

Exploring Cultural Ecosystems: the case of Dante 2021 in Ravenna

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ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at exploring cultural ecosystems around the figure of Dante Alighieri, focusing on one specific network formed by private, non-profit and public actors. It presents the results of an empirical research mostly based on Ravenna, a town in Northern Italy, based on document analysis and interviews with key actors of the network. Results contribute to confirm previous literature, highlighting the dynamics that lead to the formation of cultural networks, the role the local culture plays in the process and potentials for further development. The paper provides a useful example for cultural players and contributes to the academic debate on the need to rethink how to govern and manage public and cultural services.

Keywords:

network
governance,
ecosystem, cultural
policies, Dante

1. Introduction

In the last decades, New Public Management (NPM) scholars (Hood, 1991) highlighted the need for more collaboration between the public and private sectors. Collaborative processes which include citizens (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000) and other subjects (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000) may also develop and create networks (Kooiman, 1993), which could contribute in delivering public services. These tendencies are also developing in the cultural sector (Zan, 2007). After the

financial crisis, public funds for culture have diminished – yet, the crisis might be also considered as an opportunity for a structural change of the cultural sector (Bonet & Donato, 2011). In fact, there seems to be a growing need to rethink how to deliver cultural services (Vicente, Camarero & Garrido, 2012). Specifically, more research is needed in how cultural networks develop and work in local areas (Mydland & Grahn, 2012), rather than only considering national ones.

This paper contributes to the debate with an explorative analysis on a local cultural network between private, non-profit and public subjects, also aiming at understanding if there is a link between local culture and cultural networks (Turrini, 2015), how the cultural network works and what the potentials for developing long terms collaborations are (Bonet & Donato, 2011).

To do so, the paper focuses on one local cultural network related to an internationally known poet, Dante Alighieri, based in a town in northern Italy, Ravenna. The case of Ravenna over Dante-related cultural initiatives is particularly interesting because it is the place where Dante lived and died after being exiled from Florence. Thus, Ravenna's identity has been culturally shaped around his figure for centuries.

The research continues the discussion launched by previous scholars and is related to the ongoing debate on the need to rethink the current models of cooperation and networking in the cultural sector. Although a case-study is not aimed at generalisations, it may be of interest as it represents an example (Donato, 2015) of different actors that spontaneously cooperate to deliver cultural services, innovating traditional models.

The paper develops as follows. First, it will review some relevant literature on cultural networks as an alternative way to deliver cultural services, which were traditionally mainly provided by the public sector. It focuses on the reasons why there is a need to rethink the way cultural policies are delivered and mention some previous examples of research on cultural networks. Then, the methodology of the research and its phases will be outlined. The empirical part will follow, which will analyse and discuss the case of Dante 2021. Finally, some insights and further research perspective will be drafted.

2. Literature review

From the 1990s, most European countries have been facing the need to reduce their public expenditures, also looking for new ways in delivering public services (Héritier, 2002; Drechsler, 2005; Borgonovi et al, 2006; Levy, 2010). First, New Public Management theories (Hood, 1991) started to promote a shift towards collaboration between the public sector and private operators, introducing contracting out, privatization and competition. NPM processes contributed to the formation of hybrid organisations (Evers, 2005), thus changing the boundaries between the public, private and no-profit sectors (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006). In some cases, hybridisation processes improved public sector management and efficacy, bringing in some positives of the private sector (Bertini, 1990; Bianchi Martini, 2009).

Together with NPM, scholars proposed other approaches for managing public entities, also

questioning what the State boundaries should be. For example, New Public Service (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000) proposed to put citizens at the centre of public services management, building collaborative processes which could foster engagement and responsibility, creating strong relationships between citizens. In this perspective, citizens are not just customers of public services, but they also contribute in the making of services themselves.

Other authors maintain that public managers should not only focus on results and performances, but that they should try to create and keep trust between citizens and public institutions. In this perspective, known as Public Value, managers should also respond to the collective preferences of the citizens, not considering them just clients (O'Flynn, 2007). While some emphasise the need for coordinating and integrating public policies (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007), others believe that each public service has its own needs (Osborne, 2010).

In this perspective, Public Governance (Kooiman, 1993) first introduced the idea that public and private subjects, including citizens themselves, could collaborate for delivering public services (Rosenau, 1992; Ostrom, 1996). Discussion on Public Governance significantly grew in the last two decades (Osborne, 2017) and was further developed and integrated by Network Governance and Co-production theories. While Network Governance scholars believe that different subjects should cooperate to deliver efficient public services (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000), Co-production theory emphasises the need for different subjects (especially citizens, but also clients, community and professionals) to participate in producing public services (Bovaird, 2007).

Recently, the economic crisis contributed to emphasise the need to rethink how to deliver public services. The public debts crisis forced local and central governments to reduce their public expenditures, which led to decreasing funds for public services, including cultural ones. In fact, Italian cultural expenditure experienced substantial cuts between 2001 and 2014, around 11,5% (Council of Europe, 2016). Moreover, Italian public expenditure moved from the State to the local level, which means that in percentage the local government now provides more than half of public subsidies to the cultural services (Associazione per l'economia della cultura, 2005). Such processes are bringing European countries and local institutions to rethink the ways to deliver cultural policies (Vicente, Camarero & Garrido, 2012).

In recent years, cultural services delivery has been changing similarly with the State's governance model (Zan, 2007). Some scholars believe that the economic crisis should and has to be interpreted also as an opportunity for a structural change in the public sector and in the ways cultural organizations operate – they should adopt a long-term approach and cooperate with joint strategies. Moreover, cross-sector and international collaborations could help developing the cultural sectors even more (Bonet & Donato, 2011).

Developing cultural networks could help not only fundraising capabilities, but it could also bring to knowledge exchanges (Powell, 1990), innovation (Montella, 2014), and foster different potentials of different cultural resources from which they are born (Pencarelli & Splendiani, 2011).

During the last two decades, studies on cultural networks increased. In particular, research on museum networks has developed more than other cultural phenomena. In fact, as culture has no single meaning (Gray, 2009), what constitutes the cultural sector varies. Eurostat (2002) splits the cultural sector into 4 segments: cultural heritage (monuments, museums, archaeological sites), archives, libraries and dramas (music, dance, theatre and more). Other authors also include intangible traditions in the definition, as community uses, food and wine, handicraft (Cerquetti, 2007), feasts, dialect revivals (Argano et al., 2005) events and other cultural shows (Pencarelli & Splendiani, 2011).

Among the variety of empirical studies, Riccaboni and Magliacani (2004) analysed the museums district in Siena (Italy), while other authors analysed the characteristics and potentials of museums networks in Italy (Montella, 2014), maintaining that networks are particularly suitable in Italy due to the small dimensions of museums and the way they are widespread in the State's territory. Jung (2011) believes that museums should not be isolated, but they should be considered as active subjects in the local community, as they can positively interact and help sharing notions and education.

Besides museums networks, some works started to focus on cultural networks between different actors. While Arnaboldi and Spiller (2011) analysed how stakeholders collaborate in the creation of a cultural district, linking it to the touristic appeal of the territory, Pencarelli and Splendiani (2011) believe that public entities, companies, universities, cultural institutions and the community should cooperate and create cultural districts, while keeping a balanced governance model. This is also the case of Blackstone et al (2016), who studied cultural networks linking artists in their communities, and of Marzano and Castellini (2016), who examined cultural networks between theatres in Southern Italy, under the theoretical lens of Network Governance. The Network Governance approach is considered to be valid in small, peripheral locations as well, and could help raise the cultural attractiveness of less known places (Golinelli, 2008). In fact, some part of the academia believes that research on the cultural sector should also focus on specific local areas (Mydland & Grahm, 2012) rather than just taking national approaches. Small areas may also create the basis for culture and local traditions to build cultural districts or other forms of integration and networks (Turrini, 2015). This way, it is the territory itself, with its unique identity, which could become a “diffuse museum” (Cerquetti, 2007), where each museum is not isolated, but part of a bigger plan.

3. Research question and methodology

Past research highlighted the need for a better understanding of how to successfully manage and govern public networks (Cristofoli et al, 2017) and of how collaboration in different cultural contexts works (Aas et al, 2005; Alberti & Giusti, 2012). It also seems that integrated cultural systems are the governance models where less research has been carried out (Donato, 2015) and where there is a need for primary data (Blackstone et al, 2016).

In order to address the need to research local areas (Mydland, & Grahm, 2012), this paper focuses on a specific art city (Lazzeretti, 1997) where peculiar cultural initiatives are held (Alberti & Giusti, 2012). To do so, the case study is set in Ravenna, a town in northern Italy with a strong cultural background.

In fact, the town hosts 8 religious monuments belonging to the UNESCO World Heritage list⁹⁶ and some museum networks are already in place (Borin, 2015; Borin & Donato, 2015). Besides, Ravenna also has some intangible cultural background, as it was the place where the poet Dante Alighieri lived and died after escaping from Florence. This paper concerns Dante-related cultural ecosystems in Ravenna, focusing on a peculiar one, Dante 2021.

Starting from these premises, the case study (Yin, 2013) seemed to be a suitable way to analyse a case of cultural governance, combining various research methods (Bowden & Ciesielska, 2016; Marzano & Castellini, 2016). To sum up, the case of Dante-related cultural ecosystems in Ravenna may be considered a “unique case study” (Aas, Ladkin & Fletcher, 2005).

This paper adopts multiple qualitative methods. In a first stage, it includes document analysis (Scott, 2006), then semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The first part was based on document analysis, starting from local newspapers, online and bibliographic researches, conference materials and documents. This part helped making a clearer framework of the wide range of Dante-related cultural initiatives held in the territory. It highlighted that the territory is rich of cultural initiatives regarding Dante, which have been growing through the years approaching the centenary of Dante’s death, but networks between different subjects were not homogenous. Research then focused on one cultural network, Dante 2021, which responded to the characteristics the gaps in the literature highlighted. In fact, Dante 2021 is a rather small network of different subjects, both private, non-profit and public, that operate on the local area with different cultural initiatives – thus considering culture in its broader sense.

The second part of the research focused on the Dante 2021 case, using in-depth document and website analysis together with semi-structured interviews with key actors involved in the network. All the subject involved in Dante 2021 that appear in the official website as collaborators were contacted for an interview. From 10 organisations contacted, 7 interviews were made. In two cases, the interviewee was supported by one or two colleagues, who helped adding more details during the interview. All interviews were recorded, transcripts were made and analysed. Interviews followed a similar topic guide, which was adapted depending on the organisation the interviewee represented. Globally, they were aimed at understanding the reasons that brought to the creation of the network and how the network works.

This paper may be considered as an explorative research on local cultural networks between private, non-profit and public subjects. Specifically, the research questions are aimed at understanding if there is a link between local culture, traditions and the creation of cultural networks (Turrini, 2015), what the advantages and criticalities of the cultural network are and the potentials for developing long terms collaborations between the public and private sector (Bonet & Donato, 2011).

Following Aas, Ladkin & Fletcher (2005) and Pencarelli & Splendiani (2011), the empirical part is

⁹⁶ Please visit <<http://whc.unesco.org/> for more details>.

structured as follows: first, the town and region will be briefly described, then the basic characteristics of the case will be outlined (including the level of formalization, the year the partnership was born and the kinds of subjects), after that, the analysis will focus on the reasons for creating the network and understanding the dynamics of collaborations (including how they are born and develop, how they work out, what the output of the network is and what the advantages and criticalities of collaborating are). Finally, the local government's approach will be analysed, and potential for development will be discussed.

4. Empirical research: results and discussion

As previous research highlighted the need to focus on cultural networks in local areas, this paper is intended to contribute to fill such gap. Thus, it explores the reasons, main dynamics and potentials of cultural networks in local areas. To do so, the research proceeded with two phases. While the first one was aimed at exploring the existing networks, the second one was meant to analyse one specific cultural network.

In the first step, the research was carried out through document and internet research, aiming at identifying the main cultural networks concerning Dante in the territory. It showed that Ravenna was rich in cultural initiatives, but it was not homogenous in terms of existing and structured networks. Specifically, among the main networks, Dante 2021 seemed to be worth investigating, as it is well responded to the requirements previously highlighted, involving both private and public institutions. In fact, even if it is promoted by one main actor (Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Ravenna, Ravenna's Saving Bank Foundation) it develops with various collaborations, including Accademia della Crusca (literally "the Bran Academy"), the local municipality and other subjects, allowing it to be nationally relevant but keeping it to the local level. Moreover, Dante 2021 appeared to be quite recent, as it started in 2011, and with potential for further development, as it aimed to celebrate the seventh centenary of Dante's death in 2021.

Based on such premises, the second phase focused on the Dante 2021 network. It was carried out with a more in-depth document and websites analysis, also complemented by interviews with key subjects of the network. Results are presented in the following paragraphs.

4.1 The territory: Ravenna and Emilia Romagna

The case is set in Ravenna, a town in the northern part of Italy. It belongs to Emilia Romagna region, whose economy is partially based on the touristic sector, mostly linked to its cultural, landscape and industrial heritage (Alberti & Giusti, 2012). Ravenna's municipality area is 652,22 sq. km wide, with a resident population of 159.116 inhabitants⁹⁷, which well responds to the need to investigate local territories (Mydland, & Grahn, 2012). It is a town with a strong cultural and historical background, also included in the UNESCO World Heritage list and where some museum networks are already in place

⁹⁷ Please visit the official website of the municipality, Comune di Ravenna, for more details (<<http://www.comune.ra.it/La-Citta/Informazioni-generalisulla-citta/Il-comune-in-pillole>>).

(Borin, 2015). Apart from monuments and museums, Ravenna was also the place where Dante Alighieri lived and died after being exiled from Florence in 1302. Thus, Ravenna's cultural identity has been shaped for centuries around the figure of Dante. While Dante's present tomb was built between 1780 and 1782, his bones have always been kept in Ravenna, and they were long hidden by the Franciscan Friars. As for now, Ravenna is one of the main places where cultural initiatives concerning Dante are held, also including international conferences⁹⁸. Moreover, these years are particularly critical as a national law regarding celebrations of the centenaries of Leonardo da Vinci, Raffaello Sanzio and Dante Alighieri is being discussed in the Parliament⁹⁹.

4.2 Key characteristics of Dante 2021

Dante 2021 is a 4-5 days festival based on events, meetings and shows. It started in 2011 and is held each year in September. Dante 2021 focuses on themes around Dante Alighieri, not only on his works but also discussing and bringing their main themes to our days. It is promoted by one not-for-profit subject, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Ravenna, and it is developed in collaboration with many subjects, both private (not for profit) and public. As for now, the Dante 2021 network is formalised in the sense that the initiatives are included in one programme, which has its own brand, website, calendar and publications.



FIGURE 2. DANTE 2021 LOGO

Source: www.dante2021.it

Collaborations have developed and grown during the years, starting from the partnership with Accademia della Crusca, a public institution based in Florence (in Tuscany, central Italy), and developing with other collaborations mainly based in Ravenna. It also has the patronage of the local municipality, Ravenna, and of the region, Emilia Romagna. Currently, the network is composed of different subjects, both private (non-profit) and public. Following Donato (2015), we consider institution ownership in two categories: public and private. Private ownership also includes non-profit entities, Church authorities or single citizens.

The main participants of the network are as follows:

⁹⁸ It is the case of the International Dante Conference, which was held in May 2017 and was organised by University of Bologna.

⁹⁹ The Law Proposal, yet not definitive, may be consulted at: www.senato.it/leg/17/BGT/Schede/Ddliter/47987.htm

Name	Role in the network	Public / Private	Details
Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Ravenna	Promoter	Private	Non profit
Accademia della Crusca	Scientific committee	Public	Institution
Regione Emilia Romagna	Patronage	Public	Local Authority
Comune di Ravenna	Patronage	Public	Local Authority
Amici dell'Accademia della Crusca	Partner	Private	Non profit
Teatro nazionale della Toscana	Partner	Public	Non profit
Istituzione Biblioteca Classense	Partner	Public	Institution
Casa Matha	Partner	Private	Non profit
Centro dantesco dei Frati minori conventuali di Ravenna	Partner	Private	Non profit / Church authority

TABLE 1. MAIN PARTICIPANTS OF DANTE 2021

Source: www.dante2021.it

4.3 Reasons for creating the network

The idea of Dante 2021 was born from Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Ravenna, a non-profit entity aimed at promoting and helping the development of the local territory¹⁰⁰. The Fondazione continues the historical mission of Cassa di Risparmio di Ravenna, a bank based in Ravenna and founded in 1839, from which the Fondazione originated in the 1990s. Before the reforms of the 1990s, Italian Casse di Risparmio (Saving Banks) were originally aimed at developing the local territories both from a social and economic perspective (Fasano, 1927). Now, one of the aims of the Fondazione is helping the town and territory grow from a cultural point of view, also supporting the town to be a key cultural place in Italy.

After a few years promoting a festival named “Dante 09” (“09” as it was held in September), the Fondazione decided to give a more specific connotation to the festival and to the events, thus shifting the focus to the Italian language and aiming at celebrating the 7th centenary of Dante’s death, in 2021. With these goals in mind, the Fondazione contacted Accademia della Crusca, based in Florence, which agreed to collaborate as a main partner.

Globally, Dante 2021 seems to develop from one main subject’s will (the Fondazione), but also from the meeting of two aims and scopes: on the one hand, the Fondazione is interested in keeping some contact with the citizens and being a key actor in Dante’s initiatives in Ravenna; on the other hand, Accademia della Crusca has a chance to develop and share its researches on languages, with a focus on Dante. Overall, Dante 2021 is now aimed at reaching 2021, the 7th centenary of Dante’s death, bringing a variety of cultural insights, events and shows, also highlighting the reasons and the values

¹⁰⁰ For further details, please visit <<http://www.fondazioneassaravenna.it/La-Fondazione/Missione-e-Valori.aspx>>.

of the Italian language, which contributed to build Italian national identity¹⁰¹.

4.4 Understanding how collaborations were born

Dante 2021 has grown its partnerships since the first edition. Interestingly, most of the subjects that joined the network already had peculiar links, activities or interests in Dante. First, those subjects outside the local territories are based in Florence, the city where Dante was born in 1265. Collaboration between Ravenna and these subjects (Accademia della Crusca, Associazione Amici dell'Accademia della Crusca, Teatro Nazionale della Toscana) has deep meanings, as it ideally connects the places where Dante was born and died. Moreover, the local actors have many different links to Dante's figure, each of them from a different point of view.

Collaborations with local and Florentine subjects have grown throughout the years of the festival, giving the events an increasing richness. As mentioned, the first strong collaboration that led to the creation of Dante 2021 was with Accademia della Crusca, one of the leading institutions in research on the Italian language¹⁰². Another subject based in Florence which collaborates to the network is Associazione Amici dell'Accademia della Crusca (Friends of Accademia della Crusca), a cultural non-profit entity that financially supports Accademia della Crusca. Associazione Amici already had links to Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Ravenna, as the Fondazione is one of the Associazione Amici's members. However, the relationship became even stronger as Associazione Amici participates Dante 2021 initiatives, giving support, expanding the local network to Florence and helping the Fondazione reaching a wider variety of speakers and collaborators.

The municipality of Ravenna also supports the network, both making public locations available for Dante 2021 events and including them in the wider programme of the town's events for Dante, which is published by the municipality every year.

Among other collaborations, the ones with Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Francescani (Dante's Studies Centre of Franciscan Friars) and Casa Matha have some peculiar aspects and strong links to Dante, both belonging to ancient history and current times. Centro Dantesco is a not-for-profit entity aimed at spreading the knowledge of Dante's works and managed by Franciscan Friars. They have strong links to Dante, as Franciscan Friars have been long hiding Dante's bones from the Florentines, who wanted to bring them back to Florence. Franciscan Friars are then considered those who kept Dante's bones safe, till they were discovered, opened and brought to Dante's tomb in 1865.

¹⁰¹ "Il nuovo Festival si propone ora, infatti, di traguardare il 2021, anno del VII centenario della morte del poeta, con una costellazione culturale di approfondimenti e riflessioni che abbiano particolare riferimento alle ragioni e ai valori della lingua italiana come fattore portante della nostra identità nazionale e dello stesso processo unitario. (...) E' anche un segnale che abbiamo voluto fornire alla Città, per contribuire, crediamo, a proiettare ancora di più la sua realtà e le sue connessioni storiche e culturali in una prospettiva nazionale e internazionale. (...) Lo festeggiamo con entusiasmo, nella speranza che, insieme ai volumi che seguiranno via via fino al 2021, possa offrire anche uno strumento di riflessione per la comune crescita culturale e sociale, nel riferimento alla lingua, ai valori letterari e civili di Dante." (Le conversazioni di Dante 2021, 2011).

¹⁰² Among the main aims of Accademia della Crusca, it supports scientific activities, helps spreading the historical knowledge and evolution of the Italian language, collaborates with national and international institutions. More info can be found at: www.accademiadellacrusca.it.

Casa Matha¹⁰³ is considered to be the world's oldest association of fishermen, as it was probably founded before 943, thus being more than a thousand years old. As for now, it is a private non-profit association that organises and hosts many different cultural initiatives, including some focused on Dante. It is one of the latest entities that joined the Dante 2021 network. In fact, it was contacted for the 2016 edition and they hosted a Dante 2021 event in the associations' historic building. Collaborations will continue and further develop in 2017 and in following editions of Dante 2021. It, too, has strong historical links to Dante. In fact, the first "cartolare" (the first statute) shows a person named Pier Giardini (or Pier Zardini) among the first Casa Matha's members. In the 19th century, scholars found out that Pier Giardini really existed and was one of Dante's best students – which meant that at least one of the members of Casa Matha actually knew and studied with Dante himself. More recently, at least ten Casa Matha's members happened to attend the re-opening of Dante's bones in 1865. To sum up, Casa Matha has deep roots into Dante's history, has been promoting events on Dante on its own and has recently joined the Dante 2021 initiatives, offering its spaces.

Overall, such evidence shows that the common local cultural background brings many different subjects to start different activities on Dante. This also helps the formation and development of cultural networks: as each subject has a different perspective and specific know how, collaboration may be easier and could lead to higher the richness of the events jointly organised.

As some interviewees mentioned, "everything here recalls Dante"¹⁰⁴, and "it is not the same to do the same thing in Florence, in Ravenna or in Catania, it is different because there is some history, there is a texture that brings connections. (...) The centenary of Dante is the centenary from Alaska to Vietnam, but there are some places that have different reasons, emotions and vibrations"¹⁰⁵ To sum up, the common cultural background seems to help in many ways: first, as a variety of subjects starts their own initiatives on Dante, second, connections seem to build easier as the promoting subjects already share a cultural interest. Living in a rather small territory helps social and institutional connections, too. In fact, an interviewee pointed out that living in the town helps being involved in local initiatives: "living here you have the chance to meet (people), and being involved (in initiatives)"¹⁰⁶.

4.5 Coordinating the network and creating new outputs

The coordinating activities are managed by the Artistic Director appointed by the Fondazione, as it is the main promoter and financier. The other network participants actively collaborate in different ways, depending on their role, know how and where they are placed. They are also involved in the decision-making processes, even though the main decisions are made by the Fondazione.

The local municipality is also involved with another type of collaboration. In fact, as Dante 2021 is just one of the many initiatives concerning Dante held in Ravenna, the municipality puts them all together

¹⁰³ Please find more info at www.casamatha.it.

¹⁰⁴ "Qui ricorda tutto un po' Dante" (Paolo Bezzi, Casa Matha).

¹⁰⁵ "Cioè non è indifferente fare la stessa cosa a Firenze a Ravenna o a Catania, è diverso perché c'è una storia, un tessuto che lega (...). Il centenario di Dante è il centenario dall'Alaska al Vietnam, esistono però dei luoghi che hanno delle ragioni, delle emozioni, vibrazioni diverse" (Domenico De Martino, Artistic Director).

¹⁰⁶ "E stando qui hai la possibilità di conoscere, e quindi di essere coinvolto" (Father Egidio, Centro Dantesco).

into a calendar, which is now called “Ravenna per Dante” (Ravenna for Dante). Doing so, the municipality seems to have a role of *ex-post* coordinator.

As a main output, the network creates a series of events with a great variety of speakers and locations. Both are a result of connecting with different subjects: some help contacting speakers or are owners or responsible for places.

Collaborating and meeting different speakers becomes a chance for creating events that never existed before¹⁰⁷, while setting the events all around the town makes citizens live their territory and developing stronger roots with their culture and history. Some collaborations evolve in time: Casa Matha, for example, was first involved for hosting an event in the 2016 edition, and will probably increase its participation in the following editions.

Overall, Dante 2021 becomes a chance to offer citizens some understanding of current research concerning Dante, strengthening cultural and historic roots with their territory and reflecting on current themes and beliefs with a connection on Dante’s life and works.

However, the main output are cultural events, which don’t usually last after that fixed moment in time and space. To avoid this, the promoter decided to start a small publication, “Le conversazioni di Dante 2021” (Dante 2021’s talks). The book is published every year and is meant at collecting the main speeches and dialogues after each edition, in order to make the events last in time.

4.6 Advantages and criticalities of collaborating

Managing cultural events and collaborating leads to advantages and criticalities. Many interviewees agreed that funds for culture are diminishing, both from the public and private sectors. However, it seems that limited availability of funds leads to higher sense of responsibility for those managing the economic resources. It also has some impact when looking for speakers, mainly attracting the most motivated and passionate ones. Networking helps by means that participants may allow events to be held in their properties, thus lowering or eliminating costs of finding appropriate locations. Among criticalities, some interviewees raised the need for a stronger collaboration and shared planning activity.

Networking seems to bring some advantages, first helping varying locations and lowering some costs. Collaborating with outside institutions (e.g. Accademia della Crusca, which is based in Florence) brought something new to the town and citizens. Such connection may also help in strengthening collaborations between the two cities, Ravenna and Florence, which may become particularly important for celebrating the centenary. Some interviewees also believed that past initiatives helped stimulating citizens to participate not only to Dante 2021 events, but also to other similar cultural ones. In this sense, the cultural network appears to help developing citizens’ participation to the cultural events of their territory.

¹⁰⁷ “Hanno creato una cosa che non esisteva, che è esistita in quel momento” (Domenico De Martino, Artistic Director).

4.7 The Local Government's approach

Both the local municipality and the region gave their patronage to Dante 2021, which meant that they positively acknowledged its initiatives. Dante 2021 and the municipality also have an *ex-post* kind of collaboration, as Dante 2021 enters the town's calendar of cultural initiatives concerning Dante, which are usually held in Autumn. The calendar contains all the main events concerning Dante organised by different subjects in the territory, putting together more than 60 events a year. In short, Dante 2021 also belongs to the bigger network put together by the municipality's calendar. Coordination is managed by the municipality, which also calls together the participants in a round table once or twice a year, to collect and organise all the events.

Ravenna also participates a wider national network of the "città dantesche" (dantesque cities), also formed by Firenze and Venezia. These three cities are part of a national committee aimed at celebrating the centenary, which was formed between 2014 and 2015.

While the national committee is institutionalised, the town network is mainly an operative one – it is not formalised except from the calendar.

4.8 Potential for development

Four out of seven interviewees hoped for more coordination and integration of cultural initiatives concerning Dante. In particular, some of them believed that more coordination should help improving the external image of Ravenna as a town culturally and historically connected to Dante. One of the interviewees wished they had more private sources of income to sustain their cultural initiatives, which would also support the public sector's cultural services.

It seems that the 2021 centenary is seen as a chance to do more together, strengthening collaborations with all the town entities concerned in Dante's cultural initiatives and creating one bigger network, which would have a better known outside image¹⁰⁸. Foster the collaboration between the public and private sector might help as well¹⁰⁹. While most interviewees believe that local entities and institutions should join their forces to work together with more synergy and collaboration,¹¹⁰ some believed that they should start thinking and developing a common strategy. This would mean getting over the *ex-post* coordination and start building a strategy before the events are already planned¹¹¹.

The local municipality is also willing to promote an inter-regional committee, bringing together the two main regions of Dantesque cities: Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany. Two interviewees also highlighted the importance of creating an international network, as more integration and collaboration even at the

¹⁰⁸ "(...) coordinandoli insieme, creando una cosa che sia non voglio dire un organismo unico, ma una testuggine in cui tante persone poi costruiscono una grande immagine, forte e che può conquistare spazio." (Domenico De Martino, Artistic Director)

¹⁰⁹ "In questo senso è importante, ci può essere una cosa tra pubblico e privato, cioè trovare quel punto in cui il pubblico e il privato hanno interessi comuni, c'è un punto in cui si trovano." (Domenico De Martino, Artistic Director)

¹¹⁰ "Si potrebbe fare molto di più, però in un altro spirito, ed è lo spirito della sinergia, della collaborazione, rinunciando un po' alle proprie autonomie." (Father Egidio, Centro Dantesco)

¹¹¹ "Sarebbe bello che ci fosse la capacità di vedersi, prima cioè di pensare una strategia" (Domenico De Martino, Artistic Director)

international level might help, in order to celebrate the 2021 centenary.

Overall, there seems to be some interest for more integration and collaboration, at different levels: local, inter-regional, and international.

5. Final remarks

This paper explored one specific cultural network between private, non-profit and public actors, providing a better understanding on how cultural networks are born, work and if there is some potential for developing long terms collaborations. Doing so, the paper was aimed at contributing to the theoretical debate concerning the need to rethink governance and management models for the cultural sector. In fact, scholars suggested that collaborative processes and networks between public and private actors might help in delivering public services. Furthermore, the recent financial crisis, which led to a reduction in public expenditures and affected the cultural sector, should be considered a chance to innovate the ways to deliver cultural services.

To address the need for more research on this field, the empirical analysis focused on one specific town in Northern Italy, where peculiar cultural initiatives are held. Specifically, the paper analysed one cultural network focused on the figure of Dante Alighieri, Dante 2021, as it well represented the characteristics highlighted in the literature. First, the research briefly described the territory, then it outlined the basic characteristics of the case, including the level of formalization, the year the partnership was born and the kinds of subjects. Then, it focused on the reasons that lead to the creation of the network and on how collaborations were born and developed, what the output of the network was and what the advantages and criticalities of collaborating were. Finally, the empirical part discussed the local government's approach and possible potential for development.

The research showed that private non-profit entities spontaneously start cultural initiatives to fulfil their aims and to make the territory grow. It confirmed the tendency of private and public entities to cooperate, also creating networks. It seems that where there is a strong common cultural background various subjects start to promote their own initiatives on that cultural theme. Among them, collaborations may be born more easily, with different levels of integration and formalization (Turrini, 2015). In these cases, networks are a chance to exploit and boost the different perspectives and specific know how of the entities that form the network (Pencarelli & Splendiani, 2011). The case of Dante 2021 also showed that a cultural network helps innovation (Montella, 2014) in cultural events. Low funds seem to be a problem shared by many interviewees, confirming that public and private funds for culture have lowered – however, it appears to be a major issue when considering single entities, while collaboration seems to help.

Results also showed encouraging perspectives for developing town networks: most interviewees shared a positive attitude towards the creation of a stronger network which could share a strategic approach to improve the town's image. This would mean bringing information sharing to a higher level: not only with *ex-post* communications, but with joint strategies as well (Bonet & Donato, 2011), which

could help raising the culture attractiveness of the local area (Golinelli, 2008) – Ravenna, in this case. Dante 2021 seems to operate within other networks. Overall, there seem to be different levels of networks, with different levels of formalization, aims and scopes. As for now, Ravenna seems to have some basis and potential for a “diffuse museum” (Cerquetti, 2007) for Dante as well.

To sum up, the research contributes to confirm the current theories on cultural networks. It shows that there is some potential for developing new governance and management models for the cultural sector, based on collaboration and networking between different actors. It might also be useful for practical implications, being an example for cultural players who want to innovate the cultural sector (Donato, 2015).

However, this paper has a quite limited scope: it analyses a relatively small network in a wider framework of subjects and networks. Future research could analyse and compare how the networks work and the ways they are interconnected, in order to understand the best practices for each level. Analysing the national networks could be a basis for international comparisons between Italy and other countries.

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