Developing local cultural networks: the case of Dante 2021 in Ravenna

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ABSTRACT

In the last decades and especially after the latest financial crisis, scholars are suggesting collaborative processes to address the reduction of public funds, as first discussed by New Public Management literature and later emphasised by Public Governance theories. As cultural activities belong to the wider set of public services, this paper enters the debate on delivering public services. It is aimed at analysing which factors contribute to an effective development of local cultural networks, also considering advantages, criticalities and potential for their future strengthening. Starting from a theoretical analysis, the paper carries out a case study of a local cultural network. The research focuses on the case of Ravenna, a town in northern Italy, and it is based on document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Results indicate that factors as geographic proximity, social relationships, a common cultural background and common values are crucial for the development of local cultural networks, consistently with isomorphism theory

Keywords:

Cultural networks

Public governance

Local networks

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Introduction

Belonging to the wider set of public services, cultural activities have changed their governance and management models, as first anticipated with New Public Management (NPM) literature (Hood, 1991) and further developed with Public Governance (Osborne, 2010) theories, which 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; Jones et al, 1997), which could contribute in delivering public services. After the international financial crisis, public funds for culture have diminished – yet, the crisis should also be considered as an opportunity for a structural change of the cultural sector, fostering the need to rethink how to deliver cultural services (Bonet & Donato, 2011). Specifically, more research is needed in how and why networks develop in national settings (Bagdadli, 2003), with a specific focus on local areas (Mydland & Grahn, 2012).

This paper is aimed at analysing which key factors contribute to the development of local cultural networks. It is also aimed at understanding how local cultural networks work and what the potentials for developing long term collaborations are (Vicente, Camarero & Garrido, 2012). To do so, the paper focuses on a local cultural network based in a town in northern Italy, Ravenna. The case of Ravenna is significant because the town's identity has been culturally shaped around an internationally known poet, Dante Alighieri, for centuries. In fact, Ravenna is the place where Dante lived and died after being exiled from Florence. Although this case is not aimed at generalising to the population (Johansson & Jyrämä, 2016), it is significant as it is based on a culturally rich territory and it represents a case (Yin, 2013) of different actors that spontaneously cooperate to deliver cultural services, innovating traditional models (Borin & Donato, 2015). Results might provide useful knowledge for policy makers and academics.

The paper develops as follows. The first section will discuss the theoretical framework on cultural networks as an alternative means to provide cultural services. The second section will outline the methodology of the research and its phases. The empirical part will follow, which will present an overview on the case of Dante 2021. Finally, concluding remarks and further perspectives will be drafted.

Theoretical framework

From the 1990s, most European countries have faced 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; Anselmi, 2014). 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 non-profit sectors (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006). In some cases, hybridisation processes improved public sector management and efficacy, bringing in some positives of the private sector (Bianchi Martini, 2009).

After that, 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 the Public Value perspective, managers should also respond to the collective preferences of citizens, trying to keep trust between them and institutions (O'Flynn, 2007), not just focusing on results and performances. While some emphasise the need for coordinating and integrating public policies (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011), others believe that each public service has its own needs (Osborne, 2010).

Public Governance (Kooiman, 1993) introduced the idea that public and private subjects, including citizens themselves, could collaborate for delivering public services (Rosenau, 1992; Ostrom, 1996). Public Governance theory was further developed and integrated by Network Governance and Co-production theories (Taylor, 2000; Osborne, 2017). While Network Governance scholars believe that different subjects should cooperate to deliver efficient public services (Newman, 2004; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000), Co-production theory emphasises the need for different subjects to participate in producing public services (Bovaird, 2007).

Recently, the economic crisis contributed to emphasise the need to rethink how to deliver public services, specifically in the cultural sector, which has been marginalised in public policies (Jancovich & Bianchini, 2013). 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).

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 be interpreted as an opportunity for a structural change in the public sector and in the ways cultural organizations operate (Bonet & Donato, 2011). Such processes are bringing European countries and local institutions to rethink the ways to

deliver cultural policies (Vicente, Camarero & Garrido, 2012). Cross-sector and international collaborations between cultural and educational institutions could help developing and fostering the cultural sector's potential even more (Cogliandro Beyens & Ortega Nuere, 2014).

During the last two decades, researches on cultural networks increased, being studied from multiple perspectives (Milcu et al, 2013). In fact, as culture has no single meaning (Gray, 2009; Hawkes, 2001; Dallaire & Colbert, 2012), what constitutes the cultural sector varies. Overall, research concerning cultural networks between different actors maintains that public entities, companies, universities, cultural institutions and the community should cooperate, also increasing citizens' engagement (Simon, 2010). Part of cultural network literature also considers networks between volunteers (Jarman, 2018) and community members involved in the preservation and restoration of cultural heritage (Spiridon & Sandu, 2015).

Some explain the creation of networks as a result of both isomorphism and institutional theory (Bagdadli, 2003): cultural networks could be a result of similarities such as base values, geographic proximity, product or governance systems or reciprocity. They could also be based on pre-existing social relations, which might generate a common ground for cooperation: a solid base in common is considered a good starting point for building a joint organization from existing separate subjects (Jyrämä et al, 2015). On the other hand, according to institutional theory, having a specific purpose might be another incentive to collaborate. Indeed, it seems that a common value system supports collaborative behaviour (Camarinha-Matos & Macedo, 2010), otherwise communication between different cultures becomes a crucial factor for cooperation (Lidstone, 2008).

Events and local festivals themselves may have important network effects, as they contribute to bring together people, involving them from planning to executing the events (Richards, 2015). Recurrent events can also become a chance for artistic and professional development, creating an ecosystem and giving artists the possibility to return in the following years (Comunian, 2017).

Collaboration may involve subjects from different sectors (Schramme & King, 2016), and from the same sector (Blackstone et al, 2016). In the case of museums networks, they seem particularly suitable in Italy due to the small dimensions of museums and the way they are widespread in the territory (Montella, 2014).

Developing cultural networks could help not only fundraising capabilities, but it could also bring to knowledge exchanges and information sharing (Powell, 1990; Abfalter, Stadler & Müller, 2012), innovation, ideas interaction (Staber, 2008), and foster potentials of different cultural resources from which they are born (Pencarelli & Splendiani, 2011). Networks might provoke spillovers in many fields – from circulating the

knowledge created even after the event is concluded to promoting partnerships between different subjects in the local community (Podestà & Richards, 2018).

A cultural district could help increasing the touristic appeal of a territory (Arnaboldi & Spiller, 2011), also involving the community and residents (Taylor, 1995), even using only informal coordination practices (Imperiale & Cordella, 2016). Networks might contribute to the development of a region even after the events or festivals are concluded, as they help building connections and partnerships between different organisations (Moscardo, 2007). They might influence the performance of a region, as quality relationships between organisations may positively influence their performances. Moreover, events based on network may be drivers of the regional demand, starting from event-related expenditure and potential for increased tourism (Jones, 2005). The Network Governance approach is also considered to be valid in small, peripheral locations, and could help raise the cultural attractiveness of less known places (Golinelli, 2008).

Some part of the academia believes that research on the cultural sector should focus on specific local areas (Mydland & Grahn, 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; Van Aalst & Boogaarts, 2002), where each museum is not isolated, but part of a bigger plan.

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 and why collaboration in different cultural contexts works (Bagdadli, 2003; Aas et al, 2005; Alberti & Giusti, 2012). It also seems that integrated cultural systems are the governance models where research is particularly promising (Donato, 2015) and where there is a need for primary data (Blackstone et al, 2016).

To address the need to research micro-levels and local areas (Luonila & Johansson, 2016; Mydland, & Grahn, 2012), this paper focuses on a specific art city (Lazzeretti, 1997) where peculiar cultural initiatives are held (Alberti & Giusti, 2012). It is aimed at analysing which factors contribute to an effective development of local cultural networks, including advantages, criticalities and potentials. Following a theoretical analysis, the research is based on a case study of a local cultural network set in Ravenna. The case study (Yin, 2013) seemed to be a suitable way to analyse a

case of cultural governance, which may be considered a "unique case study" (Aas, Ladkin & Fletcher, 2005). The choice of this method was a result of different insights: as the research was aimed at understanding complex social phenomena within their real-life context, focusing on a variety of sources could help tracing links and explaining connections over time, rather than considering only quantitative data. Thus, this paper adopts multiple qualitative methods, combining (Bowden & Ciesielska, 2016; Marzano & Castellini, 2016) document analysis (Scott, 2006) and semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

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. The basic topic guide was as follows[1]:

1) Could you please describe your role and the organization you belong to?
2) Which Dantesque initiatives do you organize on your own and which together with Dante 2021?
3) Why did you join Dante 2021?
4) How are the decision making and the coordination processes concerned?
5) What is Dante 2021's output, in terms of cultural initiatives?
6) What are the main advantages and criticalities of the network?

The case study is set in Ravenna, a town in northern Italy with a strong cultural background. In fact, the town hosts eight religious monuments belonging to the UNESCO World Heritage list[2] and some museum networks are already in place (Borin, 2015; Borin & Donato, 2015). Besides, Ravenna also has intangible cultural background, as it was the place where the poet Dante Alighieri lived and died after escaping from Florence. Thus, this paper concerns Dante-related cultural ecosystems in Ravenna, focusing on a peculiar one, Dante 2021.

The empirical research was carried out in two main steps. The first part was based on document analysis, starting from local newspapers, online and bibliographic researches, conference materials and documents. It showed that the territory is rich in cultural initiatives regarding Dante, but networks were not homogenous. The second part focused on the Dante 2021 case, using document and website

analysis together with semi-structured interviews. The ten key actors of the network were contacted and seven interviews were made. In two cases, the interviewee was supported by one or two colleagues, who helped adding more details during the interview. Interviewees included: Domenico De Martino (Dante 2021 Artistic Director), Giuseppe Alfieri (President of Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Ravenna), Paolo Bezzi (past "Primo Massaro" of Casa Matha), Francesca Masi (General Direction area of the municipality of Ravenna), Egidio Manzani (past Director of Centro Dantesco), Lanfranco Gualtieri (Past President of Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Ravenna) and Aureliano Benedetti (President of Accademia Amici dell'Accademia della Crusca).

Empirical research: results and discussion

Following Aas, Ladkin and Fletcher (2005) and Pencarelli and Splendiani (2011), the empirical part is 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, the kinds of subjects and the local government's approach), after that, the analysis will focus on the reasons for creating the network and understanding the dynamics of collaboration. Finally, potential for development will be discussed.

Dante 2021: an overview

The case is set in Ravenna, a town in northern 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 square kilometre wide, with a resident population of 159,116 inhabitants[3], which well responds to the need to investigate local territories (Mydland & Grahn, 2012). It has strong cultural and historical background, also included in the UNESCO World Heritage list and where some museum networks are already in place (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.

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1 The Italian version of the questions is as follows:
    1) Può descrivere il suo ruolo e l'organizzazione di cui fa parte?
    2) Quali sono le iniziative culturali dantesche promosse dall'organizzazione in autonomia e all'interno di Dante 2021?
    3) Quali sono state le motivazioni che hanno portato alla partecipazione in Dante 2021?
    4) Come si svolge il processo decisionale e il coordinamento tra i vari attori di Dante 2021?
    5) Qual è l'output di Dante 2021, in termini di iniziative culturali?
    6) Quali sono i vantaggi e quali le criticità emerse?
2 Please visit http://whc.unesco.org/ for more details.
3 Please visit the official website of the municipality, Comune di Ravenna, for more details: http://www.comune.ra.it/La-Citta/Informazioni-generali-sulla-citta/Il-comune-in-pillole

"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"

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 conferences[4]. 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 Parliament[5]. Although Ravenna is rich in cultural initiatives regarding Dante, it is not homogenous in terms of existing and structured networks. Among the main networks, Dante 2021 involves both private, non-profit and public institutions. Dante 2021 appears 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.

Dante 2021 is a 4-5 days festival held each year in September, based on events, meetings and shows. It 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 non-profit subject, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Ravenna, and it is developed in collaboration with many subjects, both private (non-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, thus favouring homogeneity between the different actors.

Collaborations have grown during the years, starting from the partnership with Accademia della Crusca (literally "the Bran Academy"), a public institution based in Florence (Tuscany, central Italy), and developing with other collaborations mainly based in Ravenna. It has the patronage of the local municipality and of the region. Currently, the network is composed of different subjects, both private (non-profit) and public. Following Borin and 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:

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 It is the case of the International Dante Conference, which was held in May 2017 and was organised by the University of Bologna.
5 *The Law Proposal, yet not definitive, may be consulted at: www.senato.it/leg/17/BGT/Schede/Ddliter/47987.htm*

Ravenna also participates a wider national network of the *città dantesche* (Dantesque cities), also formed by Florence and Venice. 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.

FIGURE 1. DANTE 2021 LOGO
Source: www.dante2021.it

Starting the journey: the long way to 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 territory[6]. 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 an 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, one of the leading institutions in research on the Italian language[7], which agreed to collaborate as main partner.

Globally, Dante 2021 develops 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 of the Italian language, which contributed to build Italian national identity[8].

Dante 2021 has grown its partnerships since the first edition. 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.

Another subject based in Florence which collaborates with 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 associations's members. However, the relationship became even stronger as Associazione Amici participates in Dante 2021 initiatives, giving support, expanding the local network to Florence and helping the Fondazione reach 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. The calendar also 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.

Among other collaborations, the ones with

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6 For further details, please visit http://www.fondazionecassaravenna.it/

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

8 "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).

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 non-profit entity aimed at spreading the knowledge of Dante's works and managed by Franciscan Friars. 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.

Casa Matha[9] 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 association's historic building. Collaborations further develop in 2017 and in following editions of Dante 2021, thus continuing to widen the network after almost ten years from the original idea. 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 attended the re-opening of Dante's bones in 1865.

As some interviewees mentioned, "everything here recalls Dante"[10], 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"[11]. To sum up, the common cultural background seems to help in many ways: first, as a variety of subjects start their own initiatives on Dante, second, connections seem to build easier as the promoting subjects already share a cultural interest. This way, each subject brings a different perspective and specific know-how, leading to increase the richness of the events jointly organised. Living in a rather small territory helps social and institutional connections too. In fact, an interviewee pointed out that living in the town helps to be involved in local initiatives: "living here you have the chance to meet [people], and being involved [in initiatives]"[12].

Empirical evidence

The empirical research highlights the following main results: 1) relationship features, including how small territories help the development of cultural networks; 2) cultural engagement attributes, as for citizens participation; 3) coordination issues, including the advantages and criticalities of collaborating; 4) outputs and innovation aspects; 5) the potential of local and wider cultural networks.

As for relationship features, 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 subjects already share a cultural interest. Overall, it seems that a common cultural background helps the formation and development of local cultural networks, creating a common value system (Camarinha-Matos & Macedo, 2010). Living in a rather small territory helps social and institutional connections, contributing to ease communication and building relationships (Foster & Jonker, 2005).

As for cultural engagement, 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. Some interviewees believe that past initiatives helped to stimulate citizens to participate not only in Dante 2021 events, but also in other similar cultural ones. In this sense, the cultural network appears to help develop citizens' engagement to the cultural events of their territory (Simon, 2010).

The coordinating activities are managed by the Artistic Director appointed by the Fondazione, as it is the main promoter and financier, similarly to the core-periphery model (Jarman, 2018). The other network participants actively collaborate in different ways, depending on their role, know-how and where they are placed. They are 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, as it puts all Dantesque events together into a calendar, assuming a role of *ex-post* coordinator.

Managing cultural events and collaborating leads to advantages and criticalities. Most interviewees confirmed that funds for culture are diminishing, both from the public and private sectors (Bonet & Donato, 2011). However, 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

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9 Please find more info at www.casamatha.it

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

11 "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, Dante 2021 Artistic Director).

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

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 external institutions brought something new to the town and citizens, also contributing to strengthen collaborations between Ravenna and Florence. Collaborating and meeting different speakers becomes a chance for creating events that never existed before[13], mixing ideas and perspectives (Staber, 2008), while setting the events all around the town makes citizens live their territory and develop stronger roots with their culture and history. Thus, the research confirms that cultural networks help innovation (Montella, 2014) and know-how exchanges (Powell, 1990; Abfalter, Stadler & Müller, 2012), fostering potentials of different actors (Pencarelli & Splendiani, 2011) and creating unique cultural events.

However, the main output are cultural events, which do not 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 collects the main speeches and dialogues after each edition, in order to make the events last in time.

As for economic impacts, Dante 2021 is set in a town with a deep cultural and historical background (Borin, 2015) which belongs to a touristic region (Alberti & Giusti, 2012). Dante 2021's organisers are aware that the festival attracts external tourists and has an impact on various aspects of the local economy, including hotels, restaurants, transport systems, souvenir shops and local community firms. The festival also became a chance for artistic and professional development of the town's art students (Comunian, 2017). Although Dante 2021 was also aimed at promoting the territory,

> **"NETWORKING SEEMS TO BRING SOME ADVANTAGES, FIRST HELPING VARYING LOCATIONS AND LOWERING SOME COSTS. COLLABORATING WITH EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONS BROUGHT SOMETHING NEW TO THE TOWN AND CITIZENS, ALSO CONTRIBUTING TO STRENGTHEN COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN RAVENNA AND FLORENCE"**

a business plan for economic and occupational effects was not well defined. Thus, there seems to be room for further improvements in planning the local economic effects of the festival. In fact, academic literature offers methodologies to evaluate cultural events' economic (direct and indirect) effects, also considering touristic, social, occupational and environmental consequences (Candela & Figini, 2010).

Cultural impacts assessment practices are typically used in evaluating major events' spillovers, though such practices are less used in local territories (Partal & Dunphy, 2016). However, small-medium events can have some impacts on the local territory. They are usually characterized by soft investments focused on the event's areas, touristic spillovers and a high involvement of the local community, also including local typical firms. Cultural events can impact a town's long term image and reputation as a cultural destination, thus capitalizing the results of the cultural event while still keeping its key characteristics in the external perceptions (Richards & Wilson, 2004). Overall, economic effects can be synthetized calculating an index, the economic multiplier, which varies depending on the territory and the event's characteristics (Lundberg et al, 1995; Herrero et al, 2006).

Moreover, most interviewees hoped for more coordination and integration of cultural initiatives concerning Dante. More coordination should help improve the external image of Ravenna as a town culturally connected to Dante. One of the interviewees wished they had more sources of income to sustain their cultural initiatives, which would also support the public sector's cultural services.

Regarding the network's potential, the 2021 centenary is seen as a chance to do more together, strengthening collaborations with all the town entities connected to Dante, thus creating one bigger network with a better known external image[14]. Fostering collaborations between the public and private sector might help as well[15]. While most interviewees

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

14. "(…) 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, Dante 2021 Artistic Director).

15 "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, Dante 2021 Artistic Director).

"REGARDING THE NETWORK'S POTENTIAL, THE 2021 CENTENARY IS SEEN AS A CHANCE TO DO MORE TOGETHER, STRENGTHENING COLLABORATIONS WITH ALL THE TOWN ENTITIES CONNECTED TO DANTE, THUS CREATING ONE BIGGER NETWORK WITH A BETTER KNOWN EXTERNAL IMAGE"

believe that local entities and institutions should join their forces to work together with more synergy and collaboration[16], 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 planned[17]. 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 to celebrate the 2021 centenary. Overall, there is interest for more integration and collaboration at different levels: local, inter-regional, and international.

Final remarks

This research contributes to confirm isomorphism and institutional theories (Bagdadli, 2003). It confirms that collaborative processes and networks between public, private and non-profit actors, as first suggested by NPM (Hood, 1991) and then by Public Governance (Osborne, 2010) scholars, are an effective way to deliver cultural services. Doing so, it enters and deepens the debate on reconsidering public services delivery, including cultural ones, as a way to cope with the lowering of public expenditures (Héritier, 2002; Drechsler, 2005; Borgonovi et al, 2006; Levy, 2010; Anselmi, 2014), especially after the financial crisis (Bonet & Donato, 2011).

The research shows that a common cultural background and value system (Camarinha-Matos & Macedo, 2010), personal relationships between the actors and geographical proximity are the main factors for creating local cultural networks (Foster & Jonker, 2005). Local cultural networks help innovation (Montella, 2014), ideas and know-how exchanges (Powell, 1990; Staber, 2008; Abfalter, Stadler & Müller, 2012), fostering potentials of different actors (Pencarelli & Splendiani, 2011) and creating unique cultural events. Collaborating helps coping with low funds, which appears to be a major issue when considering single entities. However, this does not seem to be a reason for creating a local network.

This analysis raises some clear-cut reflections.

First, the paper confirms the critical role of citizens' awareness and external subjects' involvement in developing the network on a long term approach and shows that citizens' awareness and involvement cannot be limited to the short term. Results are fully emerging after an almost 10-year time. Hence, this case shows that cultural networks require long consolidation processes, as they need to gradually settle in time. A short term approach might have some transitory effects, yet not strengthening citizens' awareness, as well as local and external relationships. Second, this paper confirms the importance of building trust relationships between the network's subjects and it demonstrates that only when a network is homogenous and the actors share common rules and behaviors there is an impact in terms of tourist attraction and satisfaction. Third, the paper points out that without a multiannual plan of the impacts on the territory, results cannot be fully envisaged. A multidimensional approach is necessary for maintaining a long term sustainability and meeting economic, financial, reputational, and socio-educational targets. Finally, the limits and potentials of this paper are as follows. As for limits, being a case study, this research aims at generalising to theory, not to the population (Johansson & Jyrämä, 2016). However, research on local cultural networks proves to be a very promising area, still not fully explored, with a strong potential for innovating the cultural sector.

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16 "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).

17 "Sarebbe bello che ci fosse la capacità di vedersi, prima cioè di pensare una strategia" (Domenico De Martino, Dante 2021 Artistic Director).

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