

Inside and Outside the Boardroom: Collaborative Practices in the Performing Arts Sector

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Introduction

Arts organizations all over the world today find themselves operating in a climate of change and uncertainty, compelling them to act more strategically, reinvent their governance structure and restructure their business model (Fanelli et al. 2020; Reid and Turbide 2012). The numerous initiatives for improving performance around the world have, however, resulted in very different forms of governance and organizational structure. These often feature cooperation between the public and private sectors, aligning their interests in order to carry out projects and generate benefits for both (Borin 2016). These arrangements have the aim of enhancing synergic and complementary advantage, with an awareness of the risks of sharing benefits between partners. Individual organizations, however, often lack the resources to provide high-quality goods or services, and sharing resources, such as money, personnel, information and experience, can help them achieve their objectives while sharing risks, making investments and/or solving social problems (Van Ham and Koppenjan 2001). The need for collaboration is urgent in the cultural sector, where multi-stakeholder partnerships and forms of collaborative governance (CG) have been implemented in order to overcome scarcity of resources and lessen the financial burden on the public sector (Andres and Chapain 2013; Borin 2016; Fanelli et al. 2020).

The winds of change in the cultural sector started to blow when the theory of New Public Management (NPM) appeared. In the performing

arts, NPM meant achieving sustainability through broader funding diversity, new partnership models, innovative managerial models and more adaptable forms of governance. For example, in the early 1980s NPM began to promote forms of governance based on vertical collaboration, through the delegation and decentralization of decision-making from public to private (Hood 1991). But it was the evolution of NPM into the paradigm of public governance (Belfiore 2004; Bonet and Donato 2011) in the mid-1990s that increasingly stimulated forms of horizontal partnerships, whereby public and private actors cooperate to provide public services (Osborne 2006). The new paradigm criticized NPM theory for its excessive focus on the internal performance of public organizations and lack of sufficient attention to external stakeholders such as community and users. Public governance thus focuses on the concept of governance, which becomes the key element in rethinking the process of public management. Partnerships are intended as more elastic arrangements based on the flexibility of governance structures (Hodge and Greve 2007). The new concept of governance is underpinned by consensus, the involvement of a large number of public and private actors, greater consultation, and a focus on outcomes and public value.

In this view, the governance of performing arts organizations should be based on constant collaboration between public and private entities in order to generate greater value. In the literature, the theory of CG (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson et al. 2012) was increasingly formalized,

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as collaboration schemes implying wider governance grew rapidly. In 2008, Ansell and Gash defined CG as “a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (p. 544). Doberstein (2016) later wrote that the aim of CG is to allow the creation of public value through a perspective in which public administration is no longer the sole player but takes part in intensive collaboration with private firms and civil society. The traditional NPM approach, based on the 3Es (economy, efficiency, effectiveness), was thus expanded to the 5Es, with the addition of equity and environment (Benington and Moore 2011).

The new formalizations of the theory led researchers and practitioners to shift the focus towards more complex frameworks, arrangements, governance and management models. Growing attention was given to how these new forms of collaboration generate public and social value (Skelcher 2010).

Research on cooperative forms of governance in the cultural sector is characterized by three approaches. The first stream of studies concerns the involvement of private actors at a very high level (*macro*), such as in developing cultural policies (Andres and Chapain 2013). The second focuses on the *meso* level, such as the engagement of private partners to manage local cultural assets for promoting a territory (Bonet and Donato 2011; Holden 2015). The last stream focuses on single cultural organizations or projects (*micro*) and identifying the criteria and the drivers that

lead to partnership success in a new model of governance (Ferri and Zan 2015; Thompson 2006). There are three main issues in this last stream today: building governance systems based on heavily shared cultural identity, engaging multiple stakeholders in CG schemes, and designing governance structures to ensure social and public value. The consideration of both public and social value represents a departure from the traditional approach; in the new scenario, the economic dimension is still significant, but it is no longer the sole priority, and value generated for the community acquires new importance. According to Larsen (2014), it is essential that state-funded cultural organizations fulfil their societal mission and that they take an open approach to society. In short, the topic of public and social value creation has captured the governance debate, and the traditional vision of public value creation needs to be developed, along with innovative views on the role of private entities. The significance of private actors is enhanced by their involvement in the public value creation process, and their viewpoint is taken into consideration more in the development of collaborative projects (Kivleniece and Quelin 2012).

So, the development of successful CG forms is one of the greatest challenges facing performing arts organizations (Henisz 2006). Involving private partners in the decision-making process can be complex and time-consuming (Boukherroub et al. 2018). Stakeholders have different interests and values, and conflicts can arise and can compromise the success of collaboration. But it is important that innovative governance and management schemes embrace collaborative

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration is crucial in the arts sector, where forms of collaborative governance (CG) – the inclusion of private partners in the decision-making process – have been implemented in order to overcome scarcity of resources and to engage with stakeholders. The governance of performing arts organizations today must be based on constant collaboration between public and private entities in order to generate greater value. The purpose of this study is to identify the drivers of CG in performing arts organizations by means of a case study of I Teatri Foundation of Reggio-Emilia, one of the first theatres in Italy to include private partners in governance. The methodology is based on both documentary analysis and interviews. The findings show that CG should be applied at *micro* and *meso* levels (inside and outside the boardroom), as both levels contribute to the creation of value for the audience.

KEYWORDS

Collaborative governance, new public management, performing arts organizations, public value, theatres, multistakeholder partnership

approaches, expressing the social goals of the public–private agreement and overcoming fears about the opportunistic behaviours that characterized previous governance and managerial arrangements (Chong et al. 2006). On the basis of Ansell and Gash's (2008) definition, Emerson et al. (2012) developed a logic model of CG founded on collaborative dynamics and collaborative actions. Two concepts shape overall quality and the extent to which CG produces impacts and adapts to different contexts: drivers either facilitate or hinder cooperation among stakeholders; and collaborative dynamics reflect interaction between principled engagement, shared motivation and capacity for joint action.

The setting for this study is the cultural sector in Italy, which, like many other European countries, has seen the widespread introduction of governance models and management systems reflecting NPM and CG paradigms (Dubini and Monti 2018; Fanelli et al. 2020). The study is part of a stream of studies on CG in the cultural sector. It discusses CG with reference to the initial phase of the logic model of CG by Emerson et al. (2012).

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The next section describes CG in the cultural sector. The succeeding section focuses on the Italian cultural scenario in order to frame the context of the case study. A description of the Reggio-Emilia Theatre Foundation is followed by our methodology and results. The article ends with our conclusions and some implications for management. The contribution to theory is discussed according to collaborative dynamics in the CG framework of Emerson et al. (2012).



Governance Issues in the Cultural Sector: The Need for Collaboration

Governance has always played a key role for performing arts organizations. Turbide (2012) states that governance structures can absorb and avert financial crises, and Dubini and Monti (2018) argue that governance can act as mediator between stakeholders and management, orienting the organization's growth trajectory. Governance is also a determinant in addressing external shocks (Griffin 2003), seeking new approaches to fundraising and marketing (Besana 2012), balancing artistic and financial performance (Fanelli et al. 2020), and pursuing social and public goals (Hewison 2004). Several recent studies have focused on the governance structure in performing arts organizations, and more precisely on the role of the board and its composition (Azmat and Rentschler 2017; Dubini and Monti 2018; Fanelli et al. 2020).

A board should be able to adapt to environmental changes, and many studies have shown that boards modify size and composition in response to external shocks (Gabrielsson and Huse 2004; Hau and Thum 2009; Pearce and Zahra 1992). Today, the external environment in which performing arts organizations operate is characterized by financial crisis, related to the reduction in public funds (Rubio Arostegui and Rius-Ulldemolins 2020), and by the need to continue fulfilling their mission of creating public and social value (Hewison 2004). As a consequence, governance structure in performing arts organizations has changed significantly in recent years, shifting from a paternalistic to a community-focused approach (Rentschler 2015). Given the need to consider new approaches to

RÉSUMÉ

La collaboration est essentielle dans le secteur des arts, où différentes formes de gouvernance collaborative ont été mises en œuvre pour pallier le manque de ressources et nouer un dialogue avec les parties prenantes. La gouvernance des organismes des arts de la scène a besoin aujourd'hui de reposer sur une collaboration suivie entre les entités publiques et privées pour générer davantage de valeur. Cette étude vise à déterminer les facteurs qui favorisent la gouvernance collaborative dans les organismes des arts de la scène. L'étude de cas consacrée à la Fondation I Teatri de Reggio d'Émilie, l'un des premiers théâtres d'Italie à inclure des partenaires privés dans sa gouvernance, est utilisée pour explorer la gouvernance collaborative. La méthodologie repose à la fois sur l'analyse documentaire et des entretiens. Les conclusions de l'étude indiquent que la gouvernance collaborative, soit l'inclusion de partenaires privés dans le processus de prise de décision, doit être appliquée aux niveaux *micro* et *méso* (à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur du conseil d'administration), les deux niveaux favorisant la création de valeur pour le public.

MOTS CLÉS

Gouvernance collaborative, nouvelle gestion publique, organismes des arts de la scène, valeur publique, théâtres, partenariat multi-acteurs

cooperation in which culture is part of the broader socioeconomic environment (Borin 2016), the CG paradigm has also been applied to the cultural sector. A CG approach is in fact particularly relevant for sectors characterized by intangibles and the creation of value for the community.

In the majority of Western countries, because art and culture are considered merit goods, the arts sector has traditionally been characterized by a strong presence of public institutions and by public funding (Towse 2001). However, the financial crisis has stemmed the flow of money to cultural organizations, in many cases compromising the achievement of their mission (Fanelli et al. 2020). As a result, performing arts organizations have been involved in a process of change affecting most public entities, and partnerships with the private sector have become widespread, bringing new, potentially disruptive, changes. Koppell (2006) classifies the forms of collaboration between public and private entities along a continuum of hybrid arrangements, ranging from totally public ownership to complete privatization. Partnership arrangements in the cultural sector have often interpreted cultural cooperation in terms of the creation of a collaborative environment, rethinking the process of governance systems and management models (Borin 2016). In fact, although the primary focus of arts organizations is on serving their diverse stakeholders, on whom they depend for donations, stakeholder trust is crucial for their survival and sustainability (Azmat and Rentschler 2017).

Financial concerns are not the only driver for the involvement of private actors in performing arts organizations. Collaboration can produce a societal impact as well as more efficient use of resources. There are positive externalities (public-sector benefits) to using the public-private

partnership and CG model (Reeves 2002; Scott 2006). In other words, performing arts organizations not only increase their sources of funding but also gain artistic credibility and legitimacy when they are perceived as significant and inclusive by the wider community (Kann-Rasmussen 2019). It is essential for an organization to be able to show that it engages with society, because legitimacy derives from “crossing the borders” or having a public profile outside the organization.

With this in mind, many CG situations are attempting to overcome the traditional dynamics of sponsorship relations between performing arts organizations and private partners and are looking at more integrated forms of cooperation, such as the involvement of private actors in governance and management. The CG framework set out by Ansell and Gash (2008) does not necessarily include the involvement of private players on the boards of public institutions, but there have been many such initiatives recently (Ferkins et al. 2018; O’Boyle and Shilbury 2018; Van Oortmerssen et al. 2014), including in the arts sector. The purpose of a more restrictive form of CG is to enhance the competencies of both public and private partners and to encourage cooperation with other external stakeholders operating in the area. A multi-stakeholder partnership involving public entities, private firms and individuals is perceived as a potentially successful model for generating public and social value, although no detailed studies of the model have as yet been done. Different stakeholders can in fact create potential positive spillover effects on socioeconomic growth and on the cultural identity of a territory, increasing the sense of belonging in local communities (Klein et al. 2010). According to Kivleniece and Quelin (2012), identification is an important value for

RESUMEN

En el sector de las artes, donde las formas de gobernanza colaborativa se han aplicado para sobreponerse a una carencia de recursos y crear relaciones con las partes interesadas, la colaboración es crucial. La gobernanza de las organizaciones de arte interpretativo hoy en día debe apoyarse en una constante colaboración entre entidades públicas y privadas para generar un mayor valor. Con este estudio se propone identificar los factores que propician una gobernanza colaborativa en las organizaciones de arte interpretativo. Nos servimos de un estudio de caso de la “Fundación I Teatri” de Reggio-Emilia, uno de los primeros teatros en Italia en incluir a socios privados en su gobernanza, con el fin de explorar la gobernanza colaborativa. La metodología está basada en el análisis documental y las entrevistas. Los resultados muestran que la gobernanza colaborativa, con la inclusión de asociados privados en el proceso de la toma de decisiones, debe aplicarse a los niveles micro y meso (dentro y fuera de la sala de juntas), ya que ambos niveles contribuyen a la creación de valor para el público.

PALABRAS CLAVE

gobernanza colaborativa, nueva forma de gestión pública, organizaciones de arte interpretativo, valor público, teatros, asociación pluripartita.

public and private entities and other external stakeholders, especially local communities that benefit from the delivery of CG services.

Successful performing arts organizations can exploit partners to enhance the quality of their performance and funding and to make new contacts. An organization with too few connections with external stakeholders can appear to be isolated and unattractive.



Research Setting and Method

Italian Traditional Theatres: A Stronghold of Social and Local Values

The Italian performing arts sector, in spite of its undisputed importance, is characterized by certain weaknesses. It is recognized as being fertile and innovative, of high technical and artistic quality, and is widely admired and imitated abroad. At the same time, it suffers from bureaucratic governance processes and sometimes lacks managerial vision and financial stability (Trimarchi 2002).

The overall picture is as varied as the sector is wide. Studies investigating management choices and institutional challenges tend to focus on the big opera houses (e.g., Dubini and Monti 2018; Fanelli et al. 2020; Sicca and Zan 2005), but institutionally there are many smaller theatres and local companies that are often strongholds of local values and society and that operate under innovative governance systems.

The Italian ministry of culture classifies performing arts institutions into three types (law 14, August 1967, no. 800):

- *Opera houses* – 14 organizations, mainly large theatres like La Scala that have a permanent staff for the production and broadcast of opera, concerts and ballet
- *Traditional theatres* – 29 organizations, deeply rooted in their local area; they do not usually have permanent staff but present opera, concerts and ballet regularly
- *Concert and orchestral institutions* (Istituzioni concertistico-orchestranti) – 14 organizations that promote, facilitate and coordinate musical activities in their area and have permanent staff and an orchestra (e.g., Fondazione Arturo Toscanini)

The Italian performing arts system has always been characterized by “management by decree” (Marcon and Panozzo 1998), with important organizational and management reforms enforced by law. There have been a series of laws impacting on governance and aimed at raising

overall performance levels by way of support from the private sector in terms of skills, knowledge and finance.

The most important reform was enacted in 1996 and implemented in 1999 (Legislative Decree 367/1996). It transformed state-run bodies into private entities, with boards of directors, budget autonomy, and responsibility for hiring and firing. Theatres and opera houses had to have their own statutes, specifying mission, board composition and criteria for private members sitting on the board, usually related to commitment to donate. They went from being completely public organizations to publicly financed and managed private foundations that collaborate with numerous public and private actors. These now include private stakeholders in their governance processes, with the aim of reducing uncertainty and dependence on public subsidies (Donelli et al. 2017). They also include representatives from the public sphere, such as the local mayor, who usually serves as chair. Governance of the sector is thus horizontal and vertical. Horizontally it includes private stakeholders and vertically it includes different levels of government, ranging from ministerial delegates from the national government to delegates from the lower levels of regional and local government (Fanelli et al. 2020).

Traditional theatres (TTs), the focus of this study, tend to be closely linked to a particular environment. They are usually located in medium-sized cities and are active in the local area. The main stakeholders are the local municipality and community. Along with concert and orchestral institutions, TTs are responsible for “promoting, facilitating and coordinating musical activities that take place in the territories of the respective provinces” (law 14, article 28). Under article 28, TT status is conferred by the ministry of culture on “theatres that prove to have given impetus to local artistic and cultural traditions.” They are mainly locally financed; on average, 23% of their income comes from the municipality and they also have a high percentage of earned income.

TTs are important in promoting the careers of emerging artists. They operate within the international opera circuit in terms of voices, conductors and hired artists. They have increasingly taken on the role of multi-purpose cultural production centres in the entertainment sector, gaining a name for operatic, musical, stage and dance productions. As specified in the law, TTs must maintain a close connection with their area, which entails including different private partners in their governance process. TTs contribute to the cultural heritage of Italian cities

through their productions and by their very presence. Although collaboration enables them to further contribute to social values, there are factors that prevent this. Our study identifies the main drivers of, and obstacles to, stakeholder participation in the CG process.

Methodology

The main research approach in the field of CG is the single case study (Ansell and Gash 2008). Case study analysis is considered suitable for interpreting change in strategic direction (Eisenhardt 1989), and our case study focuses on an Italian TT, I Teatri Foundation of Reggio-Emilia. Since Yin (2009) argues that multiple sources should be used when building the “case,” in setting up our methodological framework we used both documentary analysis and interviews. Research data were triangulated, as is usual in case study research, in order to ensure validity (Yin 1994). Bowen et al. (2010) and Yin (1994) find that multiple methods are useful in qualitative research in order to triangulate results and reduce the impact of possible bias. According to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) framework, methodology in a multi-source study is more likely to be trustworthy when data from inside and outside the organization are triangulated.

Our study is based on a recognized framework of CG, and the findings can be transferred to other TTs in Italy. At the same time, it provides insights and descriptions of the Italian scenario.

Our research question is as follows: *How can collaborative governance be implemented inside and outside the boardroom in the performing arts sector?*

The perspective of the study is exploratory, sharing the viewpoint that we live in a world that is socially constructed (Yanow 2006). The study takes an interpretive approach, with abductive reasoning (Yanow 2006), working iteratively, back and forth, between theory and data.

Document analysis

Different types of documents concerning the I Teatri Foundation for the period 2016 to 2020 were analyzed. They included the following:

- the Foundation’s statutes, including those related to board composition (three documents titled “Holders of political, administrative, management or government offices”) and organizational charts
- six public calls for collaboration and contracts with third parties (“Atti delle amministrazioni aggiudicatrici e degli enti aggiudicatori distintamente per ogni procedura,” n. 6)

- four annual reports (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020) revealing different types of collaboration, terms and conditions, and activities undertaken
- websites of the Foundation and the stakeholders interviewed

Document analysis is particularly useful in case studies, as it provides a rich description of phenomena (Yin 1994). In the second step, the publicly available documents and websites of external partners were analyzed.

Interviews

The first interview, with the CEO of I Teatri Foundation, was conducted to triangulate evidence provided by the documents and to select key stakeholder interviewees. Three board members were selected on the basis of duration of service on the board and three external organizations were selected as partners in planning theatrical activity in 2019–20. Interviewing both internal and external stakeholders is useful for capturing different points of view on a topic and minimizing any distortions stemming from a univocal view of the phenomenon (Crilly et al. 2012). Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out in February and March 2020. The interviews lasted from 20 to 45 minutes and were conducted by phone, with the exception of the interview with the CEO, which lasted three hours and was conducted face to face. The CEO interview elicited important insights and was followed by informal e-mails and phone calls on specific themes.

The interviewees were involved in various ways in the theatre’s CG processes, as summarized in Table 1. Three main topics were discussed: reasons for the collaboration; evolution of the collaboration; and interaction, including any problems arising during the collaborative process. The interview transcripts and documents were open-coded and similar themes were categorized together.

Case study: I Teatri Foundation – three theatres within a single foundation

TTs are regulated under article 28 of the law, whose aim is to promote, facilitate and coordinate musical activities in the home province. Under this law, after discussions with the Consultative Commission for the Music Sector, the minister can confer the status of “traditional theatre” by decree upon theatres that have demonstrably provided impetus to local artistic and musical traditions, usually counting on a network of stakeholders and partners to achieve their

TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHICS OF INTERVIEWEES							
	Internal				External		
Role	CEO	Board member 1	Board member 2	Board member 3	Project manager	CEO	Executive director
Organization	I Teatri Foundation	I Teatri Foundation	I Teatri Foundation	I Teatri Foundation	Multidisciplinary theatre	Dance company	Multidisciplinary theatre
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Education	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary
Number of years with the organization/in the role	3	8	8	6	5	3	6

mission. Thus, there are numerous co-productions in opera, aimed at optimizing production processes, curbing costs and circulating productions. TTs collaborate with other TTs and with other local musical and cultural institutions in order to enhance their own activities.

I Teatri Foundation, a TT of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy, was chosen as it was a pioneer in including private partners (and their activities) in governance; its first co-productions date back to 1956. The Foundation also moved from being a completely public structure to being a private foundation with external partners in governance, with its own board, in 1990 – 10 years before most TTs. It is active in the fields of music and theatre as well as opera and is characterized by close, long-lasting collaborations with public and private partners at different levels, including governance. Its theatre system is unique in the country: three theatres on a square in the heart of the city, run by a single foundation based in a TT.

The main venue, Valli Municipal Theatre, is a classical Italian opera house dating from 1857. It presents mainly opera, concerts and musical events. Ariosto Theatre, built in 1878 and restored and made part of the theatre system in 1981, presents mainly plays. The third theatre, Cavallerizza, converted horse stables (*cavallerizza*), offers contemporary musical theatre, music, dance and plays. The theatres' performance activities are enriched by numerous exhibitions and installations, outreach activities for schools, opera for young people and two contemporary festivals.

Findings

The findings are discussed using the framework developed by Emerson et al. (2012) based on that of Ansell and Gash (2008). Emerson et al.'s (2012) logic model shows the different drivers and collaborative dynamics that shape the overall quality and the extent to which CG is developed and is effective. Collaborative dynamics have three interactive components. The first is Principled Engagement, which may include different stakeholders at different points as well as a cross-organizational network. The second is Shared Motivation, a self-reinforcing cycle based on mutual trust, understanding, internal legitimacy and commitment. The third is Capacity for Joint Action, which includes procedures, protocols or informal agreements that define procedural and institutional arrangements, knowledge and resources. The findings reflect the CG process at the *micro* level, inside the organization (inside the boardroom), and at the *meso* level (outside the boardroom). Both types of collaboration contribute to the fulfilment of the organizational mission and the creation of value for the public.

Collaborative Governance Inside the Boardroom

The primary meaning of governance is the exercise of authority and control by the board within the organization (Radbourne 2003). CG in this case study is similar to that of the traditional structure of medium-sized performing arts organizations in Italy, many of which, in the last decade, changed from public to hybrid organizations (Dubini and Monti 2018; Ferri and Zan 2015). As noted above, TTs are a stronghold of different social and cultural values in their

community, which means that their management is complex and requires numerous actors, as they strive to demonstrate their capacity for joint action. The strategy of including different stakeholders on boards and adopting high levels of collaboration is crucial. CG inside the boardroom of I Teatri Foundation thus follows the theory of Ansell and Gash's (2008) CG framework as applied to a performing arts organization (Fanelli et al. 2020).

Drivers

Drivers are the conditions that are present at the outset, which can either facilitate or hinder cooperation. CG in the board is prescribed by law and is written into the statutes of I Teatri Foundation. The board is composed of five members representing both private and public sectors. Two members are from the public sector, one each from the municipality and the province. The appointment process for the two public members is internally managed by the public organizations and is aimed at "creating a board that is composed of different skills and competencies." Two members are appointed by the main sponsors or private organizations, which are committed to financing the theatres consistently for at least three years. At the time of the study, one was a representative of the theatre's main founding sponsor (a large utilities company) and the other was appointed by its three main sponsors. The board chair is the mayor of the city. The CEO corresponds to the typical dual executive of a performing arts organization (Chong 2009), managing director and artistic director, and can be assisted where necessary by external consultants.

Our interviews reveal that board members are appointed by different organizations to ensure diversity of views in supporting theatre management according to expertise, such as their skills and competencies in terms of strategy and networking, as well as their interest in the arts. "I contribute the vision of my organization, which provides significant levels of support for the theatre, and support is not only from a financial perspective but also . . . expertise, networks and spaces to help in the realization of projects." – BOARD MEMBER 2 "I was appointed for my professionalism . . . in top management . . . a plurality of skills, experiences and methods for approaching problems is positive: in short, diversity is crucial." – BOARD MEMBER 1

Individual board members' reasons for collaborating, in addition to the requirements of their company, is the prestige of belonging and "to contribute to something [they] value as important." – CEO AND BOARD MEMBER 1

Collaborative dynamics

The data reveal that collaborative dynamics are influenced by the mix of skills on the board. Board members have a balanced combination of skills; they include controllers, who understand finance; cultural managers, who bring knowledge of the arts ecology to the boardroom; "influential people" with wide networks in government, business and the arts, who help raise funds; and other specialists, according to the taxonomy of opera house board members (Dubini and Monti 2018). Although the board does not include artist representation, the CEO reported that all members have a keen interest in the arts and are first and foremost holders of regular season tickets. "I am a representative from the public sector. We are all representatives of organizations that give a great deal of support – financially – to the theatre, but I am free to bring my own views to each decision." – BOARD MEMBER 2 "I obviously take an active part on the board of directors and I have also been involved, more than other directors, in specific matters because of my expertise." – BOARD MEMBER 1

Despite the presence of different external members contributing professional experience from other sectors, the board relies on the CEO's opinion in artistic matters and for the majority of strategic decisions.

Collaborative Governance Outside the Boardroom

CG also covers decisions taken outside the boardroom. In I Teatri Foundation, new vertical and horizontal partnerships are replacing the traditional model of contracting out and externalizing. All board members noted that their role was most important in relation to CG outside the boardroom. Board members' main input, in addition to overseeing activities, tends to be promoting the Foundation's vision and social values among private entities and stakeholders in the wider society. This is partly because board members are not paid and the number and duration of board meetings are limited: once a month for an average of two and a half hours.

Although board members are knowledgeable about and interested in the arts, our interviews show that they perceive their role to be mainly financial. They always referred to the financial collaboration first, before other types of collaboration.

Drivers

CG operates outside the boardroom because of a collaborative network, which can be ad hoc

for specific projects or ongoing for festivals, such as the Aperto Contemporary Festival. Festivals can be held in collaboration with others (e.g., dance companies, independent theatres) at the beginning of the theatre season, to give space and visibility to independent and innovative productions. Drivers of collaboration differ at various levels, although one of the universally recognized drivers is the opportunity to reduce costs and share risks. OperaStreaming, for example, is a digital streaming platform developed by seven TTs and an opera house in the area. The first fully digital season was created before the pandemic, and it turned out to be extremely strategic during lockdown.

One of the main features of CG inside the theatre is an association that is an interface with the outside. Friends of the Theatre is a group of individuals who make donations and act as ambassadors for the theatre in the public sphere, stimulating the “participation of the community” and the “cultural growth of the city.” There is also a steering committee of 10 people nominated by the CEO and board to represent the theatre community. The steering committee takes an active part in publicizing theatre activities, communicating informally with the governance of the theatre and informing it about audience perceptions.

The main drivers of collaboration outside the boardroom are not related to regulations but start with the willingness of both parties to innovate, share expertise, and create a link with society.

The inclusion of a private partner in decision-making at the *meso* level reflects the aim of creating higher value and a plurality of vision. It reduces uncertainty and helps to solve problems or meet challenges that cannot be fully resolved by a single organization. This type of collaboration, local or from outside the area, can be either project-oriented, specific, and time-limited or informal and ongoing with close partners.

Collaboration starts with bringing into the theatre contributions that might create innovative audience experiences and promote networking opportunities and the sharing of good practices in exchange schemes and communications. For example, the international project *Crossing the Sea* is a live show that creates and consolidates long-term collaboration between Italy, the Middle East and Asia. It promotes networking opportunities in different countries, encouraging participation in international platforms and meetings and enhancing capacity for joint action. The project Bruxelles en Piste, similarly, is aimed at boosting Belgian contemporary circus in Italy and establishing a solid network for future exchange.

Collaboration is considered prestigious, as it contributes to the theatre by “creating synergies” with other organizations and with centres of excellence in the regions. “[Collaboration] guarantees support to and visibility [of] artistic processes and artistic creations. It creates the conditions for good synergies. Sharing human and non-human tools enriches institutions due to concrete collaboration and exchange on several levels, and it helps to reduce costs.” – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MULTIDISCIPLINARY THEATRE

Collaborative arrangements reveal the power of external stakeholders to influence strategy. “In a wide and differentiated sector like the performing arts, diversity in skills and perception can be an opportunity and not an obstacle; it nurtures fruitful dialogue rather than barriers.” – PROJECT MANAGER, MULTIDISCIPLINARY THEATRE

Permanent or ongoing collaboration has more long-term and visionary goals, affecting the local area as well as the theatre itself. For example, collaboration with Aterballetto, one of the main contemporary dance production companies in Italy, is aimed at creating an international hub for dance. “I trust in a model that [features] constant exchange between the organizations. There is continuous and fruitful collaboration, and I hope it will continue to flourish.” – BOARD MEMBER 2

This collaboration takes place at a higher level of governance. It started with informal contact with the two CEOs. The official collaboration began with a formal meeting, which included the staff of both organizations, and evolved to create direct links between the different departments at different levels, not necessarily through formal meetings. “If our technical office is searching for a solution, they might just call the other technical office to ask for their ideas without going through me or the board.” – CEO, DANCE COMPANY

Collaborative dynamics

The steering committee and Friends of the Theatre have similar roles, a “mediating role between theatre management and society needs” (CEO). They act as advocates, and networking capabilities are the main assets.

At both *micro* and *meso* levels, collaboration is fruitful as there is an “ongoing sharing of strategy and artistic language” – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DANCE COMPANY Activities are scheduled so as to avoid overlap and to fully exploit opportunities for international guest companies. This benefits the community and the dance sector, as well as audiences and primary stakeholders of the organization.

“For years we have been talking about the supply chain. In my opinion the term ‘ecosystem’ is more interesting because it makes us think of nature – a system par excellence, functional on every level, as long as it is not brutally interfered with – but also a place in which every part, whether large or small, has a very specific function, the purpose of which is to thrive, not [just] survive!” – PROJECT MANAGER, MULTIDISCIPLINARY THEATRE

Collaboration dynamics, such as principled engagement, occur in different contexts and sectors. The process attracts different audiences and enhances cross-fertilization between visual arts, education, innovative learning and literature. “The three factors of success for collaboration are knowledge of the actors, dialogue and respect for diversity.” – PROJECT MANAGER, DANCE COMPANY

Table 2 summarizes the opportunities and challenges in collaborative dynamics for CG revealed in the interviews and documents, according to the level of governance. All interviewees agreed that, for collaboration to be effective, the final objectives must be clear and shared. Also, as one board member noted, collaboration should not be imposed but all actors must be willing to share their knowledge and to set clear boundaries.

Although at both *micro* and *meso* levels the opportunities outweigh the challenges, for CG to be truly successful attention must be paid to all aspects, particularly potential threats to the collaborative process at the *meso* level. One such threat is asymmetric information, where not all the parties have the same information, resulting in opportunistic behaviours. Another is asymmetric power, where the objectives of the collaboration are not clearly defined.

At the *meso* level, collaboration benefits all partners in that it can reduce costs and risks, set up multidisciplinary projects, and provide a wider set of skills and points of view. Collaboration in governance can thus take place between organizations operating in different sectors, provided that differences are respected and enhanced in the exchange process. Boards and organizations are required to limit opportunistic behaviours.



Implications for Management

The inclusion of private partners in the decision-making process is beneficial for cultural organizations, particularly those deeply rooted in local areas such as TTs and performing arts in general.

Organizations in the private sector bring a different vision and perspective, which helps the theatre to be more innovative and more financially stable and to create more value for the community (Fanelli et al. 2020). Collaboration with private partners in the decision-making process both inside and outside the board should be encouraged, as the coexistence of the two types allows the theatre to effectively manage different opportunities. Managers should consider that the values upheld by the theatre are crucial for collaboration, and sharing these values fosters wider engagement both internally and externally. With specific reference to governance inside the boardroom, managers and directors should be aware that even where there is willingness to collaborate, board meetings need to be efficiently organized and chaired so that the topic and the area of the collaboration are clearly

TABLE 2

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF COLLABORATIVE DYNAMICS FOR PERFORMING ARTS ORGANIZATIONS		
	Opportunities	Challenges
Micro level	Diverse perspective and skills Financial contribution Visibility Contribution of personal network	Lack of time Commitment but on a voluntary basis Participation is seen as economic transaction
Meso level	Access to different types of knowledge Access to different technologies Cost sharing Risk sharing Innovation Synergy: wider offer for the community	Asymmetric information in the collaborative process Potential for opportunistic behaviours Power asymmetry Benefits accrue only in the long term

assessed. This is because members are typically under time constraints, and organizations may also wish to limit their potential liabilities in decisions taken. On the other hand, managers also need to prevent empty rhetoric on collaboration from undermining democratic processes. This requires careful management of participation in governance, particularly with regard to negotiation, operation and supervision.

CG outside the boardroom relies on organizations sharing the expertise, vision and know-how of their staff to create higher value for the community, which may be more feasible with multidisciplinary programs. Through governance outside the boardroom, theatres can support more artists, offer the community more varied programs and better interpret audience needs. Directly or indirectly, the local community determines the board and evaluates the outputs of the TT by attending performances and through numerous channels, including local newspapers, social media, letters, meetings and reports. In order to avoid tensions that can affect collaboration, areas of operation must be clearly specified for partners; it must be clear “who is expert in what” and “what they are willing to share.”

Challenges to the collaborative process relate mainly to the asymmetry of information and different partners’ expectations with respect to the “rules of the game.”

Theatres also need to display credibility and reliability, in order to attract private investment and legitimate collaboration with citizens and communities in the surrounding environment.



Implications for Theory and Research

The urgency and scale of problems facing the public sector today mean that many of them cannot be effectively addressed by a single organization alone (Emerson et al. 2012; Voss and Voss 2000). Thus, traditional paradigms where governance is entirely institution-based are no longer efficient (Amsler and O’Leary 2017).

Different frameworks and perspectives contribute to governance theory, including external relations, social systems and human behaviour, which are in turn underpinned by different theories, as noted by Reid and Turbide (2012) and Rentschler (2015). We contribute to the discussion on governance by suggesting a framework that integrates the two levels of CG, discussing the main drivers and the collaborative dynamics that take place. Although the potential of CG in the arts, in terms of positive financial and artistic outcomes, has been identified (Fanelli

et al. 2020), studies on collaboration in the cultural sector have focused on either the *macro*, *meso* or *micro* level.

The contribution of our study is that, for the first time, we examine two levels together (*micro* and *meso*), both inside and outside the boardroom, investigating how they interact, identifying the implications for performing arts organizations in collaborating with external parties. An integrative theoretical framework should better reflect the real world and overcome the theoretical weakness of using a purely organizational, *micro*, approach.

Table 3 categorizes the items emerging from interviews into the traditional framework for CG (Emerson et al. 2012). The *micro* and *meso* levels are characterized by factors that drive the success of the collaboration. As noted by Shilbury et al. (2013), there are research areas that require further examination to uncover how barriers to collaboration can be overcome.

The framework suggests that participants at different levels of the collaborative process should be assessed in different ways. The *macro* level, concerning policy-makers and cultural policies, lies outside the scope of this study except insofar as the *macro* environment mandates the framework in which CG takes place.

The *micro* level of governance today is required to identify the criteria and drivers of partnership success (Ferri and Zan 2015; Thompson 2006) and effective interaction with board members has become a necessity. In the case of I Teatri Foundation, as specified by law and by its statutes, a traditional form of collaboration takes place at the board level, with private partners representing both the public sector (municipality, region) and the private sector (corporate philanthropists). The first driver of collaboration at the board level is legal requirements, and CG, like other recent changes in public administration in Italy, is still characterized by “management by decree” (Marcon and Panozzo 1998). Legal requirements then give way to other drivers, such as prestige and the need to differentiate competencies. Inside the boardroom, collaboration is thus based on formal procedures, which help to access different skills and competencies. But limitations in terms of time and expertise – for example, the fact that there is no artist representation on the board – mean that the role of private board members may remain exclusively one of oversight, without their exerting influence on strategy or finding innovative solutions. CG can thus be perceived as an opportunity from both inside and outside the boardroom. Where it is effectively implemented it can be more successful.

TABLE 3

INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN THE ARTS				
	Drivers	Collaborative dynamics		
		Principled engagement	Shared motivation	Capacity for joint action
Common	Recognition of expertise Mix and complementarity of skills	Shared values and interests Skills mix	Trust Engagement in and commitment to cultural life Knowledge spillover	Risk assessment
Solely at <i>micro</i> level	Prescribed by law and statutes Prestige of belonging/ contributing to something important	Formal procedures Oversight of CEO activities		Formal meetings Time challenges
Solely at <i>meso</i> level	Technical expertise of the partners Shared costs Innovation	Informal procedures Shared power	Promotion of mutual learning Commitment of all levels of the organization, not only CEO	Informal meetings Clarifying responsibilities Staff support Sharing of resources

Source: Adapted from Emerson et al. (2012)

Although previous studies (Fanelli et al. 2020) mainly describe CG in the cultural sector in terms of internal processes inside the boardroom, our analysis suggests that the private and public sectors have different interests inside and outside the boardroom. The role of the board as “controller” and “facilitator” thus consists of removing obstacles to collaboration, acting as ambassador for the theatre by publicizing activities, and facilitating collaborative processes outside the boardroom.

Outside the board, collaboration starts with different drivers, such as economic incentives and the need to reduce costs and uncertainty. It then evolves into consequential incentives for both partners, such as the creation of innovative solutions.

The *meso* level entails collaboration with external stakeholders and dialogue with external partners in enhancing the image of the local area, creating positive externalities for both partners and opening access to different forms of knowledge (Bonet and Donato 2011; Holden 2015), as well as risk sharing and cost reduction. Collaborative dynamics outside the boardroom start not with legal requirements but with the willingness of both partners to capitalize through collaboration. Principled engagement enables individuals with different areas of interest and relational and identity goals, working across their prospective institutional, sectoral or jurisdictional boundaries, to solve problems and resolve conflicts. The shared motivation based on trust and

engagement at the *meso* level is characterized by the commitment of all levels of the organization, not only management. This has important implications for trust, mutual understanding and internal legitimacy.

The capacity for joint action in collaborative dynamics differs inside and outside the boardroom. Inside the boardroom, it is based on formal meetings and legal requirements for collaboration, which means it has more impact on strategy than on innovative solutions. Outside the boardroom, collaboration starts more informally and can promote more innovative solutions.

Further research should investigate inner workings both inside and outside the boardroom. It might consider observation and focus groups to better understand the dynamics of decision-making processes where CG is present. Research should also focus on other levels, such as the *macro* level, where actions and policy can boost effective collaborative practice in the cultural sector.



Conclusions and Limitations

Our findings demonstrate that I Teatri Foundation, through collaborative forms of governance, has adopted different types of collaboration that enrich its activities and create more value for the community. CG is not a question of limiting the creative freedom or planning

capacity of individual organizations; it is a question of taking full advantage of different types of knowledge and technology in order to combine financial resources on the one hand and real and potential value for the public on the other. Values such as trust, reciprocity and mutual gain are the basis of common goals that need to be identified (O'Toole 1997). As a preliminary exploration of CG in the performing arts, our study goes beyond the traditional model of CG, which focuses mainly on collaboration at the board level. Different motivations and dynamics occur in the collaborative process in relation to where the collaboration takes place, and our study takes account of these.

The collaborative process within the organization reflects the formal requirements of its statutes. Stakeholders also aim at influencing organizational strategy favourable to integrated projects and consistent with the policies of the entities that have nominated them.

At the *micro* level, as noted by Rentschler (2015), board members interested in the arts are repaid by the perception of contributing to something important with their skills and competency, when they commit to creating value for the community, and by social prestige. The presence of official stakeholders on the board does not necessarily mean that they take an active role in decision-making or that their leadership is effective; administrative and bureaucratic aspects can hinder the ability of board members to play an effective role. Their effectiveness depends on their ability to take part in planning and on their knowledge concerning the mechanisms of the various organizations.

Effective collaboration thus entails revising the role of governance and recognizing the strong position of private partners in terms of technology, capital and information (Jamali 2004; Scharle 2002), especially outside the boardroom. The effectiveness of collaboration relies on the people involved, as shown by our interviews. Board members and external partners should not be seen simply as representatives of other institutions; in reality, they are experts who contribute their personal knowledge, interests and skills.

At the *meso* level, private partners are attracted to the idea of participating in governance and the decision-making process or of collaborating with performing arts organizations for the benefit of their own organization. This starts as a financial benefit, for both organizations, in terms of cost-sharing, and evolves into knowledge and competency spillover between partners, which allows for innovation. Finally, the ability to develop coordinated projects is linked to the identification of common objectives and organizational

methods. As one of the stakeholders remarked, the governance process should be seen as an ecosystem in which small organizations contribute, like larger ones, to enable all components to generate energy for other partnerships and to flourish rather than simply survive.

Clearly, the findings of a single case study cannot be generalized, but they can be useful in developing theory. Hence, future research might consider multiple case studies and/or surveys.

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