasting impressions, making cities memorable to those who experience them. International events can play a significant role in this regard (Ma et al., 2021), becoming integral to urban planning and governance as they provide platforms to promote and communicate a city’s image to diverse audiences (Ye & Bjorner, 2018).

The critical relevance of cultural experiences is particularly high due to their impact on economic growth, cultural preservation, and sustainability. Cultural sustainability is pivotal in city branding, reinforcing the city’s identity and enhancing its long-term appeal. Architecture and cultural heritage, as emphasised by Hristova (2019), are central to building an attractive and competitive brand. For instance, Bitola’s architectural landscape has become a key pillar of its city branding, demonstrating how preserving and promoting cultural heritage enhances identity and competitive-

ness (Hristova, 2019). While cultural experiences significantly contribute to audience engagement (Addis, 2020), landscapes also become an essential architectural reference point through ecological urbanism (Mostafavi & Doherty, 2016). Integrating a city's unique and valuable resources allows sustainable urban design development and strengthens the city's long-term growth and branding efforts.

3. Rome's Metropolitan Strategic Plan and the role of culture

A city's strategic plan defines a long-term vision for urban development, setting objectives and actions that prioritize economic growth, environmental sustainability, cultural promotion, and citizens' quality of life. It concerns the reshaping of urban development patterns and increasing competition to improve the local system (Rizzi & Dioli, 2010).

The Metropolitan Strategic Plan of Rome (Città Metropolitana di Roma Capitale, 2022) is conceived as an essential tool to promote the metropolitan area's development towards greater sustainability, innovation, and inclusion, which represent the three main thematic axes of its development. Innovation focuses on digitalisation, cultural development, research, and economic growth to modernise the economic and social fabric and support growth in strategic sectors such as technology, culture, and entrepreneurship. Sustainability focuses on responsible management of natural resources, promoting the circular economy, energy transition, and urban regeneration to make the metropolitan area more resilient to climate change and environmental challenges. Finally, inclusion aims to reduce social and economic inequalities through active labour policies, the regeneration of peripheral areas, and the strengthening of social, cultural, and educational infrastructures, ensuring greater access to services and improving living conditions across all city areas, with particular attention to the most marginalised zones.

Around the three thematic axes, twelve strategic guidelines for sustainable urban development have been identified to guide the implementation of development policies in the metropolitan area. These guidelines have integrated each other to promote a holistic approach that combines economic growth, environmental protection, and social cohesion. Among these, culture stands out as a strategic pillar, recognized not only for its role in heritage conservation but also for its dynamic potential in shaping contemporary urban life. It is interpreted as *"original and varied"* based on *"new ways of creating and enjoying cultural heritage"* (Città Metropolitana di Roma Capitale, 2022, pag. 94), becoming part of a dynamic and continuously evolving process fuelled by innovation and the participation of the local community.

Culture is considered a means of artistic expression and essential for strengthening collective identity and promoting cohesion and inclusion. This approach underscores the importance of valuing the identity of places and promoting an open culture that integrates both traditional and innovative cultural expressions. The plan includes initiatives that encourage the customisation of cultural communication channels and facilitate the co-creation of cultural activities in collaboration with local communities, respecting and valuing their unique characteristics. It foresees a coordinated management of cultural infrastructures, including the most significant historical and artistic sites and those less known or located in peripheral areas, to expand accessibility and enjoyment of CH.

Additionally, digital technologies are leveraged to enhance cultural accessibility, enabling the restoration, promotion, and innovation of cultural services. The plan envisions a digital approach to cultural heritage that facilitates engagement and inclusion. Thus, culture is conceived as a driver of urban transformation, capable of stimulating social innovation, strengthening local identity, and promoting social cohesion. It also becomes a factor of economic development, encouraging sustainable and distributed tourism that values the most famous sites and the lesser-known ones, contributing to a fairer distribution of tourist flows.

The inequalities characterising the city of Rome are well-acknowledged when discussing the need for strategic intervention. As underlined by Lelo et al., (2019; p. 8) the central areas of the city *"offer highly diversified economic activities and services, as well as artistic, spiritual and cultural amenities, and better transportation choices, if compared to the rest of the city."* Therefore, considering the inequalities in the territory and the fundamental role played by culture in increasing individuals' well-being and the effectiveness of city branding strategies, this study focuses on Rome's CH distribution among the city's UZs with the intent to provide guidelines for new strategic actions for policymakers and SMEs' investments.

The UZs represent key instruments for integrating Rome's spatial planning and balancing development. Analysing CH distribution among UZs provides valuable insights for designing strategic marketing and management interventions. These guidelines not only strengthen city branding but also help mitigate inequalities in peripheral areas, fostering a more balanced urban development.

4. Methodology

This study considers CH as comprising 1981 sites that offer cultural experiences, classified into five categories: archives and libraries (1155), bookshops (347), cinemas and arenas (106), museums, monuments, and archaeological sites (176), and theatres (196)¹. Although these categories represent key drivers of Rome's attractiveness and long-term sustainability, their actual distribution across the UZs remains unclear due to the fragmented nature of the census of historical and cultural sites and their geographical locations. To construct an integrated database, we gathered the most extensive datasets available, sourced from both public and private stakeholders. However, these datasets varied in structure (some included the full address, others only the geographical coordinates or incomplete positions) and accessibility (some were open access, while others were restricted). Therefore, the initial step of our empirical analysis focused on collecting, cleaning, and integrating the data. The result is a comprehensive list of all CH sites, including their category, geographic location, and corresponding UZ. Using this dataset, we derived another database, listing Rome's UZs and reporting the number of CH sites for each zone in the five categories. The UZs dataset has been used as input to create maps illustrating the categories' distribution across Rome's territory, showing their aggregation level. We used the QGIS (qgis.org) software to develop the maps, which is generally adopted for visualising, editing, and analysing spatial data (Chavoya et al., 2022; Moyroud & Portet, 2018; Westra, 2014). This software supports various formats, such as raster and vector data and is highly valuable for urban planning activities and natural resource management (Graser & Olaya, 2015). Specifically, it guarantees integration with other open-source tools and academic research and visualises and analyses geospatial data (Hugentobler, 2008). Therefore, we created maps for each category, displaying varying colour intensities as the number of sites increased within each urban area. The maps serve as a visual tool to identify areas with a significant concentration of CH and those with fewer, showing the cultural vocation of each urban area².

Subsequently, we performed a cluster analysis using the open-source R software to identify similarities and differences among UZs based on CH

¹ The archives and libraries' databases were retrieved from the website of the Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries and Bibliographic Information (<https://www.iccu.sbn.it/en/>). The museums, monuments and archeological sites' databases were retrieved from the national institute of statistics' website (<https://www.istat.it/en/>) and the Rome's municipality website (<https://www.comune.roma.it>). In addition, the category of bookshops includes the book sections in large retail stores.

² To identify the UZs, we used the map from Lelo, K., Monni, S., Tomassi, F. (2021) "Le Sette Rome. La capitale delle disuguaglianze raccontata in 29 mappe". Donzelli Editore, Rome. <https://www.donzelli.it/libro/9788855222563>.

distribution. Such an approach allowed us to group UZs with similar characteristics regarding the presence of CH sites facilitating the identification of spatial patterns in the distribution of cultural sites, supporting informed decisions for urban planning and cultural resource management. The relevance of this technique in the urban context has been demonstrated by several studies that have revealed regional differences and provided guidance for more balanced urban planning (Akar & Uymaz, 2022), examined the distribution of CH assets and derived useful data for the development of strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of cultural resources (Shi et al., 2024). Since arts and culture play a crucial role in city branding (Ciuculescu & Luca, 2024), our cluster analysis provides a framework for grouping urban areas based on CH similarities. This classification enables the identification of local cultural characteristics, offering a solid foundation for strategic interventions that foster balanced and sustainable cultural development while enhancing the city's attractiveness through an effective branding strategy.

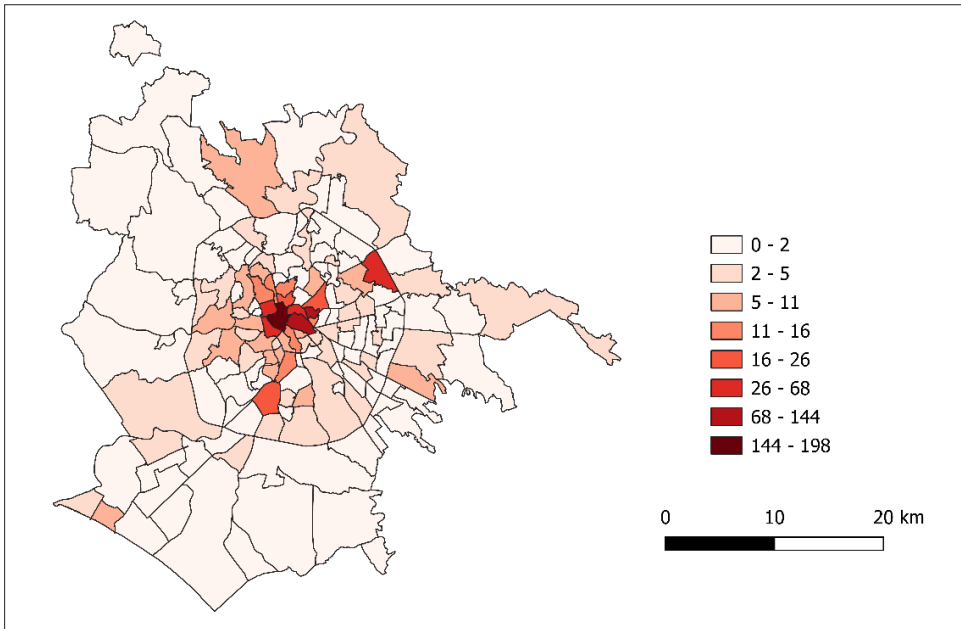
5. Rome's CH distribution analysis

The analysis process started with the map's development, which showed the distribution of the five categories of CH.

The first map (Figure 1) illustrates archives and libraries' distribution across Rome's UZs. Findings show the highest concentration of archives and libraries in "Centro Storico" (198) – the historical centre - and "Università" (144) UZs.

The high density of cultural spaces in the above-mentioned areas can be mainly linked to the presence of important academic, cultural and religious institutions, which are generally the main founders of these spaces. For instance, the "Università" UZ hosts the city's main university campus with the highest number of academic buildings and libraries and is well-supported by commercial and catering activities and services.

Figure 1 - Archives and Libraries Distribution

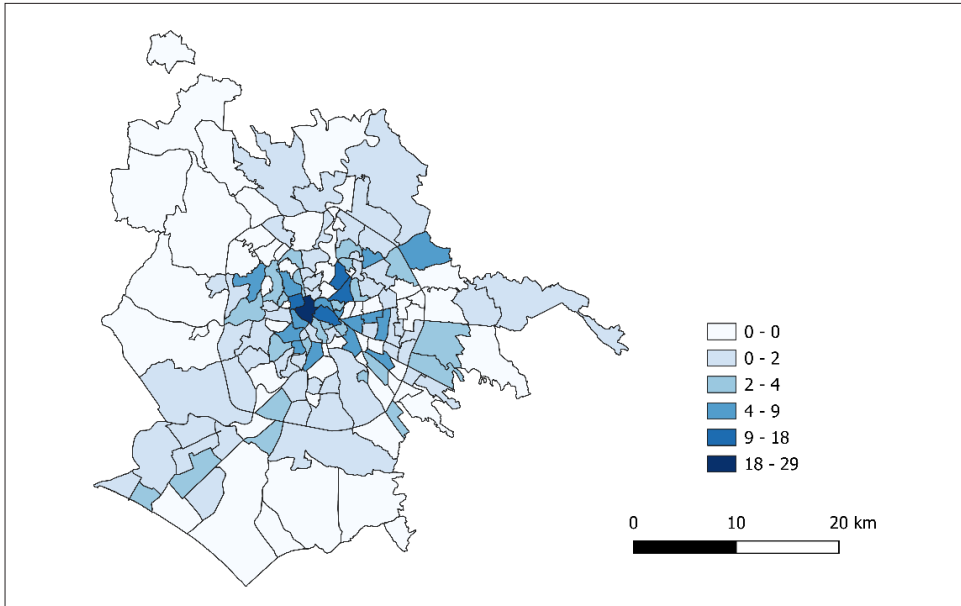


Source: authors elaboration by using QGIS software

Other zones showing a consistent number of libraries and archives are “Esquilino” and “XX Settembre” with respectively 89 and 68 between libraries and archives; “Trastevere” (46), “Prati” (43) and “San Basilio” (42). This latter is not close to the city’s core compared to the others. However, it still stays inside the “Grande Raccordo Anulare” (GRA), the 68 kilometres’ motorway that encircles the entire city of Rome, forming a ring around the capital (which is visible in the map) demarcating the separation between the more densely populated areas of the centre and the suburbs. On the contrary, it is possible to identify 37 UZs among the areas with the lowest concentrations of libraries and archives. Some of them are located inside the GRA and not so far from the city centre, such as “Salario”, “Villa Phampili” and “Eroi”.

Figure 2 displays the bookshops’ distribution. Bookshops are fundamental cultural access points due to their variety of books and literary resources. Although access to literary culture is more market-oriented in this case, it is essential for the cultural and intellectual growth of the community, especially for the younger generation. The highest concentration of bookshops in Rome is identifiable mainly in the “Centro Storico”, where 29 libraries appear.

Figure 2 – Bookshops' distribution



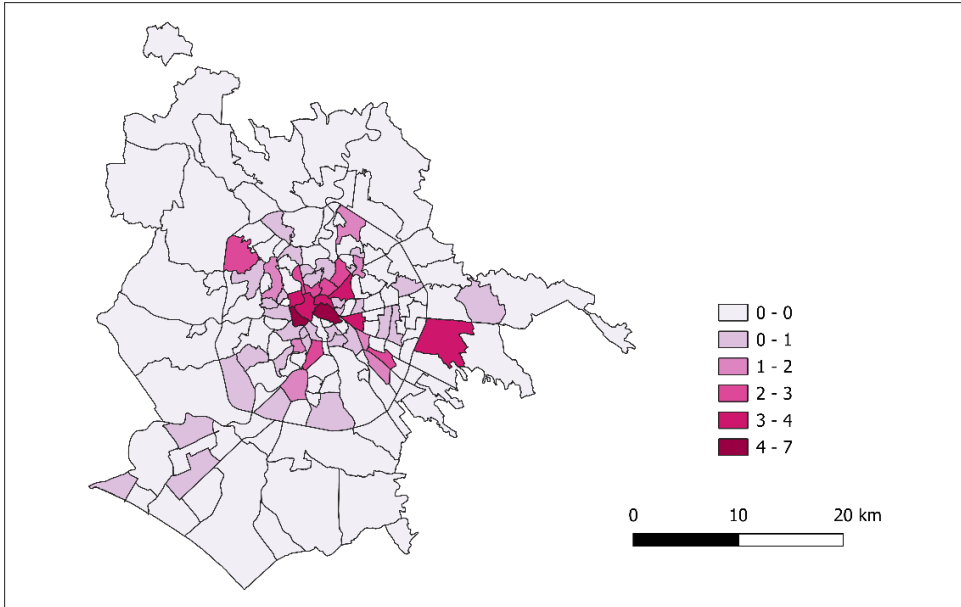
Source: authors elaboration by using QGIS software

Other areas such as “Nomentano” (18), “Esquilino” (18), “Trieste” (16) and “Prati” (14) can be considered UZs with a high distribution of bookshops (9-18), even if lower compared to the “Centro Storico”. In addition, while 26 UZs include four to nine bookshops, 56 have no libraries in their territory (white areas). Such a picture highlights these areas’ lack of access to literacy culture. This is a risk factor, especially for younger generations.

Focusing on cinemas and arenas distribution, the map displays the highest concentration of these sites in two main UZs, namely “Esquilino” (7) and “Trastevere” (7) (Figure 3). These zones are, therefore, two reference points for cinema lovers, and they host open-air arenas and smaller venues than the multiplex chains. For instance, “Trastevere” hosts the Troisi cinema, which is well-known as an art-house cinema and offers an alternative experience to commercial multiplexes.

Other areas, such as the “Centro Storico”, have a concentration that varies from one to four cinemas and arenas. In contrast, a considerable number of UZs show a total absence (white areas). More in detail, 100 out of 150 UZs do not have arenas and cinemas in their territory, thus indicating the critical lack of access to film culture.

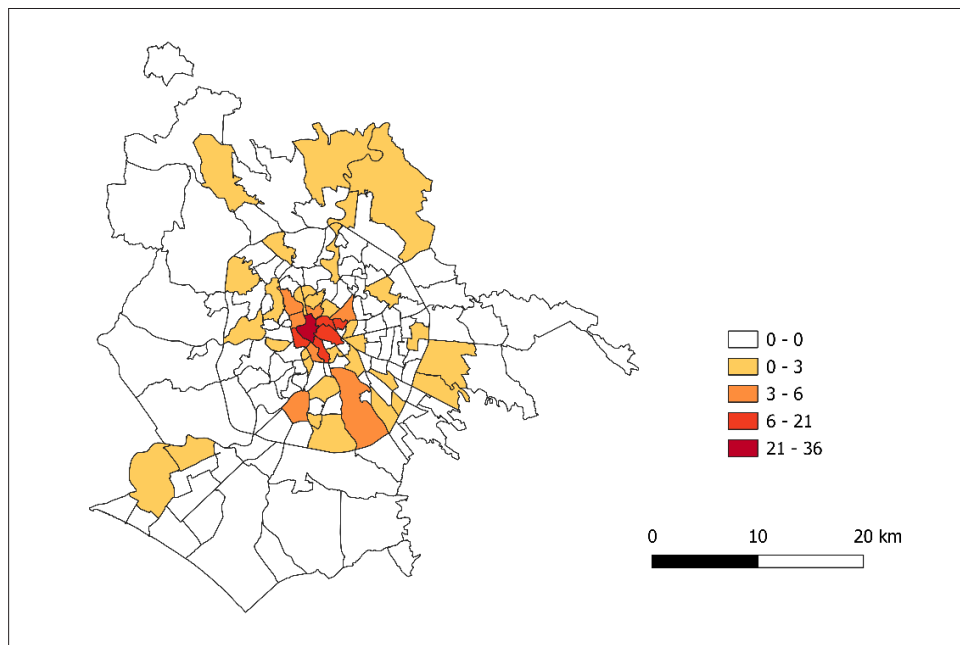
Figure 3 – Distribution of cinemas and arenas



Source: authors elaboration by using QGIS software

A similar concentration level also appears in the distribution of museums, monuments, and archaeological sites across UZs (Figure 4). The highest concentration of these sites is mainly detected in the “Centro Storico” (36), representing the heart of Rome’s culture and art and, consequently, an essential destination for visitors who want to learn more about the city’s cultural and artistic heritage. The other richest areas are “Esquilino” (21), which houses, albeit to a lesser extent than the “Centro Storico”, important museum collections, followed by “Università” (14) and “XX Settembre” (10) UZs. On the contrary, by focusing on those with the lowest concentrations, also in this case, the number of white areas on the map is high: 110 UZs do not have museums, monuments and archaeological sites.

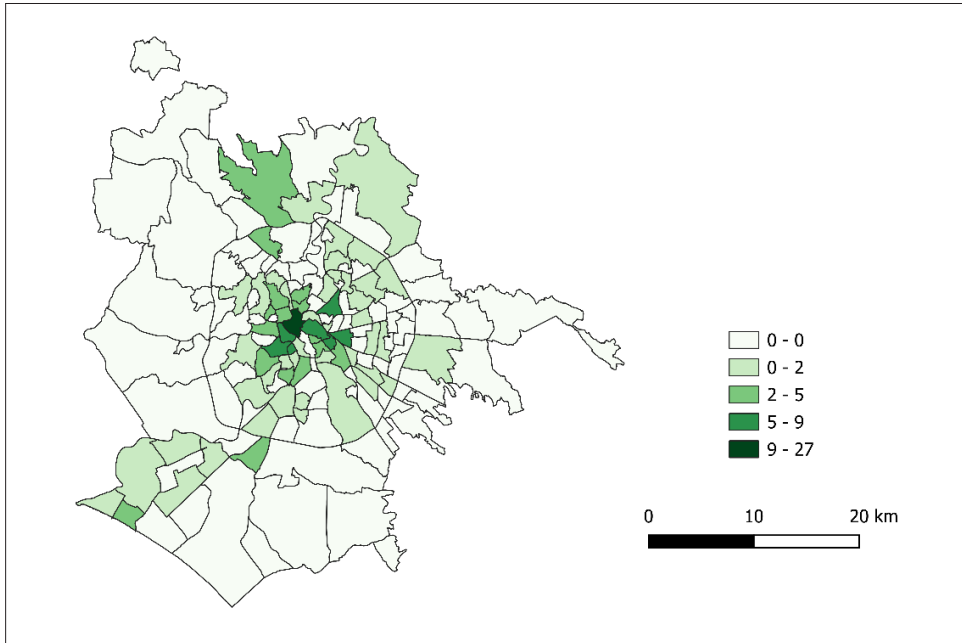
Figure 4 – Distribution of museums and archaeological sites



Source: authors elaboration by using QGIS software

The last category considered is the one of theatres (Figure 5), whose distribution shows the highest concentration in the “Centro Storico” (27). Indeed, this area hosts the city’s historical theatres, which offer a variety of performances and attract not only locals but also visitors from abroad. In addition, theatres’ visibility is further enhanced by their collocation in an area with high touristic flows, thus facilitating accessibility. However, it emerges that a considerable part of the UZs lacks the presence of theatres (89 white areas), highlighting the limited public access to these cultural spaces and, once again, highlighting that Rome is a territory with high inequalities.

Figure 5 – Distribution of theatres



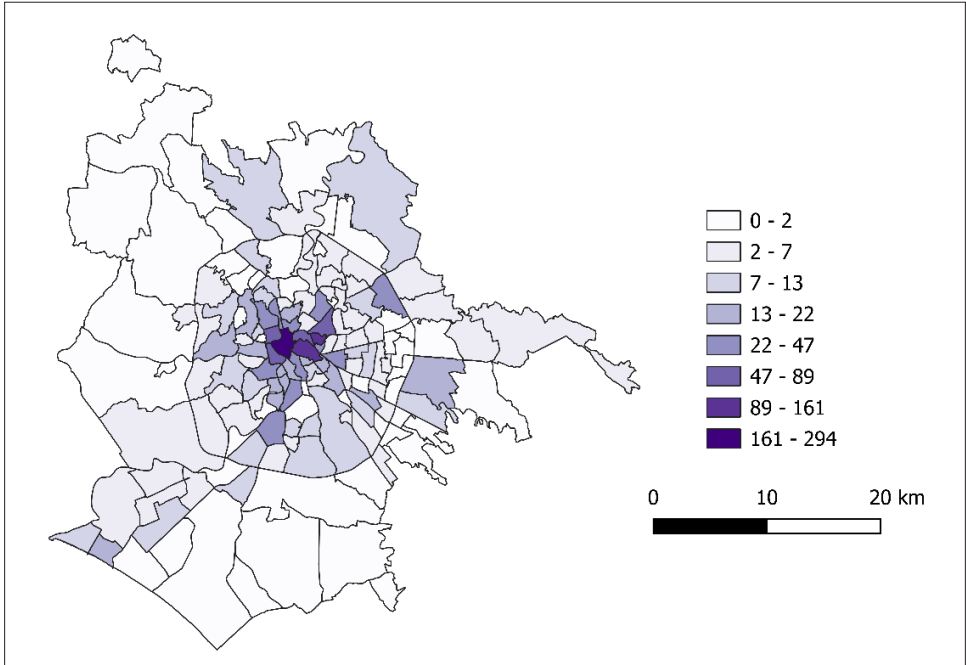
Source: authors elaboration by using QGIS software

After analysing the distribution of every category considered in this study, looking at a map encompassing all of them is essential. Accordingly, Figure 6 shows the overall distribution of these CH sites by identifying the heart of the city as the hub of Rome's cultural life with a wide range of attractions. More in detail, the UZs with the highest concentration of CH are "Centro Storico" (294), "Università" (161), "Esquilino" (144), "XX Settembre" (89) and "Trastevere" which are highly populated by almost all the categories analysed. On the contrary, as visible in the map, the UZs showing a very low presence or total absence of cultural spaces can be mainly identified in the peripheral regions of the city located outside the GRA (marked in white or with a less intense colour) and only a few of them not far from the central areas – and they are "Salario", "Villa Ada", "Tor di Quinto", and "Villaggio Olimpico".

Our findings are in line with the study of Lelo et al. (2019) that underlines the significant disparity of a wide range of activities, services and facilities including the cultural and creative ones among the UZs. Similar findings have been observed in other major European capitals, such as Paris (Doe, 2022) and Berlin (Smith, 2023), where cultural infrastructure is heavily concentrated in historical city centres, leading to accessibility chal-

lenges in suburban areas. Indeed, the concentration of CH sites in central UZs is in line with the presence of a high availability of services in these areas compared to the peripheral ones located beyond the GRA that exhibit a deficiency not only in terms of cultural offer but also regarding the presence of other essential services for residents.

Figure 6 – Overall overview of categories' distribution



Source: authors elaboration by using QGIS software

The spatial concentration of cultural assets in central UZs confirms existing theories on cultural clustering in historical city centres (Zenker, 2011). However, this pattern also suggests that peripheral areas may require targeted policies to foster cultural participation, leveraging local identity and urban regeneration strategies (Richards, 2017).

Acknowledging the presence of these disparities in cultural goods and services between central and peripheral areas and taking action to mitigate their impact can help create a more balanced and inclusive urban identity, improving Rome's attractiveness for tourists, quality of life for residents and opportunities for investors. Indeed, intervening to create a more homogeneous distribution of cultural offer exploiting local peculiarities, and the presence of services where it is lacking, could strengthen the city's brand, showing the dynamism and variety of the Roman urban landscape that does not focus only on the traditional and most renowned historical

core to which tourists are strongly attracted but that promote the entire territory. For example, initiatives such as mobile cultural units, temporary art exhibitions, or public-private partnerships for cultural infrastructure development in underrepresented areas could serve as effective strategies to bridge these disparities.

However, it is extremely difficult to make such interventions by addressing each of the 155 UZs. Therefore, to provide guidelines to develop more effective strategic interventions, we opted for developing a cluster analysis which is better discussed in the following paragraph.

This uneven distribution does not only impact residents' accessibility to cultural spaces but also affects Rome's city branding, reinforcing an image of a city that heavily relies on its historical core while neglecting its suburban potential. This highlights the need for a more inclusive cultural strategy that balances the promotion of the historical core with investments in underrepresented areas, reinforcing Rome's identity as a dynamic and culturally diverse city.

6. Cluster Analysis results

To enhance the usefulness of our suggestions in terms of strategic interventions for developing effective urban marketing and city branding actions, we run a cluster analysis on the five categories of CH considered in this study by applying the Euclidean distance and the Ward method. Such an approach made it possible to identify seven clusters represented by similar UZs in terms of presence or absence of cultural heritage, whose characteristics are summarised in Table 1 which shows the mean values of the different categories within each identified cluster.

The seven clusters are identified as follows: low CH offer (very poor) cluster, limited CH offer (poor) cluster, sufficient CH offer cluster, strong CH offer (very rich) cluster, high CH offer (rich) cluster, good CH supply cluster and prominent book-centric focus cluster. More in detail, the poorest areas in terms of cultural assets are represented by the low CH offer (very poor) and the limited CH offer (poor) clusters, including a high number of UZs with a very low number of CH sites.

Table 1 - Categories of access to culture: overall mean values and mean values within each cluster

Cluster	No. of UZs	Archives and Libraries	Bookshops	Cinemas and Arenas	Museums, Monuments and archaeological sites	Theatres
1 - low CH offer (very poor)	92	1.15	0.67	0.29	0.28	0.21
2 - limited CH offer (poor)	42	5.02	3.02	0.69	0.36	2.12
3 - sufficient CH offer	14	14.86	5.64	1.64	3.07	2.57
4 - strong CH offer (very rich)	1	198	29	4	36	27
5 - high CH offer (rich)	2	78.5	11.5	5.5	15.5	5.5
6 - good CH supply	3	43.67	8	3.67	4	4.67
7 - prominent book-centric focus	1	144	3	1	13	0
Overall	155	7.45	2.24	0.68	1.13	1.26

Moreover, the cluster with sufficient CH offer, which groups 14 UZs, is characterised by a considerable amount of CH, even if to a lesser extent than the clusters with high and good CH offer. The cluster with a high CH offer (rich) represents “Esquilino” and “XX Settembre” UZs, and it is particularly rich in archives and libraries, cinemas and theatres. Instead, the cluster with a good CH offer includes 3 UZs, which are “Prati”, “San Basilio”, and “Trastevere”, presenting a discrete range of cultural experiences due to its CH’s heterogeneity.

The richest cluster, which has a strong CH offer, refers to a single UZ, “Centro Storico,” and is the richest in terms of CH sites that guarantee cultural access for different purposes. Similarly, the cluster with a prominent book-centric focus refers to the “Università” UZ, where the presence of libraries and archives is highly marked compared to the other categories.

These findings highlight the significant disparities in cultural access across Rome’s UZs. The identified clusters provide a basis for targeted interventions, allowing policymakers and urban planners to tailor city branding and marketing strategies to the specific needs of each area. The next section explores how these results can inform effective strategic recommendations.

7. Discussion

This study makes a significant contribution to the academic literature on urban marketing, city branding, and cultural heritage management by addressing the issue of the uneven distribution of tangible CH across Rome's UZs as well as on a managerial side.

The findings of our study contribute to the literature on urban marketing and city branding by reinforcing the idea that strategic and non-fragmented interventions should not be limited to the central areas of the city but should instead aim to ensure widespread attractiveness. Moreover, the results highlight how the cultural heritage elements of a territory represent key elements not only for promoting a city image but also for fostering social cohesion and economic development.

The results obtained through the implementation of the mapping process are in line with previous studies underlining the higher concentration of services as well as cultural offer in the central areas of the city, and the lack of their presence in the peripheral ones (Lelo et al., 2019). Such inequalities are representative of the different peculiarities of the UZs, and the different efforts and resources employed in the areas with the highest concentration of CH that as recognised by Zhao et al. (2024) strengthen the disparities between the centre and the periphery of a city.

The mapping process has served as a visual tool to show clear evidence of the areas in which the interventions of policymakers are required to enhance their appealing and making them more attractive for visitors, residents and investors who can find space due to the cultural nature/peculiarities of the UZs. Indeed, by adopting a more inclusive urban marketing strategy it could be possible to emphasize the uniqueness of these areas transforming them in new cultural poles aiming at ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources (Liu et al., 2020). Moreover, by adopting policies to improve cultural activities and services in peripheral areas represent a step ahead to mitigate inequalities in Rome since according to Pocock and Jones (2017; pag. 99) *"moving between the centre and the periphery, innovations in heritage emerge"* as the periphery can act as catalyst for change.

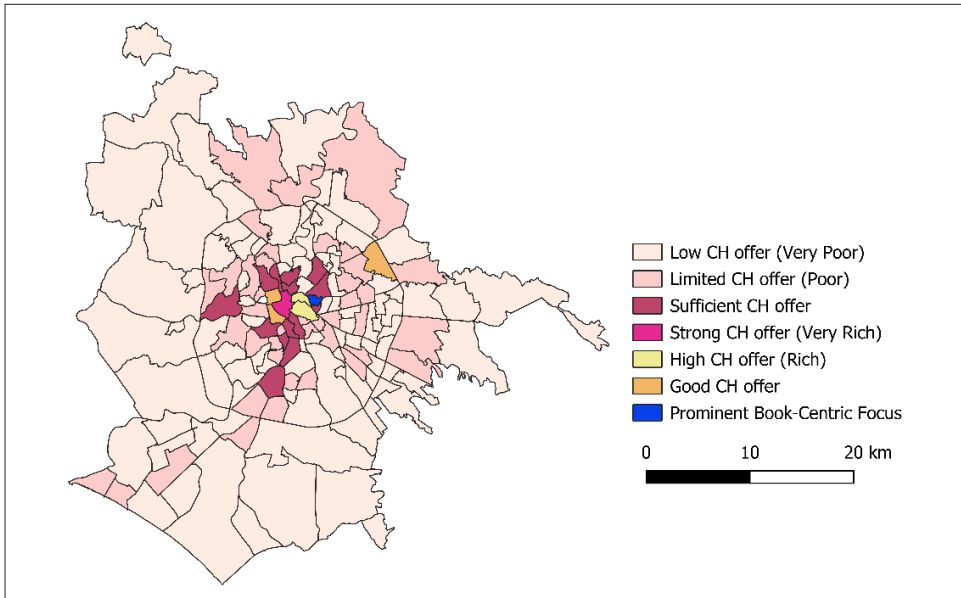
However, to suggest strategic marketing and management interventions that can address cultural disparities between Rome's central and peripheral UZs and promote more equitable cultural development, we identified seven clusters representing the point of departure for a deeper reflection on useful action to be implemented. From the cluster analysis, it has emerged that in Rome, the strong CH offer corresponds to the only "Centro Storico" UZ (Figure 7) which involves different CH sites (strong CH offer – very rich). Indeed, in the past, this area has been the subject of several interventions by policymakers who increasingly invested by making the city highly attractive. Such interventions significantly transformed the city

favouring the growth of cultural tourism in central areas which became a point of reference for tourists (Staniscia, 2020) and encouraging the development of several other services and activities such as shops, restaurants supporting the cultural offer of this area (Lelo et al., 2019).

The other well-positioned clusters are those presenting a high CH offer and a good CH offer, which are rich and heterogeneous, albeit with differences. The cluster with a high CH offer (rich) focuses on the performing arts connected to the numerous theatres and cinemas in its territory. However, it has less than half the number of museums, monuments and archaeological sites identified in the strong CH offer (very rich) cluster. Despite this aspect, the endowment of CH is remarkable.

Investing in the “Centro Storico” and the other profitable areas could be fruitful for continuing exploiting the consolidated image of the city also at an international level. SMEs interested in cultural activities can expect obtaining a reasonable profit, but they have to deal with a high competition. In addition, continuing to channel considerable resources into the central areas while neglecting the more peripheral ones reduces the possibility for policymakers to develop an inclusive city branding strategy including the more marginalised areas. On the contrary, aiming at diversifying the cultural offer and reduce inequalities helps in offering a more inclusive image of the city. For instance, promoting new cultural hubs, by transforming alternative spaces into cultural centres that enhance the characteristics of peripheral areas and leveraging digital platforms and social media to spread a more equitable narrative of the city, could be an effective approach to restoring balance and mitigating disparities.

Figure 7 – Clusters identification



Source: authors elaboration by using QGIS software

In general terms, the richest clusters in CH can exploit city branding strategies to further highlight their uniqueness, enhancing their appeal to residents and visitors and strengthening their market positioning but they must be able to create connections with the surrounding areas with alternative routes that connect the rich activities of the more central and wealthy areas with the suburbs. Concretely, the connection with the cluster with the prominent book-centric focus, which is representative of one UZ, namely “Università” with many archives and libraries, could be proficient for developing collaboration that can encourage people to get closer to culture in various ways. Indeed, it could be effective developing alternative cultural path related to reading activities and events or workshops as a continuation and deepening of the activities developed in the city centre that can stimulate residents to participate in the cultural life of their area increasing their quality of life and well-being (Zhao et al. 2024; Bonakdar & Audirac, 2020). Moreover, encouraging SMEs to invest in offering services and goods for archives and libraries, encouraging publishing initiatives, the opening of independent bookshops and the development of digital archives can transform these areas as fertile ground for further investments.

Furthermore, a heterogeneous allocation of CH characterises the cluster with a good CH offer and the one with sufficient CH offer. The former groups historical urban areas with a long tradition connected with culture

and art and areas under policymakers' attention due to their potential. Among these areas there is the "San Basilio" UZ which is characterised by a good presence of libraries and archives, a low number of bookstores and theatres and a total absence of museums and cinemas. San Basilio" UZ is object of strategic intervention since 2021 to improve citizens' lives through cultural enrichment, socio-economic fabric development, and social cohesion (Comune di Roma, n.d.). Instead, the sufficient CH offer of the latter is represented by a very heterogeneous CH endowment, which does not show a specific cultural orientation but rather a balance of CH across all categories which makes it interesting especially for investors. These clusters grouped areas with an interesting potential for SMEs' investments. Thus, policymakers should intervene to attract visitors and widespread access to culture for residents as well as stimulate SMEs interested in offering cultural good and services to invest in these areas.

Considering now the clusters with a low CH offer (very poor) and a limited CH offer (poor), they represent a high number of UZs that are not profitable for SMEs in the cultural sector at the current state. Urban marketing strategies are fundamental in these areas to make them more attractive and to bridge the gap with the more attractive ones. Therefore, these areas require greater attention and commitment from policymakers to generate equity and social well-being, strengthening communities' sense of belonging (Lau & Leung, 2005) and focusing on inclusivity and strategic axes as highlighted in the strategic plan designed for Rome. Accordingly, policymakers could intervene to promote the cultural vitality of these areas by exploiting their peculiarities (Rosenstein, 2009) as well as by operating the decentralisation of events and the valorisation of local cultural identities for rebalancing the cultural distribution of activities (Riza, 2015). In this way, they can give greater visibility to the periphery and attract audiences also from the central areas of the city. For instance, the development of festivals and events to valorise the local specificities of these areas as well as the creation of meeting points for artists create opportunities for investors, especially for SMEs interested in offering cultural goods and services. However, investments in cultural services into the more barren areas of the city, in order for them to flourish, must be stimulated. Therefore, providing entrepreneurship incentives and funding to start-ups and creative SMEs to encourage investments should be included in the strategy (Wang and Richardson 2024).

Our findings reinforce the importance of integrating city branding into urban development strategies. A well-designed city branding approach can not only enhance the visibility of Rome's CH but also help rebalance cultural disparities. Peripheral areas could benefit from branding narratives that highlight their unique cultural assets, moving beyond the dominant image of the historic centre. For example, thematic branding initiatives fo-

cusing on contemporary art, street culture, or community-driven heritage initiatives can increase the attractiveness of these underrepresented areas (Richards, 2017; Zenker, 2011). Furthermore, digital branding efforts leveraging social media and immersive technologies (e.g., virtual tours of lesser-known sites) can help distribute tourist flows more evenly across the city.

In addition, redesigning unused urban spaces, creating new ones to host exhibitions, workshops or cultural laboratories by directly involving local communities, represent a transformation that, as underlined by Shi and Huang (2025), can foster the creation of a flourishing cultural and creative ecosystem embracing the needs of residents. However, such transformation requires effective narratives able to better describe the emerging changes avoiding recalling only the peculiarities of the historical centre. To do this, the use of digital channels is essential to convey targeted content to attract a wide audience. Moreover, as suggested by Consoli et al. (2023) digital tools such as interactive maps can valorise less-known areas helping to revitalise them culturally and economically. Therefore, the creation of dynamic maps showing Rome's cultural offer and particularly the alternative cultural itineraries and events that allow peripheries to emerge are essential to foster the image of a city in constant evolution.

To address these disparities, a combined approach involving public and private investments is necessary. Public authorities could promote 'Cultural Districts' in peripheral areas, replicating successful international models like the 'Quartier des Spectacles' in Montreal or the 'East London Cultural Quarter' in the UK. These initiatives involve multi-stakeholder collaborations that encourage cultural entrepreneurship and community engagement. On the private side, SMEs can be incentivized through tax breaks and micro-funding schemes to develop local creative industries, including independent bookstores, art studios, and live performance spaces. Additionally, pop-up cultural hubs and temporary exhibition spaces in vacant urban areas can serve as pilot initiatives to test demand before implementing permanent infrastructures.

All these interventions, represents strengths for promoting a more inclusive and differentiated image the city. Thus, developing a city branding strategy of Rome by showing evidence of such transformation based on a more equitable and differentiated cultural offer which embrace social cohesion and sustainable development for the entire city is extremely important.

By developing a city branding strategy that acknowledges cultural diversity, fosters inclusivity, and embraces sustainable urban growth, Rome can strengthen its global positioning while ensuring a more balanced cultural ecosystem that benefits all residents and stakeholders.

8. Conclusion and Future research directions

Urban marketing and city branding strategies stimulate the economic development of a city attracting tourism and investments. However, these strategies often prioritize the most prosperous areas, neglecting the cultural potential of peripheral ones.

The results of this study highlight how the uneven distribution of Rome's CH has contributed to significant disparities, limiting access to cultural resources and reducing opportunities for alternative cultural itineraries that could revitalize marginalized UZs. Indeed, while the central UZs continue benefit from the high concentration of CH and strong investments enhancing their cultural vitality, the more peripheral ones remain underdeveloped in terms of cultural infrastructure and services. This imbalance affects cultural accessibility and impacts Rome's present and future social sustainability and economic growth. By constantly concentrating investments in the central areas of the city, policymakers risk missing the opportunity to create a more inclusive and dynamic urban identity. On the contrary, by strategically redistributing cultural investments through infrastructural development, the creation of new cultural hubs and a better connectivity between areas less rich in CH and the richest ones, could stimulate the emergence of new economic opportunities able to reshape the city's image.

This study contributes to the theoretical debate on city branding and cultural policy by demonstrating that an uneven cultural heritage distribution can hinder the effectiveness of branding strategies. Unlike previous studies that focus on the economic impact of cultural heritage (e.g., cultural tourism and local development), our research highlights the role of CH accessibility in shaping a city's brand identity. By integrating mapping techniques and cluster analysis, we provide a methodological framework that urban scholars and policymakers can use to identify cultural gaps and design inclusive branding interventions (Lelo et al., 2019; Pocock & Jones, 2017).

Accordingly, this study suggests rethinking Rome's marketing interventions by implementing a more balanced and inclusive approach that could enhance the city's appeal while ensuring equitable access to culture also residents. Moreover, leveraging digital tools and interactive maps to promote alternative cultural itineraries contribute to redefine Rome as a city in constant evolution, fostering social cohesion and embracing diversity.

According to this, future interventions should focus on bridging the gap between central and peripheral areas and not only by reinforcing the already established cultural hubs but also creating new routes that integrate less-known neighbourhoods into the existing wider cultural ecosystem. This vision is in line with the need to embrace a more sustainable and cohesive urban development model where all areas can actively contribute and

benefit from the city cultural wealth. However, this requires the construction of a lasting strategy for the development of a project that integrates culture and creativity with urban development.

Moreover, future research should explore how digital branding strategies can support cultural tourism beyond traditional landmarks. Virtual reality (VR) experiences, gamification, and AI-driven cultural itineraries could enhance visitors' engagement with peripheral areas, making them integral parts of Rome's identity. Such digital interventions can also improve residents' cultural participation, fostering a sense of belonging and redefining the perception of urban heritage.

To conclude, future research should pay attention to the role played by digital technologies as opportunities to enhance cultural fruition in areas with limited access to culture. Moreover, due to the fact that the concentration of heritage in the historical centre contributes to tourist congestion, future research could focus on inclusive branding strategies to better understand and strengthen the idea that such strategies can encourage visitors to explore lesser-known areas of a territory.

While this study focuses on a quantitative approach, future research could integrate qualitative methods—such as interviews or surveys—to further explore the experiential dimension of cultural heritage and its perceived value among residents and tourists.

Ultimately, fostering a more balanced cultural strategy can transform Rome into a city that not only preserves its historical heritage but also embraces innovation, inclusivity, and sustainable urban growth—ensuring that all areas actively contribute to and benefit from its rich cultural ecosystem.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

This study is the result of a collaborative effort by all the authors. The individual contributions are detailed as following.

Giorgia Masili: Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Software (QGIS); Visualisation; Validation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing; Supervision; Project administration. Caterina Conigliani: Software (R); Formal analysis; Validation; Writing – original draft.

Michela Addis: Conceptualization; Methodology; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

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CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND THE INNOVATIVE URBAN MILIEU: THE CASE OF THE METROPOLITAN CITY OF ROME

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Abstract

Purpose. In large cities creative industries tend to geographically concentrate. The purpose of this paper is to empirically test the hypothesis that this geographic concentration derives from the benefits on the innovative urban milieu.

Design/methodology/approach. A spatial regression model is estimated using as dependent variable the number of creative firms per census block in the Metropolitan city of Rome. Empirical results show that the estimated coefficient of the spatially lagged dependent variable is significantly positive, indicating that the number of creative firms in a census block is influenced by the number of creative firms in neighboring blocks. This enables to explore the conditions accounting for the concentration of creative industries.

Practical and Social implications. This paper suggests that knowledge externalities influencing the creative firm's spatial distribution can be interpreted, in an urban scale, in terms of local spatial spillovers, which take the form of spatial dependence. The empirical analysis revealed the existence of a spontaneous creative geography within the metropolitan city of Rome, which is important to further analyse and interpret, if we want to look at the creative clustering from a policy perspective. Creative clusters represent a good opportunity for local governments to catch up with innovation and entrepreneurship policies therefore they need evidence about the existence and the potential role of creative clusters, if they are to encouraging creative industrial growth in particular places.

Originality of the study. The paper aims to fill the gap between the regional and the urban scale of analysis in empirical studies on creative industries.

1. Introduction

Creativity is considered a key competitiveness driver in the knowledge-based economy. Creative industries account for substantial shares of income and employment in developed countries and contribute to increasing the local levels of urban quality and social well-being. The term refers to a range of economic activities that serve consumer demands for entertainment, information, ornamentation and social display (Caves 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2007).

One key characteristic of the creative economy is the extent to which it is an urban, and a global city, phenomenon; the creative energies of this field are powered by the production system of the urban environment, since creativity and its specific forms of expression are part of the complex socio-spatial relationships and rooted in the economic activities, employment, and local labour market dynamics of the city. This stands particularly true for major metropolitan areas like New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Milan, Tokyo, where the incidence of employment in the cultural economy is particularly high.

The superiority of dense and diversified urban areas in the transfer of knowledge and innovation output has clearly emerged in research (Henderson et al., 1995; Feldman and Audretsch, 1999; Duranton and Puga, 2001; Audretsch, 2002; Andersson et al., 2005; Berg and Hassink 2014; Durey 2021). It has been widely argued that proximity to knowledge externalities explains the presence of creative industries in urban areas (Mommaas 2004; Cooke and Lazzeretti 2008; Storper and Scott 2009; Branzanti 2015; Chapain and Sagot-Duvaurox 2021). Creative activities embedded in the urban structure sustain cross-fertilization between different activities (Lorenzen and Frederiksen 2008), co-presence of related variety (Boschma and Iammarino 2009), buzz (Bathelt et al. 2004; Storper and Venables 2004; Martin et al., 2015), access to collective learning and shared knowledge resources (Nachum and Keeble 2003).

Conceptually these topics are related to the idea of innovative milieu (Aydalot 1986; Maillat and Crevoisier 1991) characteristic of specific metropolitan areas (Gutierrez-Posada et al., 2023). An innovative milieu is defined as *“the set of relationships that occur within a given geographical area that bring unity to a production system, economic actors, and an industrial culture, that generate a localized dynamic process of collective learning and that acts as an uncertainty-reducing mechanism in the innovation process”* (Camagni, 1995).

Creative clusters as a form of economic organization are weakly theorized if compared to industrial clusters (Darchen and Tremblay 2015). The difficulty of analysing creative clustering is related to the lack of a clear definition of what creativity represents in economic terms, which may lead to confusing evidence about its effects on the performance of areas. The

territorial scale of investigation represents a further shortcoming; since cluster analysis is rooted in regional studies, urban clusters represent an isolated research field.

We support the thesis that knowledge externalities influencing the creative firm's location decisions can be interpreted, at urban scale, in terms of significance and magnitude of local spatial spillovers (LeSage 2014). We first look at the clustering phenomenon of creative industries within a city, analysing the number of creative firms by census block estimated with a spatially lagged dependent variable. The positive coefficient of the spatially lagged dependent variable supports the existence of creative clusters. Further on, we look at the determinants of the spatial concentration of creative industries in specific areas within the city. After controlling for the spatially autocorrelated error, the empirical results indicate that the creative activities benefit from the advanced urban production system and services. In other words, they benefit from the innovative urban milieu.

The main contribution of this paper is of a methodological nature. We look at the relationships between localization patterns of the creative sector and its 'spatial container' at a very detailed spatial scale, using an original dataset that refers to the Metropolitan City of Rome at the first decade of the 21st century. We are aware that the results, although not representing an updated state of the art, provide valid analyses of the behaviour of creative industries in urban environment.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a literature review on creative clusters. Section 3 describes the study area, the data, and presents some exploratory spatial analysis on creative industries in the Metropolitan City of Rome. Section 4 specifies the econometric model and discusses the identification strategies. This section also presents the estimated results. Section 5 summarizes the main findings and conclusions.

2. Literature review

Interest towards the creative industries is a direct response to new economic paradigms that have accompanied the shift since the late 1970s towards a post-industrial, knowledge-based, global economy. The privileged position of metropolitan areas in the knowledge economy lays in their superiority in transferring knowledge and innovation outputs (Duranton and Puga 2001; Asheim and Parrilli 2012).

Relationships between city and the innovative milieu are analysed in a conceptual perspective by Camagni (1999), who identifies two distinct forms of interaction: i) cities operating as innovative milieu, and ii) innovative urban milieu, consisting of well-defined areas located inside the city, intrinsically exploiting the urban atmosphere. In both cases proximity is

crucial, if we consider that close interaction and cooperation amongst firms as well as externalities associated with specialized labour markets are factors that enhance the competitiveness of the local production systems. The latest are often made up of small businesses, which find the necessary externalities in terms of infrastructure and services offered by the urban environment.

Whereas city is the natural place for the development of creative industries, it goes without saying that understanding the characteristics and the functioning of innovative urban milieu is of crucial importance in the study of the creative sector. It is clear, even though simple descriptive statistics, that the recent rapid proliferation of creative firms occur mostly in large and dense urban areas, while many consolidated metropolitan areas have fully developed 'marshallian' creative clusters (Scott, 2010).

The tendency of creative industries to cluster in metropolitan areas, widely illustrated in scientific literature is explained by the benefits derived from localization/specialization economies (Moomaas, 2004; Cooke and Lazzeretti, 2008; De Propriis et al., 2009; Boix et al., 2012) and, in more 'inclusive' terms, by the existence of the innovative milieu, characteristic of specific urban/metropolitan areas. Creative industries consist of services that share a symbolic knowledge base and rely upon talent and elevated skills. It is the symbolic knowledge base, related to the creation of contents and aesthetic attributes of products, the specific reason for spatial concentration of creative industries (O'Connor 2004; Scott 2010). Indeed, as symbolic knowledge is highly context-specific and sensitive to distance decay, creative industries tend to cluster in certain districts of the metropolitan areas (Anderson et al. 2005; Boix et al. 2015).

Conventional interpretation of industrial clustering, that is to say localisation and urbanisation economies, can be considered only partial explanation about why creative industries cluster (Wenting et al. 2011). Beneficial externalities brought by specialisation and diversity - the so-called "related variety of activities" (Boschma and Iammarino 2009), the urban assets (Van Oort et al. 2003) and the human capital (Florida 2005), all are to be counted amongst the determinants for creative clustering (Boix et al. 2012; Lazzeretti et al. 2014).

Creative clusters are not easy to frame for two reasons: first, economic activities falling under the umbrella of creative industries are highly differentiated; second, the concept of cluster appears to be fuzzy and chaotic (Martin and Sunley 2003), probably due to the fact that 'cluster is a spatial concept in which a-spatial processes play a prominent role' (Boschma and Klosterman 2005). Difficulties in coping with the functional and geographical complexity of creative clusters are clearly reflected in empirical literature, where this topic is addressed through different methodologies, at different scales and using different notions of clusters (Boix et al. 2015).

Still, the 'creative cluster' approach has proven fashionable enough to produce an increasing number of empirical case studies. These studies examine processes by which creative clusters generate externalities and their relationships with the territory. For example, Lorenzen et al. (2008) show that creative economy is characterized by a tendency to agglomerate in specific places where inter-sector knowledge spillovers are likely to occur. De Propriis et al. (2009) argue that creative industries tend to locate near each other depending on their technological complementarities. O'Connor (2004), explains how tacit knowledge - as opposed to codified knowledge - is tied to place, and why creative industries heavily rely on learning-by-doing practices and on skills diffused through specific related networks. Lee et al. (2004) show how open and creative urban environments favour a dynamic entrepreneurship climate. De Jong et al. (2007) investigate the relationship between firm entry rates and concentration of creative industries, showing that areas with higher concentration levels have larger firm entry rates. Similar conclusions obtain Coll-Martinez and Arauzo-Carod (2015) while analysing the location decisions of creative firms in Portugal.

The regional-scale hallmark appears difficult to overcome in terms of econometric modelling, although there is full awareness about regional level of analysis being too coarse to provide appropriate description of creative clusters. Data used in empirical analysis are generally aggregated at the administrative units. Location quotients (LQs) are most often used to analyse regional levels of specialization, considering the creative sector as a whole (Lazzeretti et al. 2008; Boix et al. 2012), or specific sub-sectors (Florida et al. 2010; Campbell-Kelly et al. 2010; Bertacchini and Borriore 2013). As Martin and Sunley (2003) point out, these approaches may suggest cluster's possible locations, but they cannot provide information on their spatial extension.

Whereas it is the very existence of the city that determines creative clustering, it is important to investigate the extent, the characteristics and the intensity of relationships that creative activities establish with the urban context. This observation draws attention towards an important issue in the study of the distribution patterns of the creative industries, revealing that there is an imbalance between the regional and the urban level of analysis that constitutes a gap in the creative industries literature.

Spatial dependence is important when clustering mechanisms are studied at the urban level, because it may be symptomatic of local spatial spillovers: creative firms may locate in particular neighbourhoods where they can benefit from specific characteristics of nearby areas. Spatial spillovers are reflected in spatial autocorrelation, which occurs when the observations of a variable at a particular area are partially correlated with the variables of neighbouring locations (LeSage 2014; Halleck Vega and Elhorst 2015).

In recent years different empirical studies have dealt with spatial econo-

metric techniques applied to the distribution of economic activities at regional or national scale. Some examples are represented by De Dominicis et al. (2013) who analysed the sectorial spatial distribution of economic activities in Italy, Barrios et al. (2009) and their comparative study of Belgium, Ireland and Portugal, Basile (2008) who analysed polarization patterns in the EU, Cruz and Textera (2023), who analysed the determinants of spatial location of creative industries start-ups in Portugal.

When analysing a ‘typically’ urban phenomenon such as the creative clustering, spatial econometric studies might require the use of data aggregated in small spatial units, such as the census blocks. The absence of empirical applications at this scale is probably due to the fact that variables commonly used to explain the economic significance of creative clustering might be difficult to collect, meaningless, or non-existent at the micro level. The complexity of spatial econometric approaches is another aspect to account for. In this context a common problem is the presence of unobserved variables that may give rise to spatial error correlation. The selected spatial regression model should overcome these problems and ensure valid estimates of spillover effects and valid inferences on their statistical significance (LeSage 2014).

From a methodological point of view interesting suggestions may arrive from studies in socioeconomic, planning and health sciences that make use of small-scale spatial data for exploring local contexts. Typically, variables are count data and the spatial lag econometric model also includes a spatial error term. Estimation and inference of such models is based on econometric methods such as the maximum likelihood or the generalized method of moments (Kelejian and Prucha 1999; 2010).

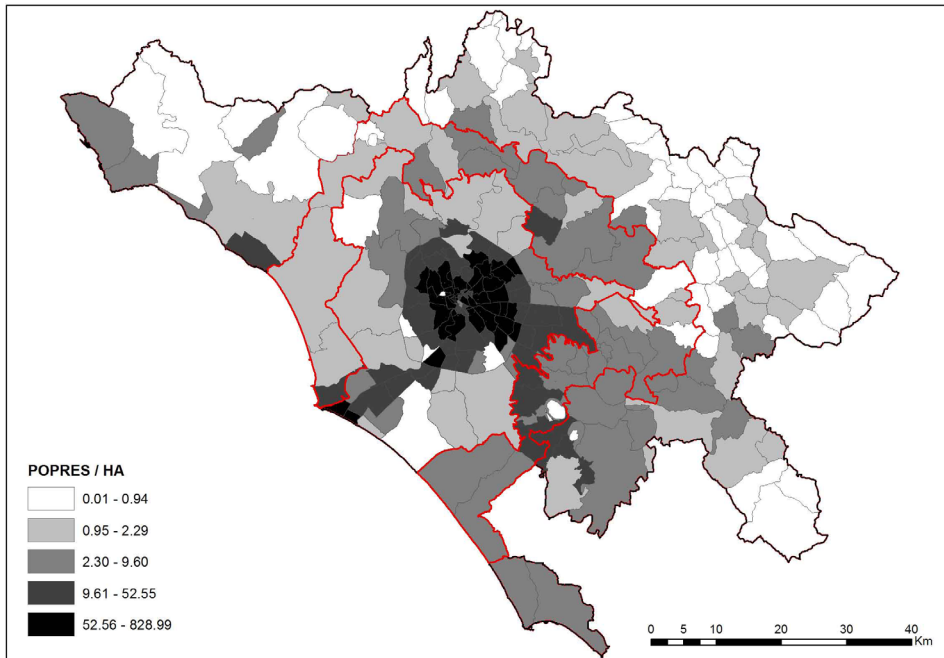
Looking at the micro-geographies of creative industries in the Metropolitan City of Rome, this paper analyses the number of creative industries at the level of census block as a function of context variables through a spatial econometric model. The purpose is to empirically test the hypothesis that the geographic concentration of creative industries derives from the benefits of the innovative urban milieu, which it can be seen as the combination of economic actors, social actors, urban amenities and quality, able to produce an urban ecosystem attractive to the creative industries. The attempt is to take advantage of the vast amount of spatial data available at census block level, as well as of spatial econometrics methods that can grasp the spatial complexity of the urban environment and mitigate the effect of the sharp transitions, which are typical of data aggregations at this spatial level.

3. Creative clusters in the Metropolitan City of Rome

The Metropolitan City of Rome is composed of 121 municipalities covering an area of 5352 km². According to the last census, 3.997.465 inhabitants live there, accounting for almost 7% of the Italian population. The area is distinguished by the presence of a strongly monocentric urban system: 65% of population live in the municipality of Rome, 25% in first belt municipalities and 10% in peripheral ones (Figure 1).

The Metropolitan City of Rome represents a relevant national creative hub. The incidence of the creative sector value added in the local economy was 7.6% in 2014, slightly higher if compared to Milano (7.0%). Notwithstanding the recent economic crisis, the performance of the creative sector in the study area has remained positive (Symbolia 2015).

Figure 1. Population density in the Metropolitan City of Rome. Red lines depict first belt municipalities.



Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011

3.1. Definition of the creative sector

The applied definition is from 'Report on the creative industries' by DCMS (De Propris et al. 2009) adapted for the Italian classification. According to this definition, activities are classified in 'layers', to be interpreted as stages in a creative value chain. Only 'core' creative industries are analysed, consisting of intrinsically creative activities and activities that directly support them in the supply chain.

3.2. Data

The principal data source is The Statistical Archive of Local Units of Active Enterprises (ASIA-UL), a business register held by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). Data refer to the creative firms in the Metropolitan City of Rome in the period 2007-2009 and include firm's geographical coordinates, economic activity (5-digit ATECO code) and number of employees¹. A major drawback is the absence of information on firm demography; thus, data only represent the stock of enterprises in each reference year. Other spatial data are obtained from the Census Bureau, the Revenue Office, or are produced in a GIS system (Table 2).

Data from ASIA-UL show that, in year 2009 the Metropolitan city of Rome counted 32.958 core creative firms out of 342.296: about 10% of share in the local production system. The presence of micro firms is one distinguishing feature: 81,14% are single employee firms, 17,26% have from 2 to 20 employees, 0,86% have from 21 to 50 employees and 0,74% have more than 50 employees.

3.3. Spatial pattern of creative industries: exploratory analysis

Data on creative industries are aggregated at the census block, which represent the smallest territorial unit for which population data are available. Creative industries are to be counted in 45% of the census blocks.

Spatial concentration of economic activities may or may not support spatial interdependence. The presence of spatial interdependence is manifested by spatial concentration of similar values (in the case of positive spatial autocorrelation) or of different values (in the case of negative spatial autocorrelation).

The measure used to evaluate the spatial interdependence of the number of creative industries by census block is LISA statistic (Anselin 1995),

¹ The ASIA dataset was provided from ISTAT following an agreement with the University Roma Tre which does not provide for the updating of data in subsequent years. Its use is to be intended as a methodological contribution to the comprehension of the locational dynamics of CCIs in urban environment.

which is a local version of Morans' I (Moran 1950). LISA statistic returns a measure of spatial autocorrelation for each individual location and provides information about which unit values are statistically significant compared to spatial randomness. LISA statistic for each observation i is given by the following expression:

$$I_i = \frac{X_i - \bar{X}}{m_0} \sum_j W_{ij} (X_j - \bar{X}), \quad \text{with} \quad m_0 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_i (X_i - \bar{X})^2, \quad (1)$$

Where: x_i is the studied variable in region i , \bar{x} is the average sample value, n is the sample dimension, W_{ij} are binary spatial weights: value 1 is given to 1st order neighbours, and 0 to all the other spatial units. The summation over j is such that only neighbouring values of j are included.

The strength of spatial autocorrelation is analysed through the Moran scatterplot, which determines the extent of linear association between the number of creative industries in a given location and in neighbouring locations. The spatially lagged transformation of the variable (y-axis) is regressed on the original standardized variable (x-axis). The slope of the Moran's I represents the autocorrelation coefficient: the steeper the slope is, the stronger is the global autocorrelation. The four quadrants of the scatter plot describe an observation's value in relation to its neighbours: high-high, low-low (positive spatial autocorrelation) and high-low, low-high (negative spatial autocorrelation). Inference is based on the conditional permutation approach. The value x_i at location i is held fixed, while the remaining values are randomly permuted over all locations. The p -values obtained for the LISA statistics are then pseudo significance levels.

Table 1 shows, in the second column, the distribution of the number of census blocks in the quadrants of the Moran scatterplot and in the third column the census blocks having a significant p -value. It is interesting to observe that the percentage of those with significant p -value is much higher for spatial units lying in the high-high quadrant, indicating that spatial clustering of high values ('hot spots') may occur in different areas.

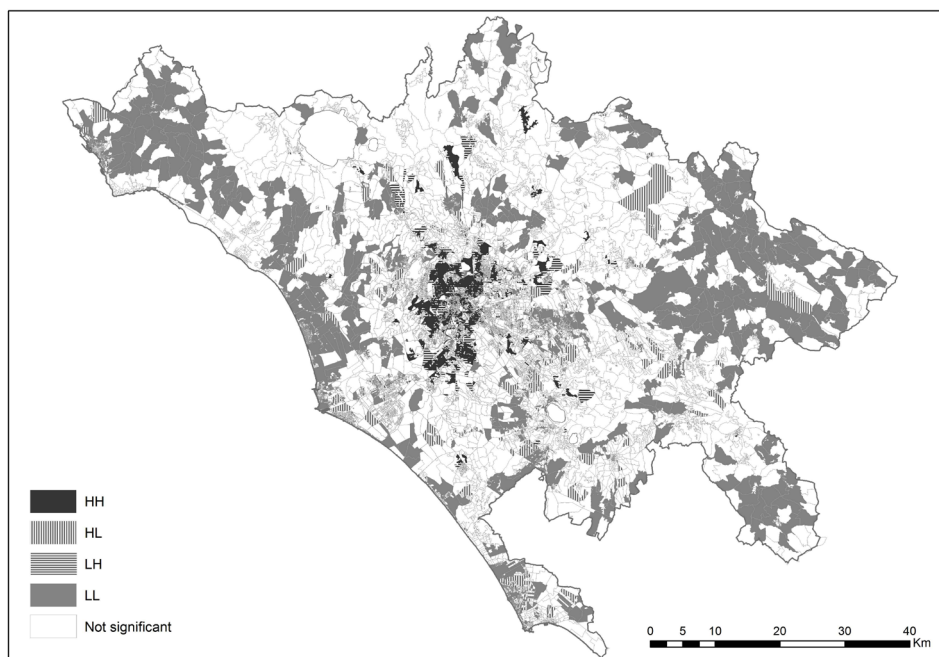
Table 1. LISA statistics and the significance levels.

Moran Scatter Plot Quadrant	Total	Significant	% Significant	Significance levels			
				0.001	0.01	0.05	NS
HH	4087	2496	61.07	52.90	31.42	23.43	13.17
HL	1604	341	21.26	7.15	3.14	4.66	10.45
LH	3674	1504	40.94	20.74	18.63	21.01	17.96
LL	10270	3213	31.29	19.21	46.81	50.90	58.41
Total spatial units	19635	7554	38.47	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

If we take a closer look at the significance levels (columns 5 to 8 in Table 1), we observe that census units having a positive relationship of high values represent almost 53% of the total units with *p-values* significant at $p = 0.001$. Conversely, the share of census units of this type represents 13 % of the total non-significant units. The opposite holds for units having a positive relationship of low values. They have a share of 58% of the total non-significant units, of 51% total units with *p-values* significant at $p = 0.05$ (weakly significant) and of 19% of the total units with *p-values* significant at $p = 0.001$. These results further support the assumption of the spatial clustering of creative firms in the study area.

It is possible to map the location and shape of clusters. Figure 2 shows census blocks with a significant Local Moran statistic classified by type of spatial correlation: the high-high and low-low locations suggest clustering of similar values, whereas the high-low and low-high locations indicate spatial outliers. As it can be observed from the map, spatial clustering of high values ('hot spots') occurs in different areas of the consolidated city. The phenomenon is particularly intense in the neighbourhoods just north to the historic centre. Consistent hot spots are also observed in the western neighbourhoods and in the southern neighbourhoods. It is significant the quasi absence of creative clusters in the eastern sector of the consolidated city, traditionally industrial, which hosts some of the poorest and infamous neighbourhoods of Rome.

Figure 2. LISA cluster map for creative firms in the census blocks in the Metropolitan City of Rome, 2009.



To further investigate the conditions that account for the spatial clustering of creative firms, an econometric model is defined and illustrated in the following section.

4. Empirical analysis

The observed spatial dependence of the number of creative firms per census block reveals the tendency of creative industries to concentrate in specific places where, most likely, they can benefit from the innovative urban milieu acting as a catalyst for the creation of symbolic knowledge. In this context spatial dependence is considered symptomatic of the existence of local spatial spillovers, which can be formally defined. While considering local spillovers in estimating the spatial econometric model, we do not consider the potential adjustments produced in all the regions by changes taking place in one region, meaning that we do not consider endogenous interaction and feedback effects (LeSage 2014).

The spatial structure is incorporated in the regression model in the form of a spatial weight matrix, defined exogenously by the census blocks polygons, which represent an arbitrary, instrumental delimitation of the spatial units.

4.1. *Key variables*

Creative clustering stem from a combination of interrelated factors, which refer to a physical dimension, an economic dimension and a social dimension. The assumption is that the explanatory variables, observed in the years prior to the year of reference, may have influenced location choices of creative firms.

The dependent variable is 'Number of creative industries per census block' in the reference year 2009.

The urban production system is approximated by the number of firms operating in high-tech sectors in the period 2007-2009 (average value and difference), and by the number of firms operating in the traditional manufacturing sectors in the same period (average value and difference). These variables account for the density of the economic agents of the territory (Turok 2003).

The physical environment is described by a second group of explanatory variables. Urban quality (architecture and streetscapes) is approximated by the average real estate prices of offices and shops in the period 2006-2009 and by the average real estate prices of housing in the period 2006-2009. The average renting prices of offices in the period 2006-2009 and the average renting prices of houses in the period 2006-2009 are also considered, since affordable renting are a possible driver for locational choices of small firms. The presence of buildings used as offices is considered a possible driver of locational choices of large firms.

The access to a wide variety of specialised services and cultural amenities highly influences the location choices of creative industries. These aspects are taken into consideration by counting the number of museums, art galleries, theatres, and entertainment facilities in the census blocks. Considering the monocentric structure of the urban system, Euclidean distance from the city centre is a proxy for an increased accessibility of creative activities to urban specialised services and infrastructures. Other space-specific characteristics are the Euclidean distance from the three main city airports, the Euclidean distance from major accessibility nodes to the national road system, the Euclidean distance from rail and metro stations.

Human capital in dense metropolitan areas embodies many different skills, aptitudes and sensibilities, which are essential for creative clustering. For each census block we count the total resident population, the population holding a bachelor or a diploma as proxy for the presence of skilled labour force and the foreign residents as proxy for cultural diversity. Table 2 presents the summary statistics of variables.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of variables.

Variable	Measuring unit	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Source
CREATIVE INDUSTRIES	n_o	1.62	3.22	0.00	71.00	ASIA
AVERAGE HT INDUSTRIES (07-09)	n_o	0.52	1.42	0.00	39.33	ASIA
AVERAGE TRADITIONAL MANUFACTURE (07-09)	n_o	0.51	1.41	0.00	53.67	ASIA
DIFF. HT INDUSTRIES (07-09)	n_o	0.01	0.59	-9.00	8.00	ASIA
DIFF. TRADITIONAL MANUFACTURE (07-09)	n_o	0.03	0.55	-6.00	14.00	ASIA
AVERAGE HOUSING PRICE (06-09)	€/m ²	3119.91	1632.25	0.00	10375.00	OMI
AVERAGE OFFICES PRICE (06-09)	€/m ²	2956.55	2142.92	0.00	11618.80	OMI
AVERAGE HOUSING RENT (06-09)	€/m ² x month	12.28	7.67	0.00	42.19	OMI
AVERAGE OFFICES RENT (06-09)	€/m ² x month	12.26	9.64	0.00	46.91	OMI
OFFICE BUILDINGS	n_o	0.74	2.56	0.00	139.00	CENS
CULTURAL FACILITIES	n_o	0.02	1.04	0.00	14.00	ASIA
DISTANCE FROM THE CITY CENTRE	meters	17312.40	14872.30	50.00	66234.90	GIS
DISTANCE FROM AIRPORTS	meters	13054.60	11196.90	180.28	58829.40	GIS
ROAD ACCESSIBILITY	meters	6383.23	7449.16	50.00	40432.20	GIS
RAIL ACCESSIBILITY	meters	2324.81	2749.18	50.00	25323.90	GIS
RESIDENT POPULATION	n_o	188.46	243.24	0.00	2594.00	CENS
RESIDENTS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION	n_o	21.89	35.96	0.00	364.00	CENS
FOREIGN RESIDENTS	n_o	6.59	17.08	0.00	1173.00	CENS

Sources:

ASIA UL: Database on local units of firms, ISTAT (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica); years 2007-2009.

OMI: Database "Osservatorio del Mercato Immobiliare", Agenzia del Territorio; years 2006-2009.

CENS: Population and housing Census 2001, ISTAT (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica).

4.2. Econometric model

We estimate an econometric model that includes a spatially autoregressive lagged dependent variable WN , where W is a $J \times J$ spatial weights matrix, and $N = (N_1, N_2, \dots, N_J)'$ is a vector of the number of creative firms in the census block. By convention, the diagonal elements of the spatial

weights matrix are set to zero and inside each row the elements are transformed in such a way that they sum to one. The effect of the number of creative industries in another census block can be expressed as $\sum_k w_{jk} N_k$, where w_{jk} is the elements of the spatial weights matrix, which does not contain N_j because w_{jj} is defined as zero.

The spatial lag model is defined as follows:

$$N = \rho WN + X\beta + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

where ρ is the autoregressive parameter for the spatial lag term, X is the matrix of geographic attributes, β is the corresponding vector of coefficients and ε is the error vector, assumed to be homoscedastic, independent and identical across the units. A significant estimate of the coefficient of the spatial autoregressive lagged dependent variable WN implies that the number of creative firms by census block unit depends on the number of creative firms in the closest neighbour area. If this is not the case, we assume that $\rho = 0$, so we have a spatially independent model:

$$N = X\beta + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

The assumption of homoscedasticity, independency and identical distribution across the observations for ε is violated if there are spatially dependent omitted variables. Alternatively, we can allow different specifications of the error process and spatially lagged variable. In particular, we specify a first order autoregressive error term:

$$\varepsilon = \lambda W\varepsilon + u \quad (4)$$

where λ is the spatial autoregressive error parameter and u is an uncorrected and homoscedastic error term.

To check for spatial dependence, we define different types of spatial weights matrices and test for spatial autocorrelation on the OLS residuals using Moran's I statistics. We adapt the model to our data as follows (Anselin 2006).

1. Estimate the spatially independent model (Equation 3) by means of OLS.
2. Apply the Lagrange multiplier test statistic LM_λ for $H_0 : \lambda = 0$ versus $H_1 : \lambda \neq 0$ and LM_ρ for $H_0 : \rho = 0$ versus $H_1 : \rho \neq 0$.
3. Apply the Lagrange multiplier test statistic LM_λ^* for $H_0 : \lambda = 0$ versus $H_1 : \lambda \neq 0$ (with $\rho \neq 0$) and LM_ρ^* for $H_0 : \rho = 0$ versus $H_1 : \rho \neq 0$ (with $\lambda \neq 0$).

If the Lagrange multiplier test statistic LM_λ leads to the rejection of $H_0 : \lambda = 0$, then we refer to the spatial error model (4); while if with LM_ρ the

null hypothesis $H_0 : \rho = 0$ is rejected we use the spatial lag model (2). When both tests in b) give not enough evidence against the null, we adopt Equation (3) as the final specification. If this were the case, it results that the number of creative industries in a block does not depend on the number of creative industries in the closest neighbour area. If both tests in b) reject the null, we carry out the robust LM tests in c). If LM_0^* test is significant but LM_λ^* is not, we estimate Equation (2) using maximum likelihood or spatial two-stage least squares method. If LM_λ^* is significant but LM_0^* is not, we estimate Equation (4) using maximum likelihood (Anselin 1988) or generalized moments method for the autoregressive parameter (Kelejian and Prucha 2010). The last case implies that the creative network effect across the census blocks is zero. If LM_λ^* and LM_0^* are significant we combine (2) and (4) as follows:

$$N = \rho WN + X\beta + \varepsilon, \varepsilon = \lambda W\varepsilon + u \quad (5)$$

and estimate the resulting spatial lag model with spatial error term using generalized feasible spatial two-stage least squares (GS2SLS). The model in Equation (5) is based on the estimation theory for the regression parameters by Kelejian and Prucha (2007), which is robust against possible misspecifications of the spatial dependence structure in the model disturbances. The model has consistent spatial heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation (HAC) estimators (Piras 2010). This aspect is of paramount importance if we consider that census blocks reveal highly different in size and characteristics. The spatial lag model with spatial error term has been already applied at the micro-scale urban level by Iwata and Karato (2011) for the purpose of analysing the spatial distribution of homeless people in Osaka City. In their paper, the dependent variable is the number of homeless people per census block and the explanatory variables typically represent the urban *milieu*, including accessibility characteristics, socio-economic characteristics, urban functions and amenities.

As a robustness check for spatial dependence, we use four different types ($t = 1, 2, 3, 4$) of spatial weights matrices:

$$W_t: w_{jk}^t = \begin{cases} \frac{d_{jk}^t}{\sum_{j \neq k} d_{jk}^t}, & \text{if } j \neq k \\ 0, & \text{if } j = k \end{cases}, \quad (6)$$

where

$d_{jk}^1 = 1$ if j and k are 1st order neighbours, and 0 otherwise,
 $d_{jk}^2 = 1$ if j and k are 2nd order neighbours, and 0 otherwise,
 $d_{jk}^3 = 1$ if distance between j and $k < 1000$ meters, and 0 otherwise,
 $d_{jk}^4 = 1$ if distance between j and $k < 2500$ meters, and 0 otherwise.

4.3. Estimation results

We first estimate the OLS model in Equation (3), and test for spatial autocorrelation on the OLS residuals using Moran's I statistics performed by applying different types of spatial weights matrices, as specified in section 4.2. The Moran's I statistics in Table 3 reject the hypothesis of no spatial autocorrelation, regardless of the weights specifications, because the p -values of Lagrange multiplier test statistics LM_0 and LM_0^* are sufficiently small. These imply that the spatial lag term (ρ) must be considered. Furthermore, the test statistics LM_λ and LM_λ^* , reject null hypotheses when the autoregressive parameter is zero. Therefore, the spatial lag model with spatial error term in Equation (5) is estimated.

Table 3. Diagnostics test for spatial autocorrelation.

Weights and test	Value	p -value
W1		
Moran's I	16.10910	0.00000
LM (lag)	159.18000	0.00000
LM (error)	255.11680	0.00000
LM* (lag)	6.80310	0.00910
LM* (error)	102.74000	0.00000
W2		
Moran's I	22.19620	0.00000
LM (lag)	240.61810	0.00000
LM (error)	481.03770	0.00000
LM* (lag)	12.37720	0.00043
LM* (error)	252.79680	0.00000
W3		
Moran's I	18.76990	0.00000
LM (lag)	206.00240	0.00000
LM (error)	342.85490	0.00000
LM* (lag)	12.34410	0.00044
LM* (error)	149.19660	0.00000
W4		
Moran's I	20.67030	0.00000
LM (lag)	170.39070	0.00000
LM (error)	403.06680	0.00000
LM* (lag)	15.89230	0.00007
LM* (error)	248.56840	0.00000

Note: Moran's $I \sim N[0, 1]$. $LM \sim \chi^2[1]$.

Table 4 shows in column (a) the estimated results of Equation (3) and in column (b) the estimated results of Equation (5). First order contiguity matrix (W1) was used to estimate the GS2SLS model, since it provided the best fit. W1 can be considered exogenously specified, being composed by arbitrarily delimited spatial units.

The hypothesis that the spatial autoregressive error is not present ($\lambda = 0$) is rejected at the 0.1 per cent significance level. The spatial lag term (ρ) reflects the spatial dependence inherent in the sample data, measuring the average influence on observations by their neighbouring observations. It has a positive effect, and it is highly significant. Spatial dependence is indicative of the presence of local spatial spillovers, which occur when the observations of a variable at a particular area are partially correlated with the variables of neighbouring locations. This has clear implications for the geographic concentration of creative firms by census unit, indicating that creative firms locate in places where they can benefit from specific characteristics of nearby areas.

The signs of the control variables did not change with respect to the OLS model in column (a). However, while controlling for spatial effects some striking differences are observed in the significance levels of some variables.

The difference of firms in the manufacturing sector appears to be less significant than in the OLS estimation. As expected, creative industry appears to be more related to the presence of firms operating in the high-tech sector. Looking at the size of the coefficient, we can estimate that a 10% increment in the average value of the number of firms operating in the HT sector causes an increment in the average number of creative industries equal to 3.5%.

The average real estate prices for offices and shops become less significant as well, while the number of buildings dedicated exclusively to offices and shops become insignificant. These results seem to validate the hypothesis that creative firms in the Metropolitan region of Rome do not require office space. Conversely, the average housing rents gains significance.

As far as it concerns the size of the coefficients, we can calculate that a 10% increase in the average value of the housing price, which means 312 eur/m², accounts for an increase in the average number of creative industries equal to 4%; while a 10% increase in the average value of the office price, causes the average number of creative industries to augment by 1.4%.

It is interesting to notice that cultural and social facilities appear to be considerably less significant than in the OLS estimation. The other substantial difference concerns the number of foreign residents, which become insignificant, showing that cultural diversity is not (yet) a determinant for creative clustering in the study area.

Other variables to be mentioned are the average number educated peo-

ple, whose increment by 2.12 units (10% of the average number) causes an average increase in the number of creative industries equal to 4.3%, and the average distance from the city centre whose increment by 1.7 km (10% of the average distance) causes an average decrease in the number of creative industries equal to 1.3%.

Column (c) in Table 4 illustrates the estimated results of Equation (5) using as dependent variable the number of single employee creative firms per census block instead of the total number of creative firms. Observed significance levels of the explanatory variables for this subset are very similar to those of the overall dataset illustrated in column (b). This result highlights the fact that the ownership structure of the creative industry in the Metropolitan region of Rome, where self-employed people represent more than 80% of the firms, highly affects the spatial behaviour of the creative sector.

Table 4. Model estimation: a) OLS; b) GS2SLS; c) (GS2SLS) for single employee firms.

Variable	a)		b)		c)	
	Coef.	t-value	Coef.	t-value	Coef.	t-value
(INTERCEPT)	-3.8080E-01***	-6.400	-4.0694E-01***	-5.977	-2.6072E-01***	-4.75
AVERAGE HT INDUSTRIES (07-09)	1.0990E+00***	91.889	1.1025E+00***	23.068	6.8387E-01***	14.685
AVERAGE TRAD. MANUFACTURE (07-09)	1.6120E-01***	12.757	1.6144E-01***	5.134	1.4595E-01***	5.631
DIFF. HT INDUSTRIES (07-09)	2.2430E-01***	11.227	2.2305E-01***	4.568	1.3117E-01**	3.053
DIFF. TRAD. MANUFACTURE (07-09)	-1.6000E-01***	-7.155	-1.5854E-01**	-2.964	-1.4271E-01**	-3.100
AVERAGE HOUSING PRICE (06-09)	2.3800E-04***	9.948	2.1016E-04***	9.674	1.5236E-04***	8.401
AVERAGE OFFICES PRICE (06-09)	8.9800E-05***	3.441	7.8910E-05**	3.047	5.8626E-05**	2.899
AVERAGE HOUSING RENT (06-09)	-1.4520E-02*	-2.165	-1.2546E-02**	-2.781	-9.3842E-03*	-2.460
AVERAGE OFFICES RENT (06-09)	-4.7120E-03	-0.879	-3.6452E-03	-0.846	-4.9461E-03	-1.370
OFFICE BUILDINGS	-1.5630E-02*	-2.430	-1.8007E-02	-0.857	-3.3679E-02	-2.252
CULTURAL FACILITIES	7.3390E-01***	8.439	6.9362E-01*	2.317	4.3261E-01*	2.110
DISTANCE FROM THE CITY CENTRE	-1.4920E-05***	-5.043	-1.1915E-05***	-3.942	-1.0434E-05***	-4.000
DISTANCE FROM AIRPORTS	1.4440E-05***	4.384	1.1911E-05***	3.863	9.2144E-06***	3.448

ROAD ACCESSIBILITY	6.5380E-06**	2.648	6.5200E-06***	4.579	6.1855E-06***	5.184
RAIL ACCESSIBILITY	6.5840E-06	1.078	7.0244E-06 .	1.768	5.3288E-06	1.618
RESIDENT POPULATION	-1.0180E-03***	-11.143	-8.8034E-04***	-4.975	-3.0917E-04*	-2.220
RESIDENTS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION	3.3920E-02***	53.829	3.2037E-02***	18.885	2.8562E-02***	19.423
FOREIGN RESIDENTS	4.7240E-03***	4.934	4.3215E-03	1.359	2.9136E-03	1.128
λ			4.7975E-02**	2.912	6.4576E-02**	3.251
ρ			1.0650E-01***	4.914	6.6324E-02**	2.660
Adj. R^2	0.5954					
Number of Obs.	19635		19635		19635	

Notes: Dependent variable is the number of creative firms.

*Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1*

5. Conclusions

Creative industries represent an important growth and employment sector in advanced post-industrial economies and have played a key role in processes of urban regeneration of many deindustrialised areas. The study of their spatial organisation represents an important challenge, in the light of the fact that scientific literature does not provide sufficient empirical evidence on this research topic. Indeed, there is a gap between the regional and the urban level of analysis, probably due to the fact that location determinants of creative industries are difficult to define in the context of complex and dense urban environments.

This paper suggests that knowledge externalities influencing the creative firm's spatial distribution can be interpreted, in an urban scale, in terms of local spatial spillovers, which take the form of spatial dependence. A spatial autoregressive model with autoregressive disturbances is estimated, that provides significant inputs to understanding the geographic distribution of creative industries and the variables that account for this concentration. The empirical results indicate that creative firms benefit from some specific characteristics of the nearby areas. In the Metropolitan City of Rome creative firms tend to cluster in places where they can take advantage of the skilled labour force, the presence of economic activities

operating in the hi-tech sectors, a large number of urban functions and high levels of urban quality. Accessibility to transportation infrastructures and office space availability appear less relevant, probably due to the high incidence of micro firms, whose location most probably coincides with that of the owner's residence.

The high significance of many explanatory variables suggest that the phenomenon of creative clustering can be interpreted in terms of multiple types of externalities relying upon the existence of the innovative urban milieu.

The empirical analysis revealed the existence of a spontaneous creative geography within the metropolitan city of Rome, which is important to further analyse and interpret, if we want to look at the creative clustering from a policy perspective. Creative clusters represent a good opportunity for local governments to catch up with innovation and entrepreneurship policies therefore they need evidence about the existence and the potential role of creative clusters, if they are to encouraging creative industrial growth in particular places. In this context, aspects related to the characteristics of the different creative segments and their co-agglomeration patterns would be important to investigate in the micro-scale, notwithstanding the evident complexity of this topic.

Working at the census block level represents a novelty with respect to previous empirical literature on creative clustering. Nevertheless, there are some considerations to be done about the spatial empirical model used in this study. The first is about the lack of specific models operating at the micro-scale, that adequately account for causality, interaction effects and spatial spillovers. The second concern is that, despite the high disaggregation level, the model is still unable to capture the impact of the distribution of creative activities within the census block. This problem becomes particularly striking in peripheral and less urbanised areas, where census units are larger. To overcome this problem, better explanatory variables are needed, that directly measure spatial distribution effects. We hope to be able to treat these issues in future research. While the model is valid in general, and it can be applied at the urban scale if the detail of the data allows it, the research conducted in the first decade of 2000 in Rome has led to significant results for the understanding of the CCIs phenomenon at an urban level that still have important implications today.

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HOW DOES SOCIAL IMPACT INFLUENCE CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP? AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY TO UNDERSTAND THE POTENTIAL OF THE 2030 AGENDA THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

Purpose. This study examines the adoption of digital tools for data visualisation in evaluating the social impact within cultural and creative industries, focusing on their alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Design/methodology/approach. Through the adoption of an action-research framework, this study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. It includes a single-case study rigorously analysed over 24 months, employing interviews and triangulation of data sources to thoroughly assess social impact metrics.

Findings. The study presents a detailed phased framework for implementing effective social impact evaluation systems within the cultural and creative industries, guided by the Theory of Change. It demonstrates that digital tools for data visualisation, particularly Business Intelligence systems, enhance data collection and analysis, thereby facilitating improved decision-making and communication of social impact.

Practical and Social Implications. The study underscores the practical implementation of a Business Intelligence-driven framework, proposing it as a best practice for cultural organisations aiming to demonstrate their social impact sustainably. This framework fosters cultural and creative industries aligning their activities with the Sustainable Development Goals by offering a clear methodology for measuring and reporting these impacts. Additionally, the significance of digital tools for data visualisation in enhancing the transparency and efficiency of social impact assessments in the cultural sector is highlighted. By presenting a model adoptable by other entities, the study proposes a pathway for enhancing societal outcomes through cultural activities, thereby expanding the potential for systemic change in the perception and valuation of cultural impacts.

Originality of the study. This research provides original insights into the application of digital technologies for evaluating social impacts within cultural and creative industries. By integrating the Theory of Change with digital Business Intelligence tools, the study introduces a novel approach to operationalising Sustainable Development Goals in the cultural sector, thereby enhancing the precision and reliability of impact assessments.

1. Introduction

Various phenomena related to cultural heritage have the potential to influence sustainable development. In this vibrant context, cultural and creative industries (CCIs) can drive change and social growth at the local level. Florida (2002) highlights that CCIs play a crucial role in job creation, economic growth, and innovation. Numerous studies underscore the local embedding of cultural entrepreneurial initiatives and their consequent social impacts (Borin & Delgado, 2018). The social context of cities and their cultural offerings are interconnected, leading to changes associated with the introduction of new organisations (Dameri & Demartini, 2020). In this vein, museum activity exemplifies entrepreneurship in the cultural heritage sector, where the pursuit extends beyond beauty alone (Olinsson & Fouseki, 2019), making assessments of social impact essential to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of such initiatives.

While numerous unforeseen factors may influence social impact, the intention to implement a system for social impact assessment represents a more deliberate and intricate process. The Theory of Change (ToC) provides a framework to guide this process, ensuring a clear understanding of the intended change, the additionality of actions taken, and the measurable criteria for evaluation (Bengo et al., 2016).

The recognition of culture's social dimension is not new, but the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015) has emphasised its importance by incorporating it into its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, the UNESCO framework uses SDGs as a universal language to express sustainability in cultural initiatives, improving both understanding and international relevance.

Alongside the escalating focus on the social impact of culture, the digitalisation and emergence of new forms of cultural entrepreneurship are reshaping the landscape of cultural activities, presenting both challenges and opportunities (Healy, 2002; Pratt, 2005). The advent of digital technology enables both the quantification of data and the transformation of communication modes.

Although numerous studies explore the social dimension of culture (Cicerchia, 2021), there is a compelling need for inductive research to examine how implementing a metric for evaluating the social impact of CCIs unfolds. On the one hand, researchers seek to identify a pattern of stages for deploying an effective measurement model. On the other, the study aims to investigate the implications of digitalisation on the measurement of impact assessment within the cultural context.

Therefore, this research aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the steps to implement an effective social impact assessment system in the cultural context?

RQ2: What are the digital potentials in social impact assessment in the cultural context?

The study adopts an inductive research methodology within an action research framework to answer these questions. This approach integrates qualitative and quantitative methods (Erro-Garcés & Alfaro-Tanco, 2020). In addition to this conceptual framework, the paper outlines various methodologies for analysing multiple sources to converge on the analysis of a single case study (Yin, 2009). Specifically, adhering to the rigorous and stringent guidelines by Massaro et al. (2019), the authors have chosen an internationally significant case study, which they have monitored for over 24 months, conducting semi-structured interviews analysed using recommendations by Gioia et al. (2013). The methodology employs source triangulation as proposed by Flick (2004), incorporating interviews, both confidential and public data, and the direct involvement of the authors, which supports the implementation with an interventionist approach (Aleksandrov et al., 2018).

The multitude results have yielded both intriguing theoretical and practical contributions. Firstly, the research augments the theory concerning social impact assessment, demonstrating the potential of the SDGs to measure and monitor progress within sustainable development initiatives in cultural entrepreneurship (Cicerchia, 2021). The analysis clearly outlines the advantages and disadvantages of the instrument, revealing its capacity to serve as a universal language. Secondly, the paper formalises the theoretical framework of UNESCO concerning a cultural entrepreneurship project, thus delineating the measurement parameters expressed in SDGs. Thirdly, the study illustrates the communicative effectiveness of integrating digital tools for data visualisation within cultural enterprises for sustainability purposes (Healy, 2002; Pratt, 2005), highlighting innovative solutions and fresh evidence in impact assessment.

From a practical standpoint, the case study's impact assessment model has proven to be effective and adaptable, serving as a reference for professionals in the field. Furthermore, the research provides tangible evidence of the potential of business intelligence to immediately connect data and information for user comprehension. Finally, the authors have presented evidence of the necessity for cross-disciplinary teams to fully measure social impact.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Cultural entrepreneurship and sustainability*

The concept of cultural entrepreneurship is relatively new within the realms of cultural studies and management (Dobрева & Ivanov, 2020). Initially introduced and defined in the late 20th century by DiMaggio (1982), it was described as creating an organisational form controlled and governed by elite members. Over time, the focus in the literature has fluctuated, with a notable resurgence of interest since the early 2000s (Klamer, 2011). Presently, the literature identifies three distinct but interconnected research perspectives on cultural entrepreneurship (Gehman & Soublière, 2017). The first, known as 'making culture', is rooted in sociology and explores the creation of culture, encompassing both high and popular culture (Johnson, 2007). The second, termed 'deploying culture', aligns with strategic management and organisational theory, focusing on legitimising new business initiatives and markets (Martens et al., 2007). The most recent development, cultural entrepreneurship 3.0, focuses on 'cultural making'. This latest strand marks an evolution from the earlier ones by emphasising cultural entrepreneurship as a distributed and intertemporal process and the creation of value through multiple and fluid repertoires and registers of meaning.

According to Dobрева and Ivanov (2020), cultural entrepreneurship is characterised as the activity centred on creating cultural enterprises and marketing cultural and creative products and services that embody cultural value while simultaneously possessing the potential to generate financial revenue. Much of the existing research has focused primarily on the distinct characteristics of cultural entrepreneurs and their motivations for initiating their businesses. Numerous studies highlight the significance of culture and the arts as forms of memory, experience, and collective heritage (Piber, 2020). Culture contributes to intellectual, moral, and emotional well-being while supporting human and cultural rights, promoting sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). Furthermore, it is recognised as both a driver and an enabler of development (Cicerchia, 2021). Furthermore, other studies emphasise that these aspects should be comprehended and developed according to sustainable development guidelines, utilising an interdisciplinary approach and an integrated perspective, which are key aspects of our research (Demartini et al., 2021).

In this context, cultural entrepreneurship fosters sustainable development through innovation and growth in the creative industries sector (Whitson et al., 2021). Over time, the discourse on the sustainable development of cultural heritage has diversified, presenting various conceptual models aligned with sustainability theory. It is essential to delineate the domains in which the concept of sustainability manifests. Some frameworks propose a

multifaceted cultural model consisting of four ideal pillars for sustainable development: social, economic, environmental, and cultural (Cicerchia, 2021). Specifically, the social pillar addresses the impact of cultural practitioners' activities; the economic pillar underscores the long-term economic sustainability of cultural endeavours; the environmental pillar evaluates the ecological impact of cultural initiatives; and the cultural pillar, considered as a distinct capital, highlights the necessity for preservation, maintenance, and conservation of art forms, knowledge, heritage, and cultural diversity for future generations (Montanari et al., 2021). Moreover, another perspective in the literature views culture as a foundational element for achieving sustainability goals. This approach, termed 'culture as sustainability', integrates and encapsulates the other pillars, positing sustainability as inherently embedded within culture and leading to an "eco-cultural civilisation" (Cicerchia, 2021).

Consequently, it is crucial to acknowledge the intricate relationship between culture and sustainable development. In this context, digitisation serves as a key enabler in addressing complex issues and promoting sustainable strategies within cultural entrepreneurship (Cori & Fraticelli, 2021). Indeed, digitisation facilitates the creation of sustainable management models that, through the adoption of new technologies and the diversification of offerings, help to prevent over-tourism (Oppioli et al., 2023).

2.2 *The overall theoretical framework*

Currently, it is widely recognised that all organisations are tasked with taking responsibility for their actions and their impacts on the environment and society (Hadro et al., 2024). In response, organisations are directing their actions and strategies towards achieving more significant social impacts (Quinn & Dalton, 2009). Social impact is defined in various ways in the literature. According to Stephan et al. (2016), describe it as the beneficial outcomes of prosocial behaviours that create value for communities, including individuals and organisations. The discourse primarily distinguishes between two interpretations: social impact as a positive change and social impact as the reduction of negative effects (Bartling et al., 2015). Hadro et al. (2024) describe social impact as significant or positive changes that address or resolve social injustices and challenges. After establishing what constitutes impact, it is deemed essential to explore how metrics are defined in the literature and how the generated impact can be assessed (Jackson, 2013). Over the years, various impact measurement and management models have been developed by academics, international organisations (such as the UN and OECD), financial institutions, and private organisations (Bengo et al., 2016).

The ToC is widely used as a key framework for evaluating project per-

formance, involving the construction of a visual model that delineates the underlying logic, assumptions, influences, causal links, and expected outcomes of a project or programme (Funnell & Rogers, 2011; Morra Imas & Rist, 2009). This model is tested against actual experiences and results to assess program performance. Evaluators using ToC are encouraged to employ specific questioning to deepen understanding and inform decisions on potential project modifications or termination (Jackson, 2013). The ToC stands out from traditional methods by focusing on desired changes, the means to achieve them, and the roles of different stakeholders, rather than merely on the actions to meet objectives (Bengo et al., 2016). Its main strengths are its multidimensionality and the flexibility it offers, facilitating a rigorous, participatory process where various stakeholders articulate long-term goals and the necessary conditions for their achievement (Jackson, 2013).

Moreover, the ToC framework is founded on three pillars: intentionality, additionality, and measurability (Nicholls et al., 2015). Intentionality defines a deliberately sought social impact, explicitly associated with a company's operations or a project, aiming to achieve a positive outcome for the community. Additionality requires that the entity's operations yield an economic return at least equal to the investment. Therefore, beyond generating social impact, impact investments also aim to achieve a return of capital and potentially an additional economic yield. Measurability means that the social impacts intended to be generated, established ex-ante, should be defined in a way that allows them to be measurable. Indeed, social objectives need to be measured quantitatively or qualitatively with the purpose of defining expected impacts ex-ante and verifying ex-post whether these expected impacts have been effectively achieved (Mulgan, 2010). If social impact lacks these structured feedback mechanisms, it risks being categorised as a positive externality rather than a measurable outcome. By establishing clear evaluation criteria, ToC helps guide decision-making and promotes accountability in governance (Zappalà & Lyons, 2009).

The UN General Assembly has passed three resolutions acknowledging culture's role as a driver and enabler of sustainable development, culminating in the inclusion of culture within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To measure and monitor the progress of culture's contribution to the national and local implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets of the 2030 Agenda, UNESCO has developed the Culture | 2030 framework, grouping specific thematic indicators.

This framework provides a holistic approach that includes the SDGs on the one hand and an operational focus specific to the cultural sector on the other. The 2030 Agenda is founded on 17 SDGs and 169 associated targets. The Culture | 2030 indicators offer a framework and methodological tools for evaluating culture's contribution to the SDGs, facilitating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at national and local levels. These indicators help

to further explore and quantify how culture contributes to the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development (Cicerchia, 2021). Furthermore, the Culture | 2030 framework addresses the issue of fragmented culture-related data, which often originates from various institutions and agencies. By its transversal nature, the framework establishes a coherent and robust narrative on culture and development, based on complex data and enabling specific benchmark analyses of institutions worldwide. The 22 qualitative-quantitative Culture | 2030 Indicators aim to leverage UNESCO's unique experience by providing a detailed overview of a country, city, or project's utilisation of cultural resources within the context of sustainable development.

The Culture | 2030 indicator framework is underpinned by four cross-thematic dimensions (UNESCO, 2019): Environment & Resilience, Prosperity & Livelihoods, Knowledge & Skills, and Inclusion & Participation (Fig. 1). This framework consists of 22 indicators distributed across four thematic dimensions. Each of these dimensions aligns with one of the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. The fourth dimension specifically addresses education, knowledge, and skills within the cultural sector. This comprehensive structure allows for a detailed evaluation of culture's multifaceted contributions to sustainable development goals.

Figure 1. Thematic indicators for culture in accordance with Agenda 2030



Source: Culture 2030 Indicators (UNESCO, 2019)

3. Methodology

3.1 *Research setting and design*

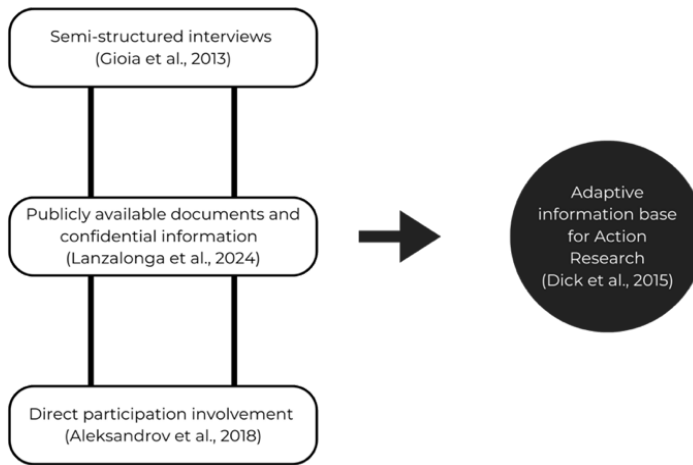
To explore the implementation of an impact assessment system and the potential of digital tools for data visualisation in the cultural sector, this study employs an action research (AR) methodology conducted from June 2022 to June 2024. This approach is rooted in the principles of AR as originally articulated by Kurt Lewin in his pivotal 1946 paper, which sought to address social issues through behavioural change within organisations and broader social contexts. However, AR has faced criticism over time for presuming that organisations operate in a stable state, applying primarily to small-scale change projects, overlooking organisational politics and power dynamics, and adopting a top-down, management-driven approach (Burnes, 2004). Lewin (1946) advocated that AR should be a participative and collaborative process involving all stakeholders, aligning with the change theory underlying the impact evaluation model (Jackson, 2013)2013.

AR has demonstrated substantial benefits in applying inductive frameworks across various settings, from private business sectors (French, 2009) to public sectors (Biancone et al., 2024), and even in studies related to cultural heritage (Magliacani, 2023). This multidisciplinary methodology integrates qualitative and quantitative methods (Erro-Garcés & Alfaro-Tanco, 2020). For instance, Dick et al. (2015) described AR as a meta-methodology, meaning it can encompass multiple sub-processes and address conflicting needs effectively.

Additionally, this study employs the single case study method to investigate challenges and perspectives as suggested by Yin (2009), based on triangulating different data types (Fig. 2): semi-structured interviews following the Gioia et al. (2013), collection of publicly available documents and granted information (Lanzalonga et al., 2024), and data capture through direct participation experiences (Aleksandrov et al., 2018; Biancone et al., 2024).

Subsequent sections will first detail the case study selection and then elaborate on the data considered for analysis.

Figure. 2 Research design



Source: author's elaboration.

3.2 Case Study Selection

Social impact assessment is not a new concept for museums, with various experiences documented both globally and within Italy. For instance, the MUS.E Association in Florence, a benchmark for cultural activities in Italy, included a Social Return on Investment (SROI) measurement in its annual report as early as 2018. The SROI method has been critiqued in literature for its underlying utilitarianism and commensuration practice - comparing different entities using a common metric (Maier et al., 2015). While the first critique is philosophical, the second concerns how qualitative issues are quantified, translated into monetary values, and compared.

In response, other cultural sectors have opted to measure change using qualitative and narrative approaches. In 2021, the Fondazione Musei in Brescia conducted a social impact assessment based on the measurement of co-created value, following four steps: identification of key stakeholders, definition of the value proposition, distribution of output to the public, and measurement of co-created value.

From an international perspective, the Guggenheim Museum has also shown a keen interest in measuring social impact by integrating data and statistics into a single dissemination document. This highlights how cultural areas provide various insights into methodologies for measuring social impact.

To understand the processes, opportunities, and limitations of establish-

ing a social impact measurement process in a cultural context, this research focuses on an inductive approach based on active and participatory observation of the MusImpact project, a fictional name. The museum, a private initiative, operates across four locations in Italy, covering a total area of 26,780 square meters distributed in the western (1 museum), eastern (2 museums), and southern regions (1 museum) of Italy. MusImpact serves as an internationally significant case study due to its annual attendance of over 110,000 full-price ticket holders, not to mention various initiatives involving school groups and free tickets distributed to specific population segments.

The study is particularly relevant for understanding the dynamics involved in establishing a social impact measurement metric within a cultural context, especially with the recent inauguration of the museum's western branch in 2022. This new implementation of a measurement system from scratch provided an opportunity to comprehend the complexities from the beginning of the process, rather than as an ongoing experience. Therefore, the case study is ideally suited to evaluate the design and assessment of processes, the setup of a metrics system and key performance indicators (KPIs), and, in line with the second research questions, the changes brought about by digitalisation in various stages of data collection.

3.3 Data collection

By applying the technique of information triangulation, the authors utilised a variety of sources to conduct the holistic case study (Flick, 1998). Specifically, the investigation of the phenomenon followed a process of consulting comprehensive materials, accessible documents, and semi-structured interviews with business experts involved in assessing the impact of cultural activities. The interviews lasted a total of 728 minutes, with two specialists handling the coding, transcription, and refinement of the texts. The interview texts were coded using ATLAS.TI version 9 software, which provides transparency and reliability to the authors (Hwang, 2008). The information was collected over a period of 24 months, and Tab. 1 and Tab. 2 summarise the data from the semi-structured interviews and respondents. Some interviews were conducted by the authors in groups of three or more people, which positively influenced the diversity of responses obtained (Balasubramanian et al., 2021). The interviews were conducted in a virtual room using Webex software, followed by the composition of minutes later analysed as described earlier (Lanzalonga et al., 2023).

Table.1 Case study data, focus on interviews.

Data	Description
Monitoring period (months)	24
Number of interviewees	11
Duration of interviews	728

Source: Authors' elaboration

Table.2 Respondent presentation

Respondent ID	Professional Profile	Interview Length (min)
A-1	Project Manager	62
A-2	Cultural Program Manager	88
A-3	Marketing Manager	52
A-4	Visitor Services Manager	83
A-5	Educational Activities Coordinator	68
A-6	Corporate Manager for Cultural Activities	57
A-7	Data Collection Office Delegate	72
A-8	Internal non-Financial Reporting Expert	77
B-1	External Cultural Management Expert	63
B-2	External non-Financial Reporting Expert	63
B-3	Academic in the Field of Social Impact Assessment	43

Source: Authors' elaboration

The authors ensured the triangulation of sources in the analysis process. According to Flick (2004), in traditional qualitative research, it is crucial to pursue source identification by combining data from different sources at different times, involving various people and documents to reduce subjective influences. In this regard, the interviews were integrated with both public and confidential documents belonging to the organisation. If managed ethically and conscientiously, anonymised confidential information can support a process of political and social change (Baez, 2002).

In addition to the first two sources of information, the authors' support activity allowed for a deeper and more personal understanding of the observed phenomena (Langley & Klag, 2019). Beyond legitimacy and reliability, this direct involvement can lead to more intuitive and detailed discoveries compared to those conducting research from a more detached perspective.

The mixing of information from different perspectives enabled the formation of results and an informed discussion, as presented in the following paragraphs.

4. Findings

Using an inductive approach that combines active and participatory observation with the triangulation of multiple data sources, this study explores the outcomes of the MusImpact case study and identifies key elements for designing a replicable social impact measurement system for cultural projects. However, it is essential to customise this process to assess MusImpact's impact accurately, ensuring alignment with the programmatic objectives set by the governance. In this regard, the application of the following measurement strategies aligns with the approach recommended by the ToC. The customisation of social impact measurement in this context signifies the organisation's awareness and intent to define its scope and to seek adjustments year after year to minimise the value of positive externalities in favour of additionality. The results analysed in detail below will adhere to the roadmap presented in Fig. 3.

4.1 *The initial steps in the social impact assessment process*

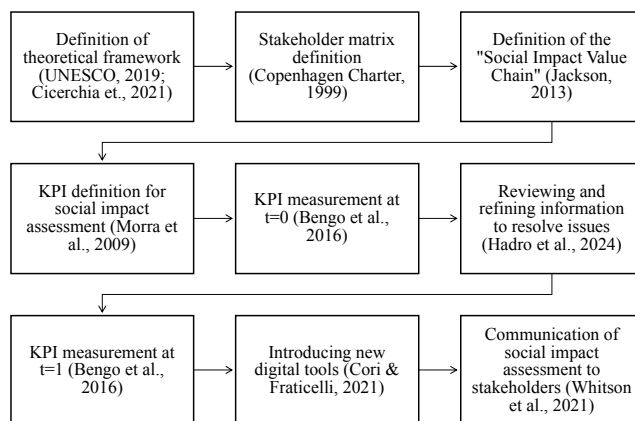
4.1.1 *Framework definition*

A collaborative action plan was established and implemented across all corporate areas involved to conduct a social impact assessment of the MusImpact cultural project. Initially, the team aimed to identify a framework from the literature that most closely aligned with the project's objectives. The working group identified the need for a framework that would support an in-depth analysis of culture's contributions to economic, social, and environmental sustainability. After carefully evaluating different options, the UNESCO Culture | 2030 framework (UNESCO, 2019) was selected.

"We chose UNESCO's Culture | 2030 framework over other frameworks in the literature because of its comprehensiveness and its four cross-thematic dimensions.

These areas are clearly delineated and visible in Figure 1 of the 2019 UNESCO document. Our working group's next step is to define the action perimeters of the four cross-thematic dimensions by analysing UNESCO's thematic indicators and the associated SDGs." — (B-3 interviews, Academic in the Field of Social Impact Assessment).

Figure. 3 How to implement an effective impact assessment system in a cultural context.



Source: author's elaboration.

eginning with the first dimension, 'Environment & Resilience', the objective is to evaluate culture's role and contribution by examining aspects related to cultural heritage, natural heritage, and the urban environment.

"The indicators proposed by the framework gauge the commitment to preserving cultural and natural heritage within our MusImpact project, offering evidence of sustainable heritage management and the integration of culturally sensitive knowledge in planning. Thus, we interpret this dimension as one that evaluates the physical and spatial aspects associated with the quality of the urban environment." — (A-1 interviews, Project Manager).

The second cross-thematic dimension addresses 'Prosperity & Livelihoods'.

"In the context of our MusImpact project, this thematic dimension provides a framework for evaluating culture's role in fostering inclusive and sustainable economies. It highlights culture's potential to generate income and employment, as well as its positive spillover effects on local territories, enhancing the appeal of cultural goods, services, and enterprises." — (A-2 interviews, Cultural Programme Manager).

The third thematic dimension focuses on 'Knowledge & Skills'.

"This dimension of the framework enables us to evaluate culture's role in fostering knowledge and skills development through local cultural values and in promoting empowerment via training, policies, processes, and educational materials. Our objective within this framework is to conduct an integrated assessment that considers cultural diversity, sustainable development understanding, and the

transmission of cultural values, with particular emphasis on cultural education. We aim to recognise skills and competencies in the creative sectors as key drivers." — (A-2 interviews, Cultural Programme Manager).

The fourth thematic dimension pertains to 'Inclusion & Participation'.

"This final cross-thematic dimension allows our impact assessment of the MusImpact project to measure our contribution to fostering social cohesion and promoting inclusion and participation within the cultural sphere. It emphasises accessibility to culture, the universal right to participate in cultural life, and the freedom of cultural expression, encompassing artistic and creative freedom." — (A-6 interviews, Corporate Manager for Cultural Activities).

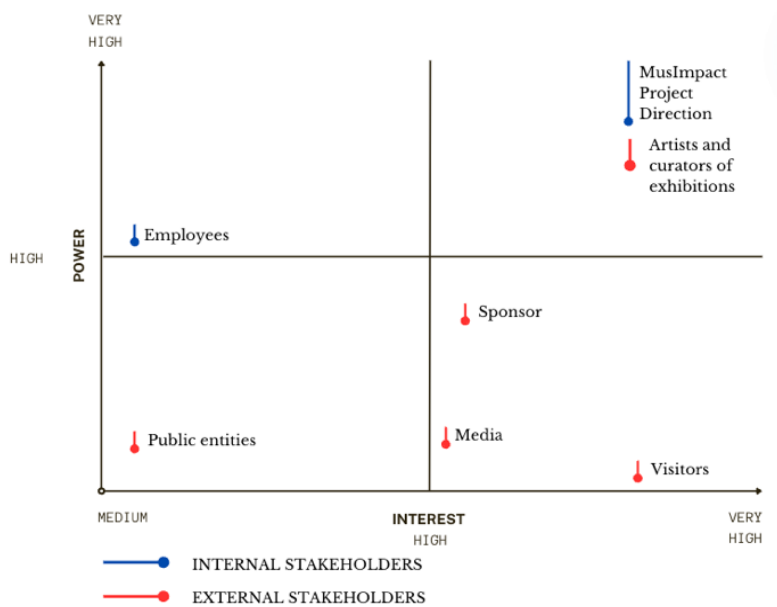
4.1.2 Definition of the stakeholder matrix

A comprehensive social impact assessment requires a stakeholder engagement strategy that considers the perspectives of all actors involved. The aim is to understand the externalities and changes that result from the organisation's actions. Key stakeholders should therefore be mapped and actively engaged, with relationships managed effectively and efficiently. Additionally, stakeholder should be categorised into two main groups: those internal to the project and those external to it.

Stakeholders are categorised using a matrix based on the Copenhagen Charter (1999) , which includes two dimensions: stakeholder power and stakeholder interest. The Power/Interest matrix classifies stakeholders by considering factors such as their influence on decision-making (Power) and their level of interest in the project's actions and initiatives (Interest).

"After our brainstorming session, we chose to structure the matrix with three levels of Power/Interest: medium, high, and very high. As shown in Figure 4, we identified two internal stakeholders (blue) and five external stakeholders (red) for the MusImpact project." — (A-6 interviews, Corporate Manager for Cultural Activities).

Figure 4. Stakeholder map of the MusImpact project



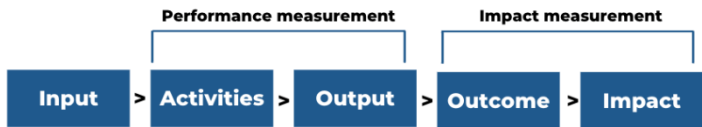
Source: author's elaboration.

Defining the 'Social Impact Value Chain'

ToC-based social impact measurement employs a flowchart known as the 'Social Impact Value Chain', which is widely recognised in the literature.

"This diagram distinguishes the various temporal stages within the flow. As noted in Jackson's (2013) study, the 'Social Impact Value Chain' includes five elements (Fig. 5) that help identify the primary activities necessary to achieve the set impact objectives and clarify the causal link between the activities undertaken and the impacts generated." — (B-3 interviews, Academic in the Field of Social Impact Assessment).

Figure 5. Social Impact Value Chain of the MusImpact Project



Source: Brescia and Calandra (2021)

«The primary impacts that our MusImpact project aims to achieve, divided across four cross-thematic areas, are as follows: within the thematic dimension

‘Environment & Resilience’, we seek to cultivate new audiences and implement policies for social impact management; in the ‘Prosperity & Livelihoods’ dimension, our objective is to bring culture closer to diverse audiences and promote gender equality. In the third dimension, ‘Knowledge & Skills’, we aim to enhance the dynamism of offerings at our venues and expand accessibility and cultural knowledge. Lastly, in the ‘Inclusion & Participation’ dimension, we plan to support inclusive activities for cities and initiate research and innovation programmes.”
— (A-1 interviews, Project Manager).

4.1.4 KPI definition for social impact assessment

In line with recent literature on the ToC (Nicholls et al., 2015), the working group identified the need to establish indicators to enhance the measurability of social impact. Defining KPIs ensures the impact assessment aligns with the UNESCO Culture | 2030 framework and its four thematic dimensions.

“KPIs should be defined in relation to the UNESCO Culture | 2030 Framework and its four cross-cutting thematic dimensions. This arrangement allows each identified KPI to be linked to a reference SDG to evaluate the contribution of culture to the SDGs as tools for implementing the 2030 Agenda at national and local levels. The identified KPIs enable the measurement and quantification of how culture contributes to sustainable development’s economic, social, and environmental dimensions.” – (Interviews A-8 and B-1, Internal and External Non-Financial Reporting Experts).

Therefore, the range of indicators aims to cover the four cross-cutting areas of the UNESCO Culture | 2030 Framework, linking them to the SDGs. On one hand, some KPIs represent generalisable objectives of social impact and are easily replicable in other contexts; on the other, there are KPIs that pursue the measurement of specific objectives of local or contingent interest. Although the KPIs succeed in quantifying some of the actions undertaken by the organisation, they do not encroach upon the analysis of intangible factors capable of effecting change according to the ToC. Aware of the partial responsiveness of a measurement system, a focus group of 8 individuals with mixed backgrounds from MusImpact personnel involved in social impact, data collection staff, and academic experts defined a system of 87 indicators. By intersecting the areas defined by the UNESCO framework, these indicators can express social impact through SDGs. The added value of this activity lies in the cross-fertilisation among the various group members and the system’s adaptability, which can be adjusted at each monitoring stage to best represent the organisation’s intentions.

Figure 6. Coverage of the SDGs using the 87 KPIs identified for the MusImpact project



Source: author's elaboration.

“Regarding the definition of KPIs for the cross-cutting thematic area ‘Environment & Resilience’ to measure the generated impact, we identified 14 KPIs. Some of these concern the ‘Number of exhibitions subject to impact assessment’ and ‘Policies or actions to reduce environmental impact’. For the second cross-cutting thematic area ‘Prosperity & Livelihoods’, we created 34 KPIs. Some examples of KPIs are: ‘Number of tickets sold online’ and ‘Number of resources involved in museum activities’. Moving to the third cross-cutting thematic dimension ‘Knowledge & Skills’, we identified 11 KPIs. Some examples of relevant KPIs for the social impact survey are ‘Number of educational activities carried out’ and ‘Number of languages available for booking a guided tour inside the museum’. Finally, for the fourth and last cross-cutting thematic area of the UNESCO Framework, we identified 28 KPIs for ‘Inclusion & Participation’. Examples of KPIs useful for measuring the social impact of the MusImpact project are: ‘Number of educational activities conducted for vulnerable groups and number of participants’ and ‘Presence of support devices for people with disabilities’” – (Interviews A-7, Data Collection Office Delegate).

The 87 KPIs identified by the working group relate to the reference SDGs, as shown in Fig. 6. This figure allows us to evaluate the contribution of culture to the SDGs as tools for implementing the 2030 Agenda. The visualisation represents a quantitative conceptualisation of social impact, exploring which monitored areas are of interest to the organisation. To understand the abstract factors that fall within the scope of social impact as envisioned by the ToC, it is necessary to verify their value over time and understand which factors influence the variation across the years.

4.2 From Measuring KPIs Variations to the Communication Strategy

4.2.1 KPI valuation at $t=0$

The temporal factor in data collection is crucial for accurately assessing social impact in projects using the ToC methodology.

“Following interviews and collaborative brainstorming, our working group developed and structured a data collection process to refine the previously identified KPIs. We established specific time intervals for accurately evaluating the social impact of MusImpact: $t=0$, $t=1$, and $t=2$. Specifically, in temporal sequence, the initial data collection occurs at $t=0$, corresponding to 31 December 2022.” — (A-7 interviews, Data Collection Office Delegate).

During the initial data collection and the first analysis of KPI valorisation, the working group identified critical issues and discrepancies. Given that the MusImpact project spans multiple locations and cities, data collection is not centralised within a single business unit that holds all the information required for KPI valorisation.

“Data collection for the MusImpact project involves various units across different locations in Italy. After gathering the data, we identified discrepancies that necessitated a detailed analysis of individual data for each KPI. Following further comparisons and in-depth analyses, we observed that data collectors and data sharers had different interpretations of the KPIs relevant to the social impact assessment.” — (A-1 interviews, Project Manager)

To address the challenges impeding a comprehensive comparison of KPI valuations, a key semi-structured interview was conducted with a data collection expert whose insights proved crucial in resolving these issues.

“From my experience, such difficulties and survey errors often arise when data collection is not centralised within a single organisational unit. Individuals conducting the data collection may interpret KPIs subjectively, leading to data distortion. KPI measurements carried out in this manner are neither comparable nor standardisable. I recommend creating a self-explanatory guide with detailed notes to ensure KPIs are interpreted objectively, thereby eliminating the identified issues.” — (A-7 interviews, Data Collection Office Delegate).

Based on this expert’s recommendation, and with the support of an academic and an external non-financial reporting expert, the team developed a clarifying statement to standardise KPI compilation and measurement.

“In the data collection process for social impact assessment under the Theory of Change, it is essential that KPIs remain comparable over time to accurately identify the presence of a positive or negative impact at different milestones ($t=0$, $t=1$, $t=2$). I suggest a brainstorming session to collectively leverage our experiences in

creating a clarifying statement for data compilation across the four locations of the MusImpact project.” — (A-8, B-2, and B-3 interviews, Academic in Social Impact Assessment and External non-Financial Reporting Expert).

With this clarifying statement established, the working group decided to update the data collection at $t=0$ to ensure an accurate baseline for comparison with subsequent collections at $t=1$ and $t=2$.

Reviewing and refining information to resolve certain issues

Following the updated data collection for KPI valorisation at $t=0$, the working group organised and systematised the information gathered by the MusImpact project. However, comparisons with external organisations and individuals revealed challenges in communication and dissemination.

“The social impact assessment for the MusImpact project is valuable, offering insights into project data and impacts. However, the data is not readily accessible to individuals outside the project. The documents generated by the working group, whether lengthy reports or extensive data files like Excel sheets, are challenging for those unfamiliar with the project to interpret and analyse effectively.” — (A-8 and B-2 interviews, Internal and External non-Financial Reporting Experts)

The working group’s efforts to communicate through a traditional report faced challenges related to information that exhibited two critical aspects. In certain sections, the report provided an extremely thorough level of detail. However, in other instances, the group articulated concepts so concisely that individuals outside the project found them difficult to comprehend.

Throughout the observation period, numerous efforts were made to refine and harmonise the report. Nevertheless, MusImpact’s commitment to immediate and clear communication led to the development of a new system that could be integrated with conventional dissemination reports. As a result, the communication managers recognised the need to disseminate their social impact using innovative tools that, when combined with the reports, enhance completeness but also increase their complexity.

4.2.3 KPI valuation at $t=1$

The second data collection, defined as $t=1$, was conducted on 31 December 2023. This collection incorporated improvements, including the self-explanatory guidelines developed after the $t=0$ phase to enhance KPI clarity.

“The current KPI analysis enables us to explore and compare each KPI individually. We can observe a variance between KPIs measured at $t=0$ and $t=1$; however, we lack the means to objectively determine whether this deviation represents a positive or negative social impact. This is a critical challenge, as we do not yet

have a tool for calculating and communicating the social impact generated by the project. Consequently, we cannot definitively assert that our actions have had an impact, as the observed changes could simply reflect an increase in MusImpact project staff rather than the efficacy of our initiatives.” — (A-7, B-2, and B-3 interviews, Data Collection Office Delegate, External non-Financial Reporting Expert, and Academic in Social Impact Assessment)

The final data collection for t=2 is scheduled for 31 December 2024.

Introduction of new digital tools for data visualisation

At this stage, the working group recognised the need for a tool that would enable effective communication of the social impact generated by the MusImpact project, following all steps of the ToC methodological approach. The development of such a tool would not only enhance dissemination but also provide stakeholders with a clearer and more structured understanding of the project’s impacts.

“Given the needs and challenges outlined above, several digital and experimental tools could enhance the communication and dissemination of the impact generated by the MusImpact project to both internal and external stakeholders. Considering the project’s characteristics and the type of information you intend to convey, I recommend using a Business Intelligence tool, such as PowerBI, which offers robust capabilities for data analysis and presentation.” — (B-2 interviews, External Non-Financial Reporting Expert).

Negrut (2018) notes that literature supports PowerBI’s capability for advanced data analysis through multiple drill-throughs, which allow users to filter reports and display detailed information tied to specific data fields. For the MusImpact project, the use of drill-through fields in PowerBI could enable a more detailed and interactive exploration of KPIs, improving data transparency and usability.

“Integrating business intelligence enables us to address the previously highlighted challenges in representing and analysing KPIs after data collection. Moreover, the software facilitates understanding and quantifying impact deviations across the surveys conducted at t=0, t=1, and t=2. To achieve this, it is essential to normalise the data used in various KPIs to ensure comparability across different SDGs. By leveraging PowerBI’s impact radar graph, the working group can analyse and quantify culture’s contribution to the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.” — (A-7 interviews, Data Collection Office Delegate).

PowerBI has significantly improved data visualisation by transitioning from static graphs and tables in Word or Excel files to an interactive dashboard. This transition enhances data accessibility and interpretation, offering stakeholders an intuitive tool to track and compare impact over time.

The dashboard not only illustrates the impact generated at $t=0$, $t=1$, and $t=2$ but also highlights variances across these timeframes. Moreover, it effectively links KPI deviations to relevant SDGs and the UNESCO framework, facilitating a clearer and more structured communication of project impact for both internal and external stakeholders.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of social impact assessment systems in the CCI, emphasising the potential of digital technologies. Employing an inductive research approach and case study methodologies (Yin, 2009; Massaro et al., 2019), the research addressed the processes and challenges involved in implementing these systems. By proposing an effective operational model, the study addresses critical questions on structuring and selecting digital tools for data visualisation to optimise social impact analysis in CCIs.

This research contributes to a growing body of work on the intersection of CCI and sustainable development, specifically examining the social impact of cultural activities (Cicerchia, 2021). It focuses on the dynamics of impact assessment within cultural contexts, a topic of increasing relevance in relation to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2015). The study places particular emphasis on the role of digital metrics in enhancing the precision and efficacy of assessments, supporting the view that CCIs can advance sustainable development through technological innovation (Healy, 2002; Pratt, 2005).

This study's implementation of a social impact assessment system within cultural industries uncovered a structured, multi-phase model. In addressing the first research question (RQ1), key phases for effective social impact assessment were identified, with the Theory of Change guiding the formulation of objectives and metrics. Careful selection of frameworks, such as UNESCO's Culture|2030, aligned the system with cultural sustainability goals. The second research question (RQ2) enabled an investigation into the role of digital and visualisation tools in assessment, demonstrating that the integration of Business Intelligence significantly enhanced data collection and analysis, rendering the information more accessible and manageable. Digitalisation has improved real-time impact monitoring, bolstering transparency and accountability. These findings highlight the value of a systematic, technologically integrated approach for better understanding the influence of cultural initiatives on sustainable development, showcasing the effectiveness of combining qualitative methodology with advanced technologies in a rigorous, innovative analysis of social impact.

On the one hand, the results have led to numerous theoretical implications:

#1. Empowering SDGs for Social Impact Assessment

The research has broadened the theoretical framework of social impact assessment, illustrating how the SDGs can serve as effective tools for measuring and monitoring progress within cultural and creative enterprises (Cicerchia, 2021). This theoretical contribution underscores both the versatility of the SDGs as universal metrics and the limitations and challenges that arise when they are applied specifically to cultural initiatives. The study critically examines the SDGs' capacity to act as a universal language for sustainability, offering insights into their practical applications and constraints in the cultural sector.

#2. Formalisation of the UNESCO Theoretical Framework for Cultural Enterprises

The study has formalised the framework, clearly delineating measurement perimeters based on the SDGs (UNESCO, 2019). This approach has enabled a structured and precise definition of parameters for social impact assessment, offering a model that is both applicable and replicable. It integrates specific cultural objectives with the broader SDGs, thus contributing a practical, contextualised model to the academic literature.

#3. Effectiveness and Limits of Digitalization in Impact Assessment

The third theoretical contribution centres on the integration of digital tools for data visualisation in cultural enterprises aimed at sustainability (Healy, 2002; Pratt, 2005). The study illustrates how advanced technologies, such as Business Intelligence, reshape the social impact assessment process, making it more dynamic, accessible, and transparent. This digital approach enhances data collection and analysis while facilitating more effective communication of results, underscoring the role of digitalisation as a catalyst for deeper understanding and improved management of social impact.

However, the analysis of Business Intelligence and other digital visualisation tools highlights an essential requirement for adequate digital literacy. Organisations adopting these tools should consider user-friendly solutions to mitigate the digital divide within their structures. Additionally, implementing digital visualisation tools may be financially challenging for organisations with limited resources. Nevertheless, the rapid advancement of disruptive technologies and their growing affordability may enable the application of similar impact assessment methodologies in a wider range of contexts beyond those described in this case study.

Alongside digitalisation, the adoption of KPIs plays a crucial role in structuring impact assessment in cultural industries, offering measurable benchmarks that enhance transparency and comparability. However, while KPIs facilitate data-driven decision-making, they also introduce limita-

tions, particularly in capturing the qualitative and experiential dimensions of cultural impact. Relying solely on quantitative indicators risks oversimplifying complex social transformations, underscoring the need to balance structured metrics with qualitative insights to ensure a comprehensive understanding of cultural value.

On the other hand, this research leads to interesting practical implications:

#1. Creation of a roadmap based on the UNESCO Framework for social impact assessment

Building on the UNESCO framework (2019), a roadmap is proposed for assessing social impact in cultural entrepreneurship contexts. This process starts by identifying the SDGs most closely aligned with the specific objectives of the cultural project, followed by defining performance indicators directly linked to each selected SDG. The roadmap then advocates for using these indicators to continuously monitor progress and adjust project strategies based on the results obtained. This structured approach ensures that cultural initiatives contribute meaningfully to their local environment while aligning with broader global SDGs, offering a clear and measurable method to evaluate and communicate their impact.

#2. Optimisation of Decision-Making Process with Business Intelligence

The adoption of Business Intelligence enhances decision-making in cultural projects by synthesising vast data sets into accessible insights. This tool bolsters operational efficiency and enables swift responses to market demands, yielding clear advantages in strategic management and organisational agility (Dobрева & Ivanov, 2020; Erro-Garcés & Alfaro-Tanco, 2020). However, its implementation entails costs related to licensing, training, and infrastructure, which can pose significant challenges for organisations with limited financial resources. To ensure feasibility, cultural organisations may consider cost-effective alternatives, such as open-source or freemium BI platforms, cloud-based solutions with scalable pricing, and phased implementation strategies that prioritise essential performance metrics. Collaborations with academic institutions can also facilitate access to BI expertise while reducing financial constraints. A cost-benefit analysis suggests that while premium BI solutions offer advanced customisation, lower-cost alternatives can still support effective impact assessment when strategically implemented. The choice of BI tools should therefore be guided by a careful balance between technological capabilities and financial sustainability, ensuring that impact measurement remains both rigorous and accessible.

#3. Assembling Interdisciplinary Teams for Comprehensive Impact Assessment

Bringing together diverse skills is crucial for a thorough impact assessment of cultural initiatives. The literature highlights that engaging experts from multiple fields enhances the analysis and fosters a holistic understanding of the social and cultural impacts of activities (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; UNESCO, 2019).

As with any research, this study has limitations. Focusing on a single case study may restrict the generalisability of the findings. While the case study provides rich, contextualised insights, the results may not be universally applicable across different settings or cultural contexts, potentially limiting the applicability of the study's conclusions and recommendations to a diverse range of organisational and geographical environments within the cultural sector. However, the methodological approach and findings of this study provide a solid foundation for further exploration. Expanding future research to include multiple case studies could complement and extend the insights gained, allowing for a broader validation of the proposed framework. Integrating diverse cultural and institutional contexts would not only enhance the generalisability of the findings but also reveal nuances that may remain undetected in a single-case analysis, further strengthening both theoretical contributions and practical applications.

Additionally, despite drawing on multiple data sources (Flick, 1998), the reliance on qualitative data and interviews may introduce subjectivity and interpretive bias. The perceptions and experiences of interviewees can shape the results, complicating objective measurement and making it challenging to replicate the study in other contexts or with different participants. Moreover, relying solely on KPIs for measuring social impact has inherent limitations. While KPIs offer valuable quantitative benchmarks, they cannot fully capture the complexity of social change. A comprehensive assessment should integrate qualitative approaches, such as stakeholder interviews, ethnographic observations, and contextual analyses, to provide a more nuanced understanding of the impact within cultural and creative industries.

Furthermore, the use of digital tools, while beneficial, also presents a limitation, as it presumes that all stakeholders have access to and the ability to use such technologies. This may not always hold true, particularly in resource-constrained environments or regions with less developed technological infrastructure.

To address these limitations, future research could enhance the generalisability of the findings by incorporating a greater number of case studies from diverse geographical areas and cultural contexts. This approach would enable comparison of results across various environments and provide insights into the effectiveness of social impact assessment tools in a

broader range of scenarios. Additionally, researchers could complement qualitative data with quantitative tools and techniques to mitigate subjective bias. Using more rigorous quantitative methods, such as advanced statistical analysis or predictive models, could offer objective measurements of the assessment system's effectiveness.

To overcome challenges related to digital technologies, future research might focus on developing more accessible and user-friendly digital and experimental tools. Addressing issues related to the digital divide and digital literacy is a crucial area for future research within the integration of digital tools. Many organisations lack the resources or expertise needed to effectively adopt advanced technologies like Business Intelligence. The implementation costs of these systems can be prohibitive for resource-limited organisations, constraining their capacity to harness the advantages of digitalisation fully. Therefore, future studies should explore strategies that not only improve access to these technologies but also enhance digital literacy, ensuring digital empowerment is inclusive and addresses existing disparities. Additionally, exploring this topic through the theoretical lens of the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1985) could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of digital tools in the cultural sector's social impact assessment, potentially informing practices that support broader adoption and meaningful use of these technologies in cultural contexts.

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FROM POLTRONOVA TO CENTRO STUDI POLTRONOVA: HOW TO PIVOT ON CULTURAL RESOURCES FOR ORGANIZATIONAL REBIR

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Abstract

Purpose. This article focuses on the role of cultural resources, seeking to shed new light on their pivotal role in organizational rebirth after organizational death. Adding to literature on cultural resources, this study investigates how an organization can leverage its existing cultural resources as primary source to inform organizational rebirth.

Design/methodology/approach. Through inductive single case study approach, this study analyzes the case of Poltronova, an Italian SME in the furniture business, founded by an artist and developed upon the central role of designers and design projects.

Practical and Social implications. The study can inform practitioners on how to navigate organizational rebirth by leveraging internal cultural resources, when other resources are unavailable. Furthermore, it offers new insight on the intrinsic value of artistic efforts and of business involvement with artists to provide favorable conditions towards both economic and cultural development.

Originality of the study. Our findings highlight the emergence of what we label artist-based enterprise and project-based model, which can secure organizational success through restoring its historical origin, while ensuring economic profitability in the contemporary context.

“Archizoom design furniture like anarchists would disseminate bombs”
(Isa Vercelloni, 1969, Vogue Home, Italian edition)

1. Introduction

This article seeks to highlight the role of cultural resources (Dalpiaz et al., 2010; Rindova et al., 2011) in organizational rebirth after organizational death (Sutton, 1987a; Walsh & Bartunek, 2011). Organizational rebirth is defined as the reenactment of valued social patterns of organizational life in novel context (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011), while organizational death is defined as the ceasing of the organization's main activities, and/or situations in which "the set of activities comprised by the dying organization are no longer accomplished intact (i.e., all activities have halted or been dispersed among two or more other organizations)" (Sutton, 1987, p.543). Previous studies on cultural resources have shown how the latter are understood as tools derived from cultural repertoires, to create strategies and make strategic decisions (Rindova et al. 2011), these resources inform entrepreneurial narratives, which are crucial for maintaining legitimacy and securing other resources (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001; Rindova et al. 2011). Furthermore, the role of such "toolkit" is crucial in resolving tensions arising from conflicting logics, which are typical of organizations where artistic vocation and business goals needs to be both secured, although possibly conflicting (Glynn, 2000; Lounsbury et al., 2019). In this scenario, cultural resources become essential in aligning different logics and resolving conflicts between these contrasting objectives (Dalpiaz et al. 2016). Such tensions are typical of the cultural sector (Demartini et al., 2021), within cultural entrepreneurship (Piber 2020), in cases of Artisan cultural entrepreneurship (Ratten et al., 2019), and highly relevant variables to be considered by any management and governance model for cultural ventures (Bonet & Donato, 2011).

Despite the importance of cultural resources in informing innovation and strategy (Rindova et Al. 2011; Dalpiaz et Al. 2010), the literature lacks in-depth exploration of their role during organizational crises or existential threats (Bonet & Donato, 2011; Pencarelli et al., 2021; Sutton, 1987a; Zell, 2003). The latter are defined as "a condition or event that has the potential to profoundly threaten or jeopardize the survival or stability of an organization, often with significant and irreversible consequences." (Norris et Al. 2020, p.2118).

More in detail, the cornerstone study by Walsh and Bartunek (2011) on organizational rebirth, suggests that, in the wake of an organization's death, members may form *ex morte* organizations, new entities that preserve key elements of the original organization. The rebirth process follows distinct stages—Disintegration, Demise, Gestation, and Rebirth—during which founders or members carry forward valuable aspects of the defunct organization. However, in cases where founders and former colleagues are absent, the role of cultural resources in driving rebirth remains unexplored.

This study aims to shedding new light on the pivotal role of cultural resources in organizational rebirth, especially in contexts when other strategic resources (e.g., financial, human) are depleted, by asking the following research question: How do cultural resources contribute to organizational rebirth after organizational death? Indeed, assessing the role of cultural resources as a primary source of organizational rebirth can be crucial to understand processes tied to innovative organizational frames for arts and culture, which rely on the value of past cultural repertoire.

It also seeks to explore how organizations navigate the tension between innovation and a returning to past values, offering insights into the strategic use of cultural resources during an organization's vulnerable moments (Gerstrøm, 2015). In order to reach the aim of the study, we performed a qualitative study using an inductive approach (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), to engage in the discussion of a single case study (Yin, 2009). To develop theory from our case study (Eisenhardt, 1989), we traced Poltrona's evolution to examine the role of cultural resources in its rebirth. We draw an historical account of the company's evolution in phases (Langley, 1999) and employed a grounded, iterative approach to move between data and theory. Poltrona reached success in the mid 20th century, and its history is intertwined with the history of designers working for and with it, participating actively in the emergence of what it is now widely recognized as "made in Italy" industrial design. Other cases of such design-based enterprises can be found in Kartell (Stigliani and Ravasi, 2007), Alessi (Dalpiaz et Al. 2016), Olivetti (Brennan 2015; Pinheiro and Franqueira 2022). Nonetheless, Poltrona has been smaller in size compared to above-mentioned other cases and highly influential in the artistic design scenario. At the 1972 New York MoMa exhibition "Italy: the new domestic landscape", the cornerstone exhibition marking the origin of the "made in Italy", 11 articles exhibited were made by Poltrona: the single company most represented in the venue. Common to other cases, Poltrona experienced tensions between artistic and commercial logics throughout all its history (Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Pache & Santos, 2013), however it represents a revelatory case in how reached organizational rebirth after prolonged crisis. A key factor in this rebirth was the renewed emphasis on the intrinsic artistic value of its design pieces and the strategic revitalization of its original cultural resources, which once again became the defining element of the company's identity (Ravasi and Lojacono, 2005).

Our findings contribute to elucidate how internal, already existing cultural resources can play a crucial role in organizational rebirth, especially in cases where organizations recover and reorganize by drawing on their internal cultural assets rather than external or innovative resources. Furthermore, our findings highlight how, within the process of organizational rebirth, the role of founders and former co-workers can be overcome by

relying on such cultural resources. Instead of turning to external or innovative resources, organizations often focus on recovering and reusing these pre-existing cultural assets, ensuring that the organization's foundational values continue to influence its revival and future direction. Furthermore, our findings highlight the emergence of what we label artist-based enterprise, which is supported by a project-based rebirth phase. The later secured Poltronova return to its historical vocation, while ensuring economic success in the contemporary context. By this way, we also contribute to current literature on the role of the arts and the artists (Pless et al., 2017; Szostak, 2023; Zsolnai & Wilson, 2016). More in detail, we contribute to the later literature by envisioning how art and artists represent a vital source of cultural resources within processes of organizational rebirth (Ravasi, D., & Lojacono, G. (2005). Overall, our contributions can inform managerial practices in SMEs, especially in cultural entrepreneurship contexts (Piber, 2020), as well as in traditional SMEs with strong ties to artistic products and ventures (Masè, 2020; Ratten et al., 2019; Zsolnai & Wilson, 2016), when experiences existential threats. Indeed, the emergence of design-based organizational rebirth can serve as a model to inform decision making over cultural resource management and how to address cultural resources as an internal source of organizational rebirth (Maurer et al., 2011).

The remainder of the article is organized as follows: Section 2 presents an overview of the theoretical background. Section 3 presents the research setting and empirical periodization. Section 4 summarizes the methodology and data collection and analysis. Section 5 summarizes the main findings. Section 6 presents discussion of the findings and conclusion, as well as listing some of the main limitations to the study.

2. Theoretical background

cultural resources are defined as resources used by organizations to develop strategies and inform strategic actions towards different goals (Rindova et al., 2011). More in detail, literature has underlined how cultural resources can be understood as a “toolkit” drawn from cultural repertoires, upon which individuals can rely to develop strategies and which play a central role in organizations in strategy formation and change. Furthermore, such repertoires inform entrepreneurial narratives, crucial to gain and maintain legitimacy and other types of resources (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Rindova et al., 2011). Cultural resources have been discussed as particularly salient in organizations with an artistic vocation, belonging at the same to the manufacturing and cultural sector (Piber, 2020). Indeed, business organizations with an artistic vocation often combine different logics, thus suffering tensions between artistic exposure and professionals' pas-

sion, and business goals and economic targets (Comunian, 2008; Ginburgh & Throsby, 2006; Glynn, 2000). Cultural resources can be essential to combine different logics to overcome such tensions (Dalpiaz et al., 2016).

Furthermore, cultural resources belonging to such artistic organizations display a distinct relevance in affecting both the organization's rationale, its purpose and its impacts on external stakeholders (Dalpiaz et al., 2010). Several cases of Italian manufacturing businesses, all created and grown in the mid of the XXI century, display a distinct role for cultural resources, due to essential features of their artistic driven business model (which founded and shaped the Italian industrial design, Verganti, 2006): Alessi (Dalpiaz et al., 2014), Kartell (Comunian, 2009; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2007), Olivetti (Brennan, 2015; Del Baldo, 2018; Iandoli, 2021). Such cases are relevant not only to inform theorizing from historical cases, but also to inspire many businesses aiming to combining both artistic vocation and economic success (Zsolnai & Illes, 2017; Zsolnai & Wilson, 2016). However, the need to find innovative organizational frames for art and culture, requires additional investigation on the role that cultural resources can play in such cultural business context. More in detail, while literature discusses the need for organizations to rely on cultural resources to inform innovation and enhance their repertoires, there is a dearth in the literature concerning how organizations can use cultural resources to address existential organizational crisis. Indeed, while cultural resources are discussed as key to reshape or redefine organizational strategy and identity (Dalpiaz et al., 2010; Rindova et al., 2011), tied to the need to expand and acquire other resources, literature does not yet enquire into the role of cultural resources understood as the only resources upon which the organization can rely.

To address this research question, we discuss the role of cultural resources within processes of organizational rebirth (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011; Zell, 2003). The death of an organization is often felt in a manner similar to the loss of a family member or close friend (Sutton, 1987b). These experiences of loss can lead to what has been described as a "conservative impulse" to restore cherished aspects of the past (Wolfram Cox, 1997). Instead of simply dispersing, members of a failing organization may engage in what is referred to as "postdeath organizing" where new entities, called *ex morte* organizations, are formed to preserve important elements of the previous organization. These *ex morte* organizations arise directly as a consequence of the death of the original organization (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011). According to Walsh and Bartunek, through processes of Disintegration and Demise, Gestation and, lastly, Rebirth, founders of the original organization can preserve its most valuable aspects, while giving birth to new organizational forms. However, in current research, rebirth is closely tied with both founders' intervention and social bonds between former colleagues. Indeed, the implementation of restructuring activities mark the start of a

new phase, during which ex morte organizations are officially presented as new entities. Organizational rebirth goes beyond the mere creation of a new organization, it represents the reformation of important social structures among former members though now in a different context (Walsh and Bartunek, 2011). Following such model by Walsh and Bartunek, founders and former colleagues hold a pivotal role in recreating the legacy of the original organization, while the specific role of cultural resources remains yet to be discussed. Furthermore, when a process of rebirth unfolds, unexpected consequences and scenarios may open (Pusceddu et al., 2022), eliciting a response from the new organization which require innovation and new strategies. In the same facet, the role of cultural resources as already existing internal toolkit remains less discussed. As organizations may witness contexts of loss of founders' direction and former members availability, further understanding of the role of cultural resources may highlight how to pursue organizational rebirth. Current knowledge conceptualizes the use of cultural resources in organizational context as the introduction of new practices and the integration of novel cultural repertoire to pursue innovative and unconventional strategies, culminating in new identity definition (Rindova et al., 2011). However, as authors recognize cultural resources as crucial for strategy formation (Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Maurer et al., 2011), it remain somewhat obscure how organizations can use original past cultural repertoires instead of acquiring new ones.

To overcome such gaps in the literature, in the next paragraph we present the case of Poltrona as suitable to theorize on the role of cultural resources, within a context of organizational existential threats (Sutton, 1987a; Zell, 2003).

3. Research setting and methodology

3.1 Research setting

To address our research question, we performed an in-depth inductive case study of Poltrona, an Italian company operating in the design and furniture industry since late 50s. The case study of Poltrona has been identified as a revelatory case study, ideal for single in-depth analysis, following established research (Yin 2004; Eisenhardt, 1989). We focus on the case of Poltrona as it represents a rich setting to investigate how an organization underwent existential threats and overcoming it through the use of cultural resources. As this study seeks to understand the role of cultural resources in organizational rebirth, the case is identified as suitable empirical setting to address their role before and after the organizational death, which occurred in the period of 1983-2000 (for details on the timeline please see data analysis).

Poltronova was founded by a sculptor based in Agliana (Tuscany) in 1956. Sergio Cammilli was widely known for being an artist-entrepreneur (Borin & Delgado, 2018; Pagano et al., 2021). At that time, Poltronova was established as a furniture business, which developed thanks to the blending the art and craft of textile and marble furniture artisans in Tuscany, with the projects provided by both Italian leading designers, as well as designers who - at that time - were unknown, but soon-to-be globally recognized. Right after founding Poltronova, in 1957 Cammilli met with Ettore Sottsass, a designer whose name is now considered a synonym of “made in Italy”: the unique blend of art, industrial production and identity, born in those years. Sottsass became Poltronova “Art Director” before the role of art direction existed as an official role in coeval organizations. Thanks to the sodalite between Cammilli and Sottsass, Poltronova soon became more than a furniture firm: young designers, coming from the Architecture faculty in Florence, started to use it as a place to propose their ideas, experiment and exchange with others. The famous studios Archizoom Associati and Superstudio, known for their provocative idea, considered outside the coeval tendencies of Italian design, found in Cammilli and Poltronova the perfect opportunity to apply their abstract projects to real-world industrial design production. Poltronova grew thanks to such connubium with designers but, at the same time, thanks to it underwent a deep period of crisis: when visionary projects became too “visionary”, both the critics and the customers, started to criticize and neglect them. Within these almost 20 years of crisis, the company was dismantled in several different companies, producing many furniture lines, attempting a transition to a more “traditional”, Northern Italian, model of furniture business. Only in the early 2000s the firm was taken over by current CEO Roberta Meloni. Meloni leadership helped in rediscovery Poltronova’s original history and opening a new phase in the organization life, envisioning a new governance and a new production strategy. Poltronova transitioned from being an artist-driven company, focused on niche design products, to an attempt at commercialization with a shift toward office pieces targeting a more mass-market audience. In this context, the company experienced a profound crisis culminated in company’s dismantling and death.

When walking into Poltronova headquarters today, in Tuscany, it is suddenly clear that designers, architects and people with a background in cultural development are in charge of running every aspect of its business (Schiuma, 2011). When looking at its balance sheet and interviewing key informants, it is impossible not to notice its marketing strategy: by allocating no resources on advertising, while displaying a specific budget allocated to publishing, Poltronova seeks to establish the organization as a well-known center for design experts. Its very name was changed into “Centro Studi Poltronova Per Il Design” in the rebirth phase, to highlight

the contribution of the firm to the academic debate on design, beyond its own production and commercialization of design pieces. Such vision had informed Poltronova recognition in 2013 of its archive of design projects “Archivio di particolare interesse” from the Soprintendenza of Regione Toscana. Such recognition allowed Poltronova to claim its original contribution not only to the history of Italian industrial design, but also a direct role in cultural heritage management (Demartini et al., 2021; Summatavet & Raudsaar, 2015). By this way, the Poltronova archive is both, at the same time, the cultural resource upon which drawing inspiration for production (right now CSP only replicates archival pieces), and a publicly available source for research and consultation. This rebirth occurred by steering clear of the commercial strategies employed during the years of crisis. In this sense, Poltronova represents a revelatory case because it implemented a clear strategy of leveraging the cultural resources linked to the company’s original identity to navigate organizational death and drive its rebirth. In fact, the Centro Studi Poltronova, established in early 2000s, today represents the highest expression of the centrality of culture in the company’s success that, over the past twenty years, it has followed a path of progressively abandoning traditional commercial logics.

3.2 Data collection

To build our case study, we collected data from different sources. First, we relied on extensive consultation of available documents on financial statements on the platform *AIDA*, together with *TELEMACO* (Registro delle Imprese) to create a chronological description of Poltronova (Yin, 1998), from 1956 to today. We then conducted four in-depth interviews with key actors: we gathered insights from all four people currently involved in the company management. To triangulate the information received from the informants, we relied on secondary interviews conducted by third parties with actors involved in previous management of the company, as well as on archives made available by the company for the purposes of this study, public available data (newspaper, magazines, press releases), a variety of media sources (youtube, recording of conferences etc.), secondary sources drawn from specialized literature, books and written testimonies.

3.3 Data analysis

To generate theory from our case study (Eisenhardt, 1989), we followed the evolution of Poltronova over the years to unpack the evolution of cultural resources and how their use enabled the company’s revival. Therefore, we divided our analysis of the company’s evolution throughout its history

into different phases (Langley, 1999), and adopted a grounded approach to iteratively move between data and theory, inductively extrapolating the theory (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). We began our analysis by drawing on the chronological history of Poltrona. We identified three key periods: from 1956 until 1983 “historical period”. From 1983 to 2000 “crisis period”. From 2001 up to date the “Centro Studi Poltrona period”. We identified 1983 as the starting point for organizational crisis, evolved in organizational death over the following decades. We then recognized the year 2001 as the organizational rebirth. By this way, we were able to draw an historical account of the different periods of Poltrona; this step was crucial in making sense of the evolution of the use of business versus cultural resources in the company over the years (Langley, 1999).

From our analysis of the data, we witness the three distinct periods as follows: first, from the foundation to the founder’s leave with contrast within the Poltrona governance; second, the emergence of a plurality of legal and business entity linked to the Poltrona holding, which aimed to transforming the company in fundamental dimensions, such as market targeted, artists’ presence and territorial production; third, the foundation of Centro Studi Poltrona, led by actual CEO Roberta Meloni, which recollects the history of Poltrona and aims to re-actualizing its historical catalogue and archive of projects.

3.1 [1956-1983] *Original Period*

Poltrona was founded by Sergio Cammilli, a sculptor based in Tuscany, in 1956. The original headquarters, as well as the actual one, is to be found in Agliana, nearby Pistoia. The area is today under scrutiny for its artistic potential (Samuk et al., 2022), while being a neglected rural area back in the original Poltrona period. After suffering a severe physical illness, which caused him to abandon the work of sculpture, Cammilli transformed his passion for art and design into a business venture (Pagano et Al. 2021). At the time Tuscany was a territory rich in craftsmanship tradition, but not as developed as a furniture district as other Italian regions, such as Lombardy (Lazzeretti & Capone, 2015; Verganti, 2006). Years after, Cammilli will admit in an interview with Kartell’s founder, that his entrepreneurial vision was based on the passion for design rather than on profit-making as an end:

“I believe that my main ‘flaw,’ if you can call it that, has been focusing my energy primarily on the project; I liked creating a continuous dialogue with the designers. When the company grew, it became difficult to control the situation. I had to call a company from Milan, Orga, to plan the management of Poltrona. They set up the sales office, the purchasing office, and the administrative office, but the

sales office was always lacking. There were administrative directors who came and went. Nonetheless, the company always managed to move forward." (G. Castelli, P. Antonelli, F. Picchi, Skira, Milano, 200, p. 214 – our translation)

Cammilli's vision blended Tuscan craft in textile industry with knowledge brought in Poltrona by designers. Among them, a key role was played by Ettore Sottsass as art director; he was at the time a promising designer and would have afterwards become the name associated with other globally renewed Italian businesses, such as Olivetti (Brennan, 2015; Del Baldo, 2018; Iandoli, 2021). Cammilli also decided to invite to Poltrona young designers, who were associated with Archizoom Associati and Superstudio, two significant architecture studios in Florence (Arista, 2006; Aureli, 2013). By this way, he was able to connect with young talents mobilizing within the Architecture Faculty of Florence to bring about a new idea of experimental design. The latter movement is now known as the movement of Radical Design. In 1972 Poltrona changed its legal form from S.r.l. to S.p.A., signaling a transformation and expansion of its organizational form. However, soon tensions started to arise: In 1974 Ettore Sottsass left, following a disastrous release of its new design "mobile grigi" (grey furnitures). One of the most renowned magazines in the field "Abitare", in 1970 had labeled Sottsass (and Poltrona) idea as outrageous. This elicited a damaging response from the critics and the audience, thus representing the culminating event opening a deep crisis concerning the organization's vision and leadership.

3.2 [1983-2000] Crisis Period

We identify 1983-2000 as the crisis period. At that time, Poltrona was growing in size, revenue and audience, but found it hard to promote adequate change in its structure and management:

"Poltrona is now a company that employs over one hundred and fifty people, operates on a surface of thirty thousand square meters, and has a distribution network of over one hundred sales points. These are dimensions that have become difficult to control, and require Cammilli to make radical administrative updates. In the early 1970s, the corporate structure changed with the entry of a new partner who brought in new capital, and a company from Milan, Orga, was identified to plan the commercial activities. One of the first decisions made by the new management was to discontinue the collaboration with Sottsass." Milco Carboni (source C1)

Cammilli left Poltrona governance in 1983, when contrasts between him and the rest of the management became irreparable.

"I left in 1983, at sixty-five years old, when I decided to dedicate myself exclusively to my true passion, which is art. Until the seventies, it was fun to do this job, there were many people who knew what to say to each other. I worked eleven hours a day, without any anxiety." (source D3)

Although Poltronova grew in size and relevance, as well as in notoriety (in 1967 Elio Fiorucci engaged Poltronova in the design of its Milan shop-showroom), financially wise Poltronova navigated troubled waters. On one hand, Cammilli wanted to pursue artistic experimentation, on the other the economic sustainability of the organization was at stake, as experiments were not as profitable as the company needed to ensure financial success (Lampel et al., 2006). By the time Cammilli left in 1983, the idea that Poltronova served as a venue of designers' experimentation was lost. During this period of crisis, we witness a subsequent change in both forms of governance and management, a continuous foundation and failure of different entities. While production was re-oriented towards commercial lines, the organizational crisis deepened; with the declining of the centrality of the artists, leading to a more commercial orientation, the financial performance still did not recover.

Table 1 – Crisis Period

Active Period	Juridical Code (P.Iva)	Registered as	Additional Info
1956 - 1988	89590475	Poltronova S.r.L.	In 1972 became Poltronova S.p.A.
1956 - 1983	89590475	Poltronova S.p.A.	In 1979 Florence and Milan headquarters closed down. In 1985 There is a new registered name as: "Poltronova arredamenti sedie poltrone e divani"
1986 - 2010	554665048	Nuova Poltronova S.r.L.	
1977 - 2019	366010478	Poltronova Arredamenti Settore Mostra S.r.L.	
1991 - 2019	1150940474	Poltronova S.r.L.	1999 Sold to Mobilservice S.r.L. (P.IVA 04649480482)
2019 – up to date	5546650481	Centro Studi Poltronova per il design S.r.L.	

3.3 [2001 - up to date] Rebirth: Centro Studi Poltronova

In 2001 Poltronova started a new phase, culminating in 2004 with Roberta Meloni becoming majority shareholder and CEO. In 2005 it is formally founded the Centro Studi Poltronova which in 2019 will become part

of the Centro Studi Poltronova per il design Srl (source: AIDA). The management is completely renewed and all profiles hired are design experts, scholars and have a deep knowledge of the Poltronova history (either as they studied it or had some previous engagement with its design projects. Trincherini, 2023). [see Table 2]

Table 2 – Governance Profiles

Name	Current Role	Years (from)	Background
Roberta Meloni	CEO	2004	Architecture
Dontatello d'Angelo	Art Director	2014	Architecture
Elisabetta Trincherini	Director of Archive, studies and research	2017	History of Art PhD in Semiotic
Francesco Toselli	Product developer	2017	Engineering, Design
Joyceline Maniscalco	Accounting	unavailable	unavailable

During the pandemic, when exhibitions and other cultural venues were closed, Poltronova kept alive its relationship with the audience by providing a newsletter with narrative accounts on its most beloved pieces, their history and stories from their designers (Khlystova et al., 2022). The third period is defined by CSP decision to re start the production only of pieces which are archival sourced. Some examples are: Superonda and Safari sofas, Ultrafragola mirror, the lamps Gherpe, Passiflora, Cessato allarme and Sanremo, the armchairs Mies. Pieces are all produced upon request.



Ultrafragola
design by
Ettore Sottsass jr.
1970



Mies
design by
Archizoom Associati
1969



Joe
design by
De Pas, D'Urbino, Lomazzi
1970

Source: Poltronova Press Kit <https://press.poltronova.it/>

Poltronova new phase of restoring and recovering its projects archive, culminated in 2013, when the organization obtained the recognition by the Soprintendenza della Regione Toscana of “Archivio di particolare interesse”.

4. Findings

Artist-Based Enterprise

Poltronova's success stemmed from its deep-rooted collaborations with avant-garde designers and its commitment to cultural engagement over traditional marketing methods. Founded in 1957 by Sergio Cammilli, a sculptor with a profound appreciation for the burgeoning design culture in post-war Italy, Poltronova was envisioned as a bridge between art, craftsmanship, and modern design experimentation. The company positioned itself at the forefront of design not through commercial advertising, but

by building a rich network of artists and participating in cultural events, exhibitions, and design publications. Cammilli believed in the power of artists to redefine the concept of living spaces. He actively sought collaborations with architects and designers who were pioneering the Radical Design movement, including Ettore Sottsass, Archizoom Associati, Superstudio. The involvement of artistic figures at Poltrona, whether internally or externally, such as Gae Aulenti collaboration, went far beyond merely designing and producing pieces; they were integrated into the company's operations, as the Art Director explains:

"Sottsass was essential; he was a multifaceted and versatile figure who oversaw the brand's early development (catalogs, logo, trademark). He advised Cammilli on the production of some pieces that later became iconic and acted as a bridge to the Milanese design scene. He was responsible for communication, designed objects, and even conducted talent scouting. For the Radical group, he was a key point of reference within the Florentine context. His role was threefold: communication, talent scout, and designer."

— AD

Poltrona became a hub for these creatives, producing iconic pieces like Archizoom's "Superonda" sofa (1967) and "Mies" armchair (1969) or the sofa "Sofa" (1967-8) and the lamp "Gherpe" (1967) from Superstudio. These designs pushed the boundaries of conventional furniture, embracing bold forms, innovative materials, and provocative ideas. Poltrona's strategy of cultural engagement over traditional advertising further distinguished it. Cammilli avoided commercial publicity, opting instead to showcase the company's work in cultural venues such as the Triennale di Milano, Salone del Mobile, and through features in design journals like "Domus" and "Casa Vogue." These efforts established Poltrona as a leader in design thought and aligned it with the radical movements of the time. The company's showroom in Agliana became more than a sales space; it was a laboratory for artistic exchange and experimentation, embodying a spirit of avant-garde collaboration. Through these activities, Poltrona built a unique cultural capital that made it not just a furniture company, but an influential voice in the design world:

"Like other Tuscan companies, Poltrona tried to find its own identity, almost in contrast with the outside world, and this remains true today: we do not conform to market rules. This applies to our approach to communication as well. We move forward following our instincts, even when choosing products for production. For example, we included the 'Mitzi' sofa by Hollein in our catalog because it was important to have a piece from a designer of that caliber. It's a complex product in the market, but it plays to our advantage in terms of communication. The same goes for 'Cessato Allarme' by DDL, which is very pop and evokes war, yet carries peaceful messages. We chose colors that align with these aspects."

— AD

Moreover, artistic experiments were running on current basis, yielding some pieces which were often difficult to commercialize. Such practice was structural to the organization, despite its ambiguous commercial outcome:

"The experimentation was being done, and here was the peculiarity of Cammilli who, being a man of art, believed in the invention of art, let's call it that. He believed, as we would say today, in creative design. That's why we got along: he let me do things, he made the prototypes, and every now and then I would make something else for him that was 'sellable.' But even this here (flipping through the catalogs) now seems like minimalist furniture... I don't know how many he might have sold... four or five (Sottsass)" – (source D2)

Organizational crisis

However, this dedication to radical design and cultural engagement would soon clash with market realities. In the late 1970s, Poltronova began experiencing financial difficulties. The designs that had defined the company's identity in the previous decades, while culturally significant, struggled to find mass-market appeal. As economic challenges mounted, Poltronova sought to pivot towards a more commercially viable direction, attempting to align its products with mainstream consumer preferences and trends in the furniture market:

"In the 1980s, there was an artistic direction, but later, in trying to chase the market, Poltronova sought to adopt an identity it never truly had. Our catalog was a collection of different styles and languages. There was never a 'Poltronova style' or a 'Poltronova home.' Brands like De Padova, Cappellini, and Zanotta had a clear vision for their way of living. The response back then was to overcome the crisis by becoming like them. As a result, the company introduced projects that had nothing to do with our original ethos. So, we didn't become like the others, and we weakened our own vision. If you have a weak identity, this might work, but when you start with a strong identity like ours, you can't produce things that match the caliber of the past projects."
— CEO

In 1983, Sergio Cammilli left the company, marking the beginning of a two-decade-long period of crisis for Poltronova. His departure led to a loss of the company's original artistic vision and direction, which had been fundamental to its identity and success. This strategic shift marked a departure from Poltronova's original artist-driven ethos. In the pursuit of a new identity that could secure the company's future, Poltronova distanced itself from its roots. It began to lose touch with some of its key collaborators, including Ettore Sottsass. The company increasingly focused on more conventional designs aimed at the contract and office furniture markets, moving away from the experimental, culturally-rich creations that had made it an icon in the first place:

"The relationship with the designers had been lost. The true fuel of the company, more than the products themselves, were the projects, including everything that was never produced. Having the designers with you on this journey is essential."
— CEO

This redirection led to a crisis that went beyond mere financial strain. By attempting to become more market-oriented, Poltronova eroded the very cultural foundation that had set it apart. The loss of key design figures and the push to adopt a different identity left the company struggling to maintain its distinctiveness. The innovative, artist-centric ethos that had once fueled its growth was replaced with a more commercial mindset that did not resonate with its existing audience, nor did it establish a strong foothold in the broader market.

Ultimately, Poltronova's crisis in the 1980s and 1990s was not solely a result of market shifts or the decline of Radical Design's popularity. It was also due to the company's attempt to conform to market demands, which led to the loss of its initial cultural imprint. By drifting away from its core philosophy of artistic collaboration and cultural engagement, Poltronova found itself in an identity crisis, struggling to find its place in an evolving design landscape. This experience would later underscore the importance of cultural resources in the company's revival.

Project-based organizational rebirth

In the early 2000s, Roberta Meloni took over the company with the aim of reviving Poltronova. Inspired by the advice of architect and Professor Gianni Pettena, Meloni's strategy was to begin the renaissance by delving into the company's archives, drawing on the memories of the last remaining employees, and exploring what had been left in the warehouses. This approach centered on reconnecting with Poltronova's roots and rediscovering its original cultural resources.

"In 2000, I was left alone in a valley of things to do. Pettena sent a student to work on a thesis about Poltronova. I told him that the archive didn't exist, and he replied, 'Then you create it.' With Balena, we started working in thousands of square meters that were in semi-ruin. The company had a vast surface area, but it was split into five different properties because, in the 1980s, five companies operated under the Poltronova name. The spaces had been reduced, and everything that was no longer in use was thrown into these abandoned areas. Among pigeons and dead rats, we began recovering items, like fabric samples from the original collections—true industrial archaeology. We did the same with the catalogs and everything else we could find. Meanwhile, we reached out to the designers, who started sending us materials they hadn't given to Parma or the museum. With Francesca, we began visiting Sottsass once a month with a timeline of the projects, organizing and revising the projects together."

— CEO

The process was a long and meticulous journey, taking nearly a decade. It involved numerous meetings with key figures from Poltronova's golden era, including Ettore Sottsass, Gilberto Corretti, Andrea Branzi, Paolo Deganello, and their heirs. Through these interactions, Meloni sought to piece together the company's legacy and rekindle the spirit that had once made Poltronova a leader in radical design. Meloni began to understand the key to overcoming the organizational crisis:

"Numbers are not my best, but a company like Poltronova, given its target market, cannot compete on price or adopt an identity that is not its own. It's not about the increase of 1,000 euros in the price of the product; it's about quality, and it must be executed even better."
— CEO

In 2004, Meloni became the sole director of the company, and in 2005, she founded the Centro Studi Poltronova within the company. This center became instrumental in researching, preserving, and promoting Poltronova's cultural heritage, setting the stage for the brand's revival. In this recent phase of Poltronova, the company's revival was entirely driven by a management team composed of individuals with artistic backgrounds, particularly experts in design and architecture.

The key approach in this new era at Poltronova was to retrieve and reintroduce designs created by notable designers who had collaborated with the company during its earlier period. The strategy emphasized the artistic and cultural value of these works, positioning them as important contributions to design history, despite their limited commercial success at the time, Poltronova capitalized on their artistic significance:

"We no longer recover the best-selling items; we sell the incredible commercial flops like Ultrafragola or Joe, which sold very little." — AD

This was confirmed by the director of the archive in Centro Studi Poltronova, that affirmed:

"The pieces that he (Camilli) didn't sell are the ones that now allow the company to sell." — DOA

This approach seeks to steer Poltronova's resurgence by bringing the intrinsic value of its products to the forefront, thereby restoring the company's identity to its former prominence. The context for this strategy is rooted in the complex relationship with suppliers, the challenges of production, and the difficulties in sourcing materials. In the new vision that leverages cultural resources, a key element has been the relationships with suppliers:

"As much as we can, we try to work with local suppliers because we like to have an ongoing relationship with them. Some suppliers are Tuscan, though there are fewer now than when I started, as some industrial districts have disappeared. However, we want to rebuild that personal relationship."

— CEO

These partnerships became a crucial resource in the revival of Poltronova, as efforts were made to rebuild the lost knowledge and craftsmanship, by re-establishing connections with former artisans, who were identified as a key resource in overcoming the company's crisis. These artisans, many of whom had been involved in Poltronova's earlier years, brought invaluable expertise and knowledge that had been lost over time:

"The seamstress, upholsterer, and assembler are still in contact with us and are essential when we need to reissue a piece or restore something we have never seen or made before. They are the living part of the archive (Rosetta, the seamstress, was 14 when she started working at the company, and she is still fundamental)."

— CEO

Together with the architects, the company would visit each supplier individually, working closely to recover and reintroduce traditional techniques:

"With Dario Bartolini, one of the designers, we went together to the suppliers to see how they were making the pieces. For me, it was wonderful to go with him, and for him, it was emotional to see an object returning to production after so many years. Historically, it's said that they were made by a pharmacist who had a passion for boats and, for fun, created these fiberglass shells. Today, they are made in Livorno by a company that specializes in this work."

— PD

Poltronova faced numerous technical and design challenges in updating vintage projects, particularly those requiring materials that were no longer commonly used. Moreover, the company had to address the practicalities of production, such as producing small batches and purchasing materials in advance without knowing how much would eventually sell. This uncertainty added a layer of risk to the revival efforts, especially for unique fabrics. Many of the original patterns and designs, which were crucial to Poltronova's aesthetic, were not available every year, making it even more challenging to maintain the brand's distinctive style. Despite these obstacles, the company remained committed to its vision, carefully navigating these production and supply hurdles to breathe new life into its iconic creations. As a hallmark of this cultural resource-based approach, the company has chosen to focus exclusively on publishing and cultural participation, deliberately moving away from more traditional business strategies centered on marketing and advertising investments:

"The archive materials are included in the books. The Centro Studi has an editorial code and has decided to invest a significant amount of money in this activity, cutting the advertising budget. The money, the time, and the effort are not the same."

— DOA

By prioritizing contributions to design journals, books, exhibitions, and cultural events, Poltronova reinforces its identity as an influential and authentic voice in the design world. This strategy highlights the intrinsic

value of its products and brand, allowing the company to connect with its audience through its historical and cultural significance:

"All the magazines call us for ads, but what you see is natural and spontaneous, not paid. We prefer to invest in classic publishing. We produce the monographs in-house, and both production and graphic design are not easy. The strategy is to maintain a strong connection with the past; we are contemporary, but it's important to remember that these pieces have a history."
— AD

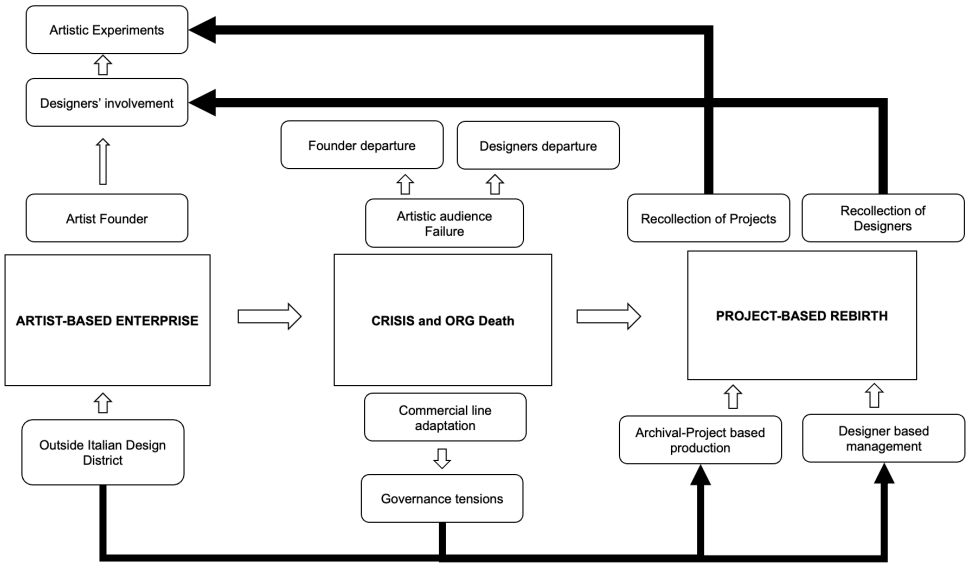
5. Discussion

The findings of this study allow us to witness the emergence of two main cultural resources, crucial to yield organizational rebirth: the relationship with designers and the archive of design projects (Ravasi & Lojacono, 2005).

The first phase sees the origin of the organization as enrooted in an artist-based enterprise: fueled by both the artistic passion of the founder, as well as the involvement of designers at all organizational levels. Differently than what has been labeled as "art based business" (Zsolnai & Wilson, 2016), the artistic vocation of the organization is not used neither for commercial purposes nor for mecenatism and cultural initiatives (Marchegiani, 2018; Schiuma, 2011), rather to use the organization as a space of experiments. Although designers were involved in many similar coeval businesses, the peculiarity of the artist-based enterprise arises from its pursuing of artistic creation as a primary objective, rather than mass commercial outreach. The second phase, opened with the departure of key designers (such as Sottsass) and the founder himself, witnesses the explosion of untamable tensions between the commercial logic and the cultural logic that have been coexisting until that period. Such crisis led to organizational death rather than to alignment in between different logics (Dalpiaz et al., 2016). In this period, our findings show how cultural resources have been neglected, substituted by a focus on commercial lines and commercial revenues. However, such strategy eventually led to organizational demise and failure. The third phase, organizational rebirth, centers around the restoring of the two main cultural resources which were originally developed in the first phase. We label this phase project-based rebirth: first, our findings support the claim that recollection of old design projects led to revaluation of design pieces. The latter, which in the first phase were considered commercial failure, through this last phase, are restored and re-commercialized. Second, in order to achieve re-commercialization of such archival pieces, the relationship with designers has been restored as well. This has been pursued through two drivers: first, by envisioning a management en-

tirely composed by design and architecture experts; second, by restoring, when possible, the original relationship of Poltronova, with those designers who contributed to projects. Findings relevant to the analysis of this third phase confirm previous studies on the pivotal role of cultural resources in strategy formation (Maurer et al., 2011; Rindova et al., 2011). We therefore highlight how cultural resources can be used not to inform innovation or renovation strategies, rather to inform the very organizational rationale of existence. We found that the organization was able to drive its rebirth without enrichment of cultural repertoire, rather by sourcing from the original one in a process of restoration of intrinsic value. Such process finally led to organizational rebirth, building on identity restoration rather than identity redefinition (Rindova et al., 2011). Thus, cultural resources emerge as the primary source of economic sustainability and success, to both overcome organizational death as well as to position the organization within a new context (Rosanas, 2008; Sutton, 1987). By this way, we were able to model what we call artistic and design-based rebirth [see Figure 1]

Figure 1: Artist and project based model



6. Contributions and limitation

This study contributes to literature on organizational death and literature on cultural resources, by enquiring into the key role of the second amidst processes of organizational rebirth, in at least three main ways.

This study elucidates the dual role of cultural resources in organizations, particularly in cases where tensions between cultural or artistic vocation and business goals are not successfully aligned (Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Zsolnai & Wilson, 2016). Cultural resources, such as experimental design projects and relationships with designers, often represent competing logics—artistic aspirations versus commercial imperatives—that create friction within governance frameworks and can lead to organizational challenges. However, our findings demonstrate that these same cultural resources, when strategically restored and acknowledged as central to the organization's strategy, can transition from being sources of conflict to becoming pivotal drivers of success. By resorting to and restoring original cultural assets, organizations can capitalize on their heritage to redefine their strategic positioning and re-establish legitimacy (Dalpiaz et al., 2010; Rindova et al., 2011). This shift highlights the potential for cultural resources to not only address tensions but also foster competitive advantage by aligning artistic authenticity with economic sustainability. Thus, the study contributes to the literature by showing how cultural resources can evolve from being antagonistic forces within an organization to becoming the cornerstone of its strategic renewal and success.

Second, this study bridges the gap between literature on cultural resources and organizational death. While prior research has explored the centrality of cultural resources in strategy formation and strategic renewal in thriving organizations such as Alessi, Kartell, and others (Dalpiaz et al., 2014; Ravasi & Lojacono, 2005; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2007), these cases have not specifically addressed scenarios involving organizational death. Our findings extend this body of work by showing how art-based businesses (Comunian, 2008; Masè, 2020; Zsolnai & Wilson, 2016) can restore their artistic vocation as a primary driver of strategy formation, even in contexts marked by organizational demise (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011; Zell, 2003). This contribution yields relevant insights for SMEs studies, inasmuch literature has extensively discussed the role of resilience or family ties as internal drivers of avoiding organizational death (Mchiri, 2022; Salvato et al., 2019), while we reveal how cultural resources, such as archival projects and designer collaborations, can serve as primary foundation for recovery by enabling the restoration of internal, pre-existing assets, rather than relying on the acquisition of new resources or innovations (Rindova et al., 2011) or family ties.

Furthermore, this study offers several practical implications to managers and

entrepreneurs aiming to yield a process of organizational rebirth. Following the elucidation of the pivotal role of cultural resources, often overlooked in favor of financial or operational strategies, practitioners can focus on the strategic deployment of their intrinsic artistic value. Specifically, the Poltrona case shows how the recollection and restoration of archival resources and legacy collaborations can be pursued as main strategic drivers able to yield organizational rebirth. By this way, practitioners can gain a deeper understanding of how such resources represent not merely historical artifacts or elderly collaborators, but a unique source of competitive advantage, particularly in contexts where traditional market approaches falter. Moreover, the research highlights the efficacy of a heritage-driven business model, suggesting that practitioners can prioritize authenticity and cultural alignment over purely commercial considerations. Additionally, the study sheds light on the importance of integrating designers and cultural experts into leadership roles to ensure alignment between strategic goals and cultural values.

Main limitations to the study can be enlisted as follows. First, the lack of complete documents and records concerning the crisis period, allowed us to gather limited data on management and governance structure and strategy concerning that historical period. This could have impacted our ability to understand tensions and decision-making processes and outputs during the crisis period. Although this does not directly influence the understanding of how Centro Studi Poltrona leverages cultural resources in the present period, we signal such shortcoming in data collection. Second, interviews have been conducted reaching data saturation, as they involved all key informants in the current governance of Centro Studi Poltrona, however, only secondary data have been found available to unpack the historical periods. Third, additional understanding of the role of cultural resources could be gathered from future enquires, which deepen designers' experience and role in organizational rebirth for art and artist-based businesses.

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OTHER RESEARCH ARTICLES



PUBLIC FUNDING TO SUPPORT FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ITALY

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Abstract

Purpose. The study analyzes entrepreneurship as a key element to understanding a country's economic characteristics and growth trajectory, explicitly focusing on the role of women entrepreneurs. The objective is to explore how national institutions can promote and support female entrepreneurship through financial instruments and targeted programs.

Design/methodology/approach. This qualitative study analyzes financial instruments supporting female entrepreneurship in Italy from 1992 to 2024. Analyzing public funding programs highlights the alignment—or lack thereof—between institutional objectives and actual support mechanisms. A dual perspective is adopted, comparing programs exclusively dedicated to women with general initiatives that include specific provisions for female entrepreneurship, focusing on the role of Invitalia SpA.

Findings. The study highlights the importance of public financial tools in supporting women entrepreneurs. The analysis of calls for proposals and regulatory provisions offers a systematic overview of existing opportunities, contributing to identifying new development possibilities for female entrepreneurship. This analysis compares exclusive programs with general programs featuring dedicated components for women.

Practical and Social Implications. Practical implications include mapping financing opportunities and providing valuable recommendations for public and private entities to promote female entrepreneurship.

Originality of the study. This study contributes to the literature on female entrepreneurship by combining an analysis of financing policies with an operational perspective on regulatory guidelines. Its originality lies in its in-depth analysis of the funding landscape for female entrepreneurs in Italy, spanning three decades (1992–2024). By systematically comparing public programs exclusively dedicated to women with general calls for proposals containing targeted components for female entrepreneurship, the research provides a dual perspective rarely addressed in the existing literature.

1. Introduction

Promoting women's entrepreneurship is a growing priority in public policies at the national and international levels. However, there are still significant gaps in understanding how public funding has influenced the creation and development of women's enterprises. This study contributes to the debate by analyzing the initiatives implemented in Italy since 1992, with Law 215, up to the current policies.

Women entrepreneurs face structural and cultural challenges in obtaining financing at the national and international levels (Paoloni & Demartini, 2016). The structural barriers include difficulties getting credit through traditional financial institutions and the need for more professional networks, often less developed than men. Gender stereotypes persist on a cultural level, linking entrepreneurship to traditionally masculine traits and limiting women to domestic roles. Many women entrepreneurs face significant obstacles due to the dual responsibilities of family and professional ambitions (Winn, 2005).

The international agenda of promoting gender equality and reducing economic disparities aligns with female entrepreneurship. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda emphasize the importance of ensuring equal access for women to opportunities in all sectors. However, despite initiatives and measures encouraged by UN member states, significant inequalities persist in key areas such as access to employment and economic resources, underlining the urgency of implementing more effective and targeted strategies (Leoncini et al., 2024).

In Europe, significant progress has been made towards reducing the gender gap. The European Pillar of Social Rights is an example of an initiative aimed at ensuring equal opportunities in areas such as access to employment and working conditions (Garben, 2019). The InvestEU Program, on the other hand, aims to provide financial support to women-led businesses through dedicated funds (Tati, 2022), while the WEGate (Women Entrepreneurs Gateway) platform offers women entrepreneurs access to resources, training, and support networks across Europe (Wang & Morrell, 2015). Nevertheless, women in Europe remain significantly underrepresented in the entrepreneurial landscape.

At the national level, the gender disparity in the entrepreneurial sector remains particularly pronounced (EIGE, 2020). In Italy, in 2023, only 22.2% of businesses were led by women, a figure 0.9 percentage points lower than the European average of 32%. The agriculture, manufacturing, and trade sectors observed the most significant declines. Unexpectedly, however, growth was noted in the technical-scientific sector (Banca d'Italia, 2023). Despite these positive trends, Italy's average remains below the European benchmark. Most women-led businesses (76%) are sole proprietorships, often facing challenges in accessing growth capital and development op-

portunities. This reflects the prevalence of micro-enterprises, characterized by limited financial resources and insufficient collateral to secure financing from credit institutions. Joint-stock companies (S.p.A.) generally enjoy easier access to significant investments and international growth opportunities, representing only 15% of women-led businesses. This underrepresentation highlights a significant structural disparity between men and women in the Italian entrepreneurial context (Cerved, 2020). Additionally, only 8% of women-led businesses are partnerships, and just 1% are associations, groups, foundations, or other forms registered with Chambers of Commerce (ASVIS, 2022).

These data underscore the structural challenges women entrepreneurs face and the need to introduce more inclusive financial policies to support the consolidation of female entrepreneurship.

A fundamental aspect of addressing these persistent difficulties lies in access to credit, a critical issue across European countries. In this context, financial instruments specifically designed to support women entrepreneurs are indispensable (Paoloni, 2011). These tools provide the capital to start and grow businesses and help reduce gender disparities (Cavalca, 2022). Expanding the availability of financing dedicated to female entrepreneurship is therefore essential.

Women entrepreneurs face three primary barriers to accessing credit: the structural characteristics of their businesses, subjective discrimination by financial institutions, and limited financial literacy (Calcagnini & Lenti, 2008). Women-led businesses' structural characteristics hurt their ability to attract investments (Favretto et al., 2003). These characteristics include small business size (predominantly micro-enterprises), activity types (mainly in services and personal care sectors), and the average age of women entrepreneurs, often over 45 (Unioncamere, 2022). Since most women-led businesses are micro-enterprises, they present more straightforward financial statements and less diversified activities, factors that increase the perception of risk by investors and credit institutions (Mattei et al., 2022).

In addition to objective obstacles, women entrepreneurs often face subjective biases that amplify inequalities in treatment. Persistent gender stereotypes continue to place women at a disadvantage compared to men in accessing credit, even though scientific evidence shows that SMEs led by women achieve management performance comparable to those led by men (Bellucci et al., 2010). Research has also highlighted that the applicant's gender can be discriminatory: banks tend to apply higher interest rates to women (Alesina et al., 2013). After credit applications are approved, there are no significant differences related to variables like age, gender, or education level. Once the initial hesitation to apply has been overcome (Cesaroni & Sentuti, 2016), credit access conditions are generally equal between men and women (Ibidem).

Another significant obstacle is financial literacy. Their lack of financial skills decreases women's ability to fully comprehend and negotiate financing terms (Banca d'Italia, 2024).

These characteristics result in a lower financial reliability index than male entrepreneurs (Iazzolino & Succurro, 2012).

The negative impact of general socio-economic conditions and challenges hinder female entrepreneurs from accessing financing. Reducing available resources results from economic and financial crises, particularly impacting women entrepreneurs. An emblematic case is the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), during which many women entrepreneurs struggled to access emergency financing essential to sustain their activities (Cesaroni & Sentuti, 2016). Many women had dual roles, divided between work commitments and family responsibilities, which were highlighted by the pandemic as a social crisis. This dual pressure significantly reduced the time and resources available for managing and developing their businesses (Cesaroni, 2014).

A notable study was conducted by Sentuti, Chamochoyumbi Diaz, and Cesaroni in 2023. The research showed that, during the pandemic, in the Marche region, women entrepreneurs submitted fewer requests for public funding than their male counterparts. Moreover, the average amount requested by women was significantly less than that requested by men. The study also revealed differences in the types of funds requested, suggesting a potential information gap between women and men entrepreneurs. A disparity in access to information and the ability to identify available economic support opportunities could be indicated by this aspect.

This research analyzes public funding opportunities available in Italy through a qualitative analysis due to the significant challenges women entrepreneurs face. This study aims to identify and analyze financial instruments specifically designed for women entrepreneurs since 1992, the first public intervention dedicated to women under Law No. 215—to 2024. The analysis is derived from secondary sources, including official documents issued by public administrations concerning fund distribution (Tuzzi, 2003). The central research question of this study is:

RQ1: To what extent do financial instruments exclusively for women entrepreneurs, active at the national level from 1992 to 2024, truly address the specific needs of women, considering the discrepancy between the emphasis placed on the issue and the actual number of dedicated interventions?

Addressing this question is both academically significant and practically valuable. This contribution to the literature fills a gap in understanding the financial resources available to women entrepreneurs. Additionally, it provides practical guidance for women seeking to navigate the complex world of public funding, helping them identify and access the most appropriate opportunities.

The document is divided into four main sections. The first section outlines a comprehensive review of current literature on female entrepreneurship, providing a theoretical basis for the study. The second section describes the methodology and research protocol used in the study and the data collection and analysis process. The third section gives an overview of public funding opportunities solely devoted to women from 1992 to 2024 at the national level. The fourth section consists of the study's conclusions, which provide recommendations for policymakers and suggest directions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 The Evolution of Female Entrepreneurship: An Analysis of Historical and Contemporary Literature

Women play a multifaceted role in the workplace, particularly in business management. The literature analyzed focuses on two key themes: studies on female entrepreneurship and public financial support for establishing women-led businesses.

To thoroughly analyze the progress achieved by women entrepreneurs over the past decades in terms of opportunities developed at the national level, it is essential to start with the historical evolution of female entrepreneurship in Italy. This method allows for the distinction between results achieved through public interventions and those stemming from the determination and resilience of the entrepreneurs themselves.

After World War I, Italy's promise to repay war debts led to economic and financial cooperation with the United States, facilitating the introduction and propagation of international concepts such as women's associations.

In 1929, the Italian Federation of Women in Arts, Professions, and Business (FIDAPA BPW Italy) was founded to promote, coordinate, and support the initiatives of women working independently or in collaboration with others (Cagnolati & Follacchio, 2022). Its charter aimed to "increase the sense of responsibility of working women by raising their level of education and preparation, making them capable of undertaking any career without gender discrimination" (Dal Mas & Paoloni, 2020).

In 1961, on the occasion of the centenary of Italian unification, the Association of Women Entrepreneurs and Executives (AIDDA) was founded in Turin to create a support network for the empowerment and affirmation of women in industry, agriculture, and services (Castagnoli, 2007).

In the following decade, women lost and then regained their economic

autonomy and visibility in business management (De Vita et al., 2014), culminating in the adoption of Law No. 903 in 1977, which established “equal treatment between men and women” and prohibited all forms of gender discrimination in access to work (Morgante, 2017).

In 1989, the Bellisario Foundation was established in Rome to recognize women’s professional abilities and assist them in advancing their careers. Despite numerous initiatives to support women and their skills, at the beginning of the 1990s, less than 15% of women were self-employed, and female workers were underpaid compared to their male colleagues (ibid.). The urgent need to strengthen the protection of women in the workplace led to the adoption of Law No. 215/1992.

2007 APID Women Entrepreneurs was established in Turin to foster “actions supporting the development of female entrepreneurship” (Castagnoli, 2007).

In the current European landscape, female entrepreneurship still faces significant disparities among countries, which have slowed the expansion of entrepreneurial initiatives (Bonanno et al., 2023). A notable issue is the absence of a uniform definition of “women-owned business” shared among Member States. In Italy, the criteria for identifying a women-owned business are based on Law No. 215/1992 and subsequent amendments in 2006, which define such businesses as those where women hold the majority control or ownership. Specifically, a business is considered women-led when the gender participation rate exceeds 50% (Barricelli & Pedone, 2024).

Despite being central in the European context and pivotal in shaping economic policies, countries such as Germany, France, and Spain have no legal definition of “women-owned business” equivalent to Italy’s. This lack represents a significant obstacle to ensuring fair competition and balanced access to international funding among Member States (Calcagnini & Lenti, 2008).

To address this challenge, gender has been progressively integrated into the criteria for accessing public funding in Europe, aiming to create more significant opportunities for women (Pangol et al., 2023).

2.2 In the Early 1990s: Legislative Interventions in Europe for Female Entrepreneurship

In the early 1990s, Europe witnessed the first significant legislative efforts to bridge the gender gap, including female entrepreneurship. The European Union began incorporating gender equality into its economic policies. An example was the European Structural Programs, which started including specific measures related to female entrepreneurship.

The EQUAL Program (1997-2007), although officially launched towards the end of the decade, became a milestone in supporting female entrepreneurship. This program financed innovative transnational projects to

combat workplace discrimination, including gender-based discrimination (Verloo, 2018).

In Italy, Law 215/1992 marked the first legislative intervention exclusively aimed at promoting female entrepreneurship. This provision sought to encourage women's self-employment, recognizing the need to provide adequate tools to support their emergence as entrepreneurs (Angelini, 2004). The legislation provided non-repayable grants differentiated based on territorial characteristics. While it contributed to an increase in women-led businesses, the motivations behind starting such activities were often more related to the need to overcome precarious working conditions than a conscious desire to pursue an entrepreneurial path. Consequently, female entrepreneurship was often perceived as a forced solution rather than a voluntary choice to start an economic activity (Kraja & Berberi, 2023).

Additionally, the law's effectiveness could have been improved by the lack of support for the subsequent phases of start-up growth, leaving many women entrepreneurs needing more tools to consolidate and expand their businesses (*ibid.*). Despite these shortcomings, Law 215/1992 represents a turning point in the history of promoting female entrepreneurship in Italy. However, the legislative initiative developed within an economic-political context unfavorable to female entrepreneurship, a challenge that persists today (Fornengo & Guadagnini, 1999).

Similarly, Spain strengthened gender-sensitive public funding programs, such as the "Emprendimiento Femenino" program, which offers grants and financing specifically for women entrepreneurs (Castiblanco Moreno, 2013). In Germany, the "FRAUEN unternehmen" program, promoted by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, supports female entrepreneurship through mentoring networks and financial incentives (Biemann & Weckmüller, 2017). France, with the initiative "Entreprendre au Féminin", provides women entrepreneurs with targeted training and financial support (Cornet & Constantinidis, 2004). These examples show how various European countries have adopted targeted strategies to promote female entrepreneurship despite lacking a shared definition at the European level.

Public initiatives supporting female entrepreneurship fall under the framework of facilitated finance, which is defined as public financial tools offering more favorable conditions than those provided by traditional banking systems (Andriolo & Viassone, 2017).

Despite theoretical promises of equitable access to facilitated finance, women need help utilizing these tools. These difficulties often stem from the complexity of bureaucratic procedures and ineffective communication. Moreover, the lack of specific training programs leaves many women entrepreneurs needing more skills to optimally manage the financial resources received. Facilitated finance tends to focus almost exclusively on the

start-up phase of businesses, neglecting the need for support during subsequent stages, which are essential for sustainable development and growth. Consequently, many inexperienced women entrepreneurs find themselves needing help tackling the complex challenges of business growth and stability (Mustapha, 2016).

Various studies highlight the importance of strengthening and improving facilitated finance through more targeted public funding. For example, Emek (2021) analyzes public-private partnerships (PPPs) in Turkey, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges of this model. The research emphasizes that to fully exploit the benefits of PPPs and overcome their associated risks, adopting a clear regulatory framework and promoting greater transparency is essential.

Another approach to improving public funding efficiency is presented in the study by Bogacheva and Smorodinov (2021), which explores the use of the Technology Readiness Level (TRL) Scale. This tool enhances transparency, reduces risks by financing more mature technological projects, and fosters innovation, contributing to developing a solid and innovative ecosystem. Finally, the article by Attanasi, My, Buso, and Stenger (2020) proposes applying game theory to analyze situations where a private entity manages and finances a project. The authors demonstrate how government intervention, through Benefit-Sharing or Cost-Sharing, can lead to more effective cost management and prevent delayed interventions.

Studies suggest that while facilitated finance, seen as public funding, represents a significant opportunity to support female entrepreneurship, improvements are still needed. Greater transparency and more effective management of public funds are necessary to realize women's potential in the entrepreneurial world fully. To further promote female inclusion, it is essential to implement mentoring strategies and provide adequate training programs (Paoloni and Demartini, 2016).

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to identify and analyze financial instruments dedicated to women entrepreneurs, focusing on public initiatives implemented between 1992 and 2024 (Tuzzi, 2003, Miles 1994). The chosen time frame encompasses the introduction of Law 215/1992, the first legislative intervention in Italy to promote female entrepreneurship, and its subsequent evolution up to recent policies. The investigation also considers financial tools not exclusively aimed at women but incorporating specific measures designed to support the creation of women-led businesses. The comparison between public funding exclusively dedicated to women and general funding with specific provisions for female entrepre-

neurship aims to evaluate whether the opportunities provided by public administrations align with the emphasis placed on promoting female entrepreneurship development.

Regarding general financial instruments with targeted components to support women entrepreneurs, the research focuses exclusively on programs managed by Invitalia SpA. This choice is justified by Invitalia's critical role, under the supervision of the Ministry of Economy, in fostering economic growth, job creation, and development in economically distressed areas in Italy. Specifically, focusing on Invitalia's calls for creating new businesses enables an in-depth examination of how incentives for women entrepreneurs are integrated into broader programs, assessing their effectiveness and coherence with stated objectives.

The opportunities offered will be analyzed and systematized through a matrix based on five key variables, identified as fundamental and recurring in the implementing circulars of the calls.

This approach will allow for a structured evaluation of gender-related content within each program and assess how such incentives were made accessible to women.

Following the prevailing literature (Miles, 1994; Andriolo and Viassone, 2017; Cosentino and Paoloni, 2021), the research adhered to the following steps:

1. Identification of calls exclusively dedicated to women (1992–2024): The analysis focused on calls open exclusively to women.
2. Identification of public calls for business creation managed by Invitalia: The reference timeframe is 2015–2021, coinciding with the period in which Invitalia introduced and developed specific tools to stimulate the start of new entrepreneurial activities, such as ON - Nuove Imprese a Tasso Zero and Resto al Sud.
3. Analysis of the content of the calls: Extracting five thematic sections: (i) summary of the call's content; (ii) type of public funding; (iii) value of eligible projects; (iv) target audience; (v) territorial focus of the initiatives.
4. Identification of strategic variables in the issued calls.

By adopting this methodological framework, the study examines the public funding landscape available to female entrepreneurs in Italy. The findings aim to assess the coherence and accessibility of the measures implemented and highlight areas where additional support or refinement is needed.

4. Findings

4.1. *Programs Exclusively Dedicated to Women Entrepreneurs (1992-2024)*

The introduction of public programs focused on creating and developing women-only businesses has resulted in significant progress in female entrepreneurship in Italy over the past thirty years. These programs aimed to promote women's economic empowerment, promote gender equality in the entrepreneurial world, and address issues related to women's access to credit and resources needed to start new businesses.

The number of public initiatives specifically intended to support women has been limited, as demonstrated by the number of calls for proposals introduced between 1994 and 2024, despite these efforts. The primary public programs introduced during this period are solely targeted toward women, and this paragraph analyzes them. The research was conducted through online consultations of the Official Gazette, ministry, and agency websites, including those of the Department for Regional Affairs and Autonomies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The analysis revealed that between 1994 and 2024, only four public programs were exclusively dedicated to creating women-owned businesses.

In 1994, Law 215, titled "Positive Actions for Female Entrepreneurship," was introduced to promote equal opportunities in employment and entrepreneurship. The incentives were aimed at different types of businesses, such as sole proprietorships, cooperatives, partnerships, and corporations, provided they were managed by women. For cooperatives, at least 60% of the members must be women, while corporations require that at least two-thirds of their members be women. The introduction of these requirements led to the concept of female-dominated business governance for the first time, which contributed to a significant cultural shift in business management. Eligible sectors for funding included industry, crafts, agriculture, commerce, tourism, and services, aiming to diversify women's access to male-dominated productive sectors. Eligible expenses included starting new businesses (purchasing equipment, facilities, patents, software, and construction work) and acquiring existing businesses (Law 215 of 1992).

Despite being the first major initiative, this opportunity presented significant challenges. Accessing the incentives was complicated by lengthy and complex bureaucratic procedures, discouraging many women from applying. As a pioneering measure, it also needed a monitoring and evaluation system, making it difficult to understand the initiative's impact on the territory. Finally, the availability of funds was tied to periodic allocations by the public administration, which often needed to be renewed, fur-

ther limiting the initiative's effectiveness.

In 2020, nearly thirty years after introducing the first dedicated measures, the "Microcredito Libertà" (Microcredit for Freedom) initiative was launched. Promoted by the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, in collaboration with the National Microcredit Authority, ABI, Federcasse, and Caritas Italiana, this program aimed to promote the economic empowerment of women victims of violence by providing them with financial tools to start or develop an entrepreneurial activity.

Access to the measure was reserved for women victims of violence, with or without children, who were assisted by Anti-Violence Centers or hosted in Shelters. The program provided zero-interest loans of up to €50,000 to ensure greater economic autonomy. Applications had to be submitted through participating intermediaries, with support from tutors registered on the national list of non-financial service operators. The program's main innovation lay in combining financial support through the loans granted with psychological and operational support offered by qualified tutors to guide beneficiaries in defining and implementing their entrepreneurial projects (National Microcredit Authority).

However, this measure also faced some issues. The pool of beneficiaries was highly restricted to women assisted by specific support structures, limiting the program's accessibility. Additionally, the procedures were complex and marked by significant bureaucracy, discouraging potential applicants. Finally, the measure needed more systematic fund renewal, reducing its sustainability and long-term impact.

In 2021, with the Interministerial Decree of September 30, 2021, the "Fondo Impresa Femminile" (Women's Enterprise Fund) was established. The call for proposals was exclusively reserved for women and was structured into two main components: Chapter II, which supported the establishment and development of businesses founded in the last 12 months, and Chapter III, which focused on the growth and integration of businesses established more than 12 months ago. Target sectors include industry, crafts, agricultural product transformation, services, commerce, and tourism. The call provided non-repayable grants and subsidized loans. The Women's Enterprise Fund was managed through a click-day. The click-through campaign management led to closure within a few hours, with 4,985 applications submitted (data updated to 2022, published by Invitalia). The evaluation process is ongoing, as the managing body could not process more projects, leaving some applications under evaluation two years later (www.invitalia.it).

Finally, in 2023, the Department for Regional Affairs and Autonomies (DARA) of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers launched the *Imprese Femminili Innovative Montane* (Innovative Mountain Women En-

terprises) call for proposals. This call aimed at creating capital companies, including cooperatives, with at least 51% of shares owned by women and located in mountain municipalities specified in Annex I of the Notice.

The objective of the call was to develop products, services, or solutions with high technological and innovative content, funding a spending program not exceeding €100,000 for the purchase of equipment, machinery, technological tools, hardware, software, patents, licenses, certifications, and specialized consulting in the technology field. This call aimed to promote the creation of new innovative women-owned businesses in these disadvantaged areas, fostering the adoption of advanced technologies and innovative solutions to enhance the competitiveness of enterprises in the mountain sector. The non-repayable grant covered 70% of eligible expenses, with a maximum of €70,000. Applications were evaluated according to their submission (Department for Regional Affairs and Autonomies, 2024).

Even recent calls, such as the 'Women's Enterprise Fund' and 'Innovative Mountain Women Enterprises' (IFIM), are characterized by a limited pool of beneficiaries, lack of fund renewal, and complex bureaucratic procedures.

Despite the efforts, this preliminary analysis shows that few public initiatives exclusively target women. The demand for these funds continues to be high, as demonstrated by the many requests received during the Women's Enterprise Fund's click day. These data demonstrate the importance of accelerating and streamlining the evaluation process, optimizing management, and simplifying bureaucratic procedures.

4.2. Programs for Starting New Businesses and Funding Opportunities Managed by Invitalia SpA (2015-2021)

The tools aimed at creating new businesses, which include specific provisions in cases where the future entrepreneur is a woman, have been analyzed in this section to compare them with funding exclusively dedicated to women. To achieve the research objectives, the calls managed by Invitalia SpA, the National Agency for Investment Attraction and Business Development, wholly owned by the Ministry of Economy, were examined.

The decrees of approval and the implementation circulars associated with these calls are officially published on Invitalia's website. This analysis focuses on the calls listed in the "What We Do - We Create New Businesses" section of the Agency's website, which includes initiatives aimed at supporting the start-up of new entrepreneurial activities.

Several recurring key variables were identified from the examination of regulatory documents, including implementation decrees and circulars. These variables indicate how resources are allocated and what projects are eligible for funding. The main variables include the objectives of the call,

details on the available funding, eligible and fundable projects, and the scope of application at the national level. The findings related to these variables are summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1 – Calls for the Start-Up of New Businesses and Funding Opportunities

Call	Objective	Funding	Beneficiaries	Sector	Geographic Area
Smart&Start	Establishment and growth of technological and innovative startups	Coverage of 80%-90% for investments between €100,000 and €1.5 million	Innovative startups (<5 years) and teams planning to create startups with a female majority	Technology	Italy
ON - New Zero-Interest Enterprises	Support for young or female-led businesses	Up to 90% of the investment, maximum €3 million	Youth (18-35 years old) and women	All (except fishing, agriculture, betting)	Italy
Cultura Crea 2.0	Support for creative and cultural entrepreneurial projects in southern regions	Zero-interest loans and non-repayable grants up to 80%-90%, maximum €500,000	Teams, companies, and third-sector entities with at least 51% women or under 36	Creative industries	Southern regions
Resto al Sud	Support for new entrepreneurial initiatives in southern regions	Total coverage (50% non-repayable, 50% subsidized financing), between €50,000 and €200,000 for four members	Businesses under 56 years old established after June 2017	All (except fishing, agriculture, betting)	Southern regions, central Italy, islands
Fondo Imprese Creative	Promote businesses in creative sectors	Up to 80% of eligible expenses (40% non-repayable, 40% zero-interest financing)	Micro, small, medium creative enterprises, already established or to be established	Architecture, design, music, audiovisual, software, etc.	Italy
Smart Money	Support for innovative startups in the early stages	Phase 1: up to 80% for specialized services; Phase 2: up to 100% for venture capital investments, maximum €30,000	Innovative startups (<24 months) or individuals planning to establish a startup	Various sectors	Italy

Source: Author's elaboration based on the analysis of circulars and implementation decrees.

The analysis of implementation circulars identified five common indicators for all the calls examined. The variables identified include the objective of the call, the type of financial support provided, the geographical area of reference, the economic sector involved, and the beneficiary's gender.

Public administrations define the objective of a call through careful analysis of the existing context. This process includes identifying socio-economic opportunities and community challenges and ensuring the call aligns with the government's strategic objectives. The measure was developed in consultation with stakeholders and potential beneficiaries. The distribution of financial resources is determined by analyzing the available funds for the specific funding program. The theme of the call is a clear guide for future applicants, providing information about the areas of intervention and expected outcomes (Colemar & Robb, 2009).

The legislator determines the type of funding after defining the objective through an in-depth and structured analytical process. This process includes evaluating the specific needs of the sector or community, considering development goals such as innovation and sustainability, and prioritizing public spending. The economic and social impacts of the proposed measures are estimated using cost-benefit analysis. Subsequently, the modalities for fund disbursement are planned, defining elements such as grants, financing conditions, distribution methods, and monitoring to ensure that resources are effectively directed toward achieving the intended objectives (Bigoni, 2012).

A methodical process is followed to determine the geographical coverage area for the call, which is based on several fundamental phases. Socio-demographic data is collected to analyze the needs of different territorial areas and identify regional disparities. Olcuire (2019) compares these needs with the government's strategic priorities to ensure consistency with defined objectives.

The target industrial sector is selected by systematic involvement of stakeholders. Input and feedback, combined with the need to develop policies, are collected through workshops, round tables, and public consultations, allowing for direct stakeholder engagement (Ibidem).

Additionally, participation modes for the call, such as the 'click day' or chronological evaluation, are defined, considering the potential number of applicants and the IT infrastructure's capacity to manage these modes. The click day allows for rapid application submission but may disadvantage candidates who need to be more adequately prepared or face technical difficulties, risking exclusion. On the other hand, evaluating applications chronologically offers greater fairness but may result in longer waiting times.

The inclusion of the gender dimension is essential when designing a call. This ensures that all beneficiaries within the reference area have equal opportunities. Gender perspective integration helps to foster projects that positively impact equality and social inclusion, leading to equitable and sustainable progress (Paoloni et al., 2023; Paoloni et al., 2019).

The choice to dedicate a call exclusively to women rather than include simple provisions depends on several factors: (i) socio-economic context

analysis if data indicates a significant disparity in female participation in the sector of intervention, it can influence the decision; (ii) Analysis of available resources in cases of limited funds for that specific action, the legislator is more likely to introduce only provisions; (iii) Alignment with strategic planning if the call is part of a broader plan aligned with UN objectives, targeted provisions are more likely to be included, whereas for European-level interventions, exclusive calls for women may be preferred. These criteria are evident in the analysis of the calls listed in Table 1.

The ‘Smart&Start’ program is designed to enhance research and development activities through an innovative approach. It has supported establishment of 1,525 innovative startups with a total investment of €783 million (as per the data updated by Invitalia on December 1, 2023). However, specific data on applications submitted by women are not available at www.invitalia.it. The gender effect in this program is apparent in the increased funding for companies with a female majority: the contribution, typically 80% of the investment, goes up to 90% in these cases.

The “Resto al Sud” (Stay in the South) call, launched in 2018, aims to promote entrepreneurship in areas characterized by high youth unemployment, significant population growth, high immigration rates, and limited economic expansion. It has supported over 7,589 businesses (with 7,366 of them being new entrepreneurial initiatives) and generated 28,166 jobs (www.invitalia.it). The gender impact on this measure is limited because the call is gender-neutral and offers the same conditions to men and women, even though women submit 41% of applications. The program must address any structural barriers women face in southern Italy, even though it is neutral, like limited financial literacy or less developed professional networks.

The “Cultura Crea 2.0” (Culture Creates 2.0) initiative targets non-profit organizations in the creative sector. This measure is significant because few government initiatives specifically target cultural, innovative, and tourism-related entities. Public funds are generally inclined to support projects with a significant social impact. The program received 1,504 project proposals, but only 485 (32%) were granted funding (www.invitalia.it). Similar to Smart&Start, Cultura Crea 2.0 exhibits a gender effect visible in the increased percentage of funding for projects with a female majority.

The ‘Nuove Imprese a Tasso Zero’ (New Zero-Interest Enterprises) program targets new entrepreneurial ideas or young businesses not covered by previous measures (www.invitalia.it). In this initiative, the gender effect is not central, as the call is open to a broader range of supporters.

The ‘Fondo Imprese Creative’ (Creative Enterprises Fund), designed to promote activities in sectors such as design, music, audiovisual, and similar fields, exhibits a gender effect through the increased percentage of funding awarded to women who apply. The total number of applications submit-

ted, evaluated, or approved for this fund is unavailable (www.invitalia.it).

Smart Money connects startups with qualified stakeholders like incubators, research centers, and accelerators. The program stands out because it is gender-neutral and does not offer specific incentives for women (www.invitalia.it).

5. Discussions

The analysis of funding programs exclusively dedicated to female entrepreneurs (1992-2024), as well as those that, while general, include specific provisions when women submit the funding request, highlights that issues related to women's access to credit in Italy, along with precarious working conditions, have not seen significant improvements. The study confirms previous findings in the scientific literature regarding the difficulties women face in obtaining financing, both through the banking system and public aid (Paoloni et al., 2019; Cesaroni and Sentuti, 2015; Coleman and Robb, 2009; Andriolo and Viassone, 2017). The literature review and analysis of public funding opportunities for female entrepreneurship have revealed various challenges and obstacles preventing women entrepreneurs from achieving economic development.

A particularly critical issue is the need for more public funds exclusively dedicated to women's participation in the economic sector. Only one specific public fund, the 'Women's Enterprise Fund,' has existed since 1992, indicating a significant lack of public initiatives supporting female entrepreneurship. This deficit could be linked to the low representation of women in decision-making committees and institutions, resulting in the frequent neglect of the specific needs of female entrepreneurs.

The situation has remained the same despite the introduction of Law 215/1992, intended to address precarious employment through entrepreneurship.

These conclusions are further supported by the analysis of measures such as "Resto al Sud" (Stay in the South), often utilized by women excluded from the labor market due to reasons related to age, the desire for maternity, or unstable working conditions.

The complexity and bureaucracy of application procedures make women's difficulties in accessing public funds worse. Law 215/1992 and the Women's Enterprise Fund are two notable examples of complex application formats, inefficiencies in managing submission and evaluation processes, and excessively long evaluation timelines. Many potential beneficiaries have been discouraged by these factors, leading to a sense of inadequacy in approaching public funds. Another limitation is the lack of specific data on women's applications submitted in calls that increase funding percentages

for female entrepreneurs. It is difficult to evaluate the impact on the territory and the effectiveness of measures that often offer simple provisions without addressing the underlying structural barriers due to this absence.

Adopting administrative systems such as ‘click days’, intended to simplify procedures, can create inequalities. The system prioritizes applications according to their chronological order until funds are exhausted without thoroughly examining business plans or project proposals. Invitalia has had to reopen the evaluation process even two years after the launch of the call because of negative evaluations or withdrawals by applicants, which resulted in the release of additional financial resources due to such mechanisms. It is necessary to have more access to information about calls and participation methods, which is exacerbated by poor financial literacy and limited familiarity with STEM disciplines.

The identification and full utilization of available market opportunities are hindered for women by these factors.

6. Conclusions

To address the persistent gender gap in Italy, it is essential to establish new funds specifically for women entrepreneurs, raise awareness about the challenges they face, and promote training programs aimed at bridging financial literacy gaps, thereby facilitating easier access to credit.

As of 2024, delays in updating the guidelines for refinancing the Women’s Business Fund have hindered progress toward achieving the United Nations gender equality goals, particularly Indicator 5.5. This situation highlights a structural issue linked to the lack of funds exclusively dedicated to women. Furthermore, the absence of detailed data on female participation in general funding calls with specific provisions for women raises questions about the effectiveness of such initiatives in addressing the specific needs of women entrepreneurs.

Another critical issue is the lack of financial training in the analyzed funding calls. This suggests that financial illiteracy, widely recognized in the 1990s, has not been adequately addressed and continues to pose a challenge for many women. This study forms the foundation of a broader research project to analyze data related to female participation in various funding programs. Its contribution lies in enriching existing literature, fostering the development of female entrepreneurship, and identifying new funding opportunities at the national level. Its ultimate goal is to create a more equitable and inclusive entrepreneurial environment for women.

Regarding public policies, it is crucial to develop financing programs tailored to women entrepreneurs, with simplified procedures and effective monitoring systems to ensure their impact. Introducing financial literacy

training courses could significantly enhance women entrepreneurs' abilities to manage and access funds.

From the perspective of financial institutions, increasing transparency through digital tools that enable the monitoring of fund allocation and launching awareness campaigns aimed at overcoming gender biases and ensuring equitable treatment are essential.

Finally, women entrepreneurs must be supported by developing centralized platforms to disseminate information on available funding opportunities and mentoring programs. Additionally, promoting collaborative networks among women entrepreneurs could facilitate sharing experiences and collective solutions. These initiatives could create a more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem encouraging female participation.

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BOOK REVIEW



BOOK REVIEW:

**VALUTARE L'IMPATTO DEGLI INTERVENTI SUI BENI
CULTURALI ATTRAVERSO IL METODO SOPHIA. IL CASO
TEATRO AKROPOLIS, BY MICHELA MARCHIORI, MAURO
BAIONI, FLAVIA MARUCCI, CHIARA PETRINI,
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Abstract

This volume presents the first Italian application of the SoPHIA method, a holistic framework for evaluating cultural heritage interventions, tested at Teatro Akropolis in Genoa. Developed within a Horizon 2020 project, SoPHIA assesses impacts across three dimensions: domains, people, and time. The case of Teatro Akropolis, a small performing arts centre undergoing strategic transformation, illustrates how the method supports participatory evaluation, internal reflection, and future planning. Findings highlight the method's multidimensionality, stakeholder engagement, and its capacity-building potential. The study underscores the value of flexible evaluation tools tailored to the complex realities of small cultural organizations.

Review

The volume *Evaluating the Impact of Interventions on Cultural Heritage through the SoPHIA Method: The Case of Teatro Akropolis*, edited by Michela Marchiori, Mauro Baioni, Flavia Marucci, and Chiara Petrini, makes a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on evaluating the effects of culture on sustainable societal development. Published in the Working Paper Series of the Department of Business Studies at Roma Tre University, the text introduces the holistic impact assessment SoPHIA method, developed by a European consortium as part of a Horizon 2020 call. The book presents the outcomes of SoPHIA's first application in Italy, focusing on Teatro Akropolis, in Genoa.

The SoPHIA method (Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment) stems from the recognition of the limitations of traditional evaluation approaches, which are often narrowly focused on quantitative metrics and adopt a unidimensional perspective (Holden, 2006; Radbourne et al., 2009; Chiaravallotti & Piber, 2011). A comprehensive review of existing literature and international policy revealed that commonly used methods (e.g., environmental or heritage impact assessments) inadequately capture the multidimensional nature of cultural interventions (SoPHIA Consortium, 2020a, 2020b). Additionally, they frequently overlook the viewpoints of both direct and indirect beneficiaries, despite the growing emphasis on civic engagement in policy discourse.

SoPHIA proposes an innovative approach to address these gaps, structured around three key dimensions (Marchiori, 2021):

- **Domains:** The transformative impact is assessed through six thematic areas and 28 sub-themes, considering both cross-cutting synergies and possible negative or unintended effects (countereffects).
- **People:** The method explicitly incorporates stakeholder and beneficiary perspectives, engaging them in defining objectives, selecting criteria, and reflecting on outcomes, either directly or through consultation.
- **Time:** It takes into account the temporal evolution of interventions across planning (ex-ante), monitoring (on going), and medium- to long-term evaluation (ex post).

The volume emphasizes that SoPHIA method should be regarded more as a methodological framework than a prescriptive model. Its application must be tailored to the specific case and context, thus highlighting the importance of human engagement and reflective processes.

It was in this context that Teatro Akropolis in Genoa emerged as the first concrete opportunity to carry out such an applied experimentation.

The specific choice of Teatro Akropolis was driven by several compelling factors that made it an ideal testing ground for this experimental approach.

First, the theatre was undergoing a significant strategic and organizational transformation. Founded in 2010 as a centre for experimental performing arts, Teatro Akropolis had recently completed the renovation of its main hall in March 2022. This infrastructural development marked a critical juncture for the organization, making it an opportune moment to engage in reflective evaluation.

Second, the renovation had catalysed new programming possibilities and expanded audience engagement. The leadership recognized the need for more structured and nuanced evaluative tools to understand the effects of this expanded activity portfolio.

Third, the theatre's objectives aligned closely with SoPHIA's extended definition of "intervention," which encompasses both physical changes and intangible initiatives intended to produce measurable change. Teatro Akropolis was not only interested in evaluating the impact of the physical renovation but also the broader set of immaterial cultural activities it enabled. This alignment ensured conceptual consistency between the organization's assessment needs and the methodological principles of SoPHIA.

Fourth, the theatre's resonance with participatory engagement made it a natural fit for SoPHIA's stakeholder-inclusive approach. Teatro Akropolis has historically emphasized collaborative practices that involve artists, audiences, and the local community. The participatory foundation of the SoPHIA method, therefore, resonated with the theatre's own values and operational culture.

Fifth, Teatro Akropolis was open to collaboration with researchers and Academia and demonstrated enthusiasm in becoming the first Italian organization to test the SoPHIA framework in practice. For the research team, this readiness presented a unique opportunity to transition from theoretical design to applied experimentation.

Lastly, the project was configured as a mutual action-research initiative, emphasizing the co-construction of knowledge. The impact assessment project was conceived as an action-research process, blending theoretical insight with practical co-creation. Researchers worked closely with Akropolis staff, offering the organization a reflective and progressive pathway while enabling the research team to test and refine the method in a real-world setting.

This alignment between the evolving needs of Teatro Akropolis—supported by its relationship with the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation—and the research team's goal of operationalizing the SoPHIA method illustrates how this case was not only timely but methodologically strategic. The evaluation, conducted between September 2022 and May 2023 links theory and practice and emphasizes participatory engagement. Specific-

ly, the researchers adopted an analytical approach, whereby academics and practitioners collaboratively applied diverse forms of knowledge (tacit and explicit) to examine decision-making and implementation processes. Key participants included the Teatro Akropolis staff and Artistic Direction, as well as two external stakeholders: the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation (a funding body) and Triangolo Scaleno Teatro (an artistic partner from Rome). The evaluation focused on three of the theatre's core activities: artist residencies, the *Testimonianze ricerca azioni*, festival performances, and PCTO (school-to-work transition) programs for students. Surveys were used to gather perceptions from artists, audiences, and students.

The project produced not only benefits for the theatre—such as increased awareness of evaluation's strategic role and embedded practices of audience feedback—but also critical insights for translating the method into operational procedures. Despite its specificity, this case study validated the method's multidimensional and participatory design and established a foundation for future applications. The evaluation of Teatro Akropolis, as detailed in the volume, yielded several significant findings. Firstly, the evaluation report was broadly perceived by stakeholders as an accurate and faithful representation of the theatre's current state. This perception reflects the methodological rigor and contextual sensitivity with which the evaluation was conducted. Importantly, the purpose of the evaluation extended beyond mere documentation of past activities. It adopted a forward-looking orientation, intended to inform future planning and strategic decision-making. This dynamic use of evaluation—as a generative, not only retrospective, tool—emerged as one of the most valued aspects of the process. A central strength of the SoPHIA method lies in its multidimensional framework, which was recognized by participants as particularly effective in capturing the complex, interrelated effects of cultural interventions. Unlike traditional evaluation models that emphasize singular indicators, SoPHIA's structure facilitated a more holistic and nuanced understanding of Teatro Akropolis's diverse impacts across domains such as social cohesion, innovation, and identity. The evaluation also revealed certain underdeveloped areas, most notably in the thematic domain of "Protection," which encompasses environmental awareness and care. Although this domain aligns with the strategic aspirations of the organization, concrete impacts in this area were limited. This gap prompted the theatre's management to consider targeted actions to better align its practices with environmental goals. Moreover, the process surfaced several latent synergies—such as the potential to open artistic residencies to public audiences—which spurred new strategic reflections about how to amplify positive impacts through more inclusive programming. One of the most profound outcomes, however, was the participatory nature of the evaluation itself. This approach was widely viewed as a valuable opportunity for self-reflection, mutual

learning, and organizational development. The inclusion of diverse stakeholder voices enriched the process and fostered a sense of shared ownership over the results. Perhaps most notably, Teatro Akropolis has since institutionalized evaluation as a recurring and autonomous practice. The organization now routinely collects public perceptions and adapts its impact assessment tools to better integrate them into its operations—demonstrating a significant step forward in internal capacity-building. Finally, the evaluative process has also encouraged the theatre to consider how the dissemination of results might serve purposes beyond internal learning. Sharing findings externally was identified as a strategic lever for enhancing collaboration, benchmarking, and broader organizational legitimacy within the cultural and funding ecosystems.

This volume offers compelling insights. Cultural organizations, while often non-profit in nature, operate under complex managerial dynamics and constitute a vital part of the socio-economic fabric, frequently as small or medium-sized enterprises or third-sector entities. The need to measure and communicate value creation extends beyond financial metrics and is increasingly critical for access to funding and social legitimacy. SoPHIA's emphasis on multidimensionality and participation provides a fitting approach for capturing the inherently complex goals and impacts of cultural organizations, which rarely align with single metrics. The Teatro Akropolis case demonstrates that even small organizations can engage in structured evaluation processes—not only for external accountability but also as a tool for internal analysis, organizational learning, and strategic development. The discussion on the method's "tailored-approach" and the balance between context-specific insights is relevant for small cultural organisations, which often lack the resources for implementing complex, standardized evaluation systems.

The volume does not shy away from open questions, such as how to reconcile case uniqueness with data comparability, or how to refine evaluation procedures and integrate various sources of information (KPIs, perceptions). Nonetheless, the well-documented pilot experience with Teatro Akropolis offers a solid foundation for future applications and methodological development, supporting the creation of accessible, effective impact evaluation tools. It fosters greater awareness of their multiple impacts and informs more grounded decision-making processes. In conclusion, the volume is a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners engaged in the management and evaluation of cultural organizations, as well as for those interested in impact assessment processes in small enterprises and the third sector more broadly. It offers a robust theoretical framework and, through the case study, provides practical and empirical evidence of the benefits and challenges associated with applying a holistic, participatory method. The work is an invitation to see evaluation not as a bureaucratic obligation, but as a strategic lever for growth and socio-economic positioning.

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