

# Room for space in agencification reforms: A tale of three Italian museums

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## Abstract

The debate on agencification in the public sector has traditionally overlooked the influence of space on how autonomy unfolds in practice. Starting with the contention that organizing and space are interweaved, the study analyzes the early stages of the agencification process of three Italian museums and reveals that space is a constraint to, and an enabler of, de facto autonomy for newly created entities. Space is a constraint when spatial changes are temporally misaligned with the agencification process, including directorship cycles. On the other hand, space enables de facto autonomy, as it is purposely modified to accommodate new demands and needs by newly appointed managers. The paper maintains that policy makers and site managers should seriously consider space when dealing with agencification reforms, paying attention to the revenue and cost implications of spatial solutions, and the areas of responsibility concerning buildings and objects.

## KEYWORDS

agencification, autonomy, Italy, museums, space

## INTRODUCTION

Starting from the 1980s, many countries have undertaken a profound reorganization of their public administration. This has involved downsizing large ministries and separating policy making and operative responsibilities (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Szescilo, 2020). This process is a core idea of the New Public Management paradigm (hereafter NPM, Hood, 1991) and is usually referred to as “agencification” (Pollitt et al., 2004). In general terms, agencification is a form of vertical specialization of government bureaucracies that operates through the formal delegation of decision-making autonomy on specific tasks to newly created administrative bodies (Christensen et al., 2008; Moynihan, 2006).

However, research has shown that in real life, formal autonomy does not automatically translate into de facto autonomy, which connotes the extent of agencies’ autonomy as they manage their day-to-day operations (Hanretty & Koop, 2013; Korinek & Veit, 2015; Verhoest et al., 2004). As prior studies have demonstrated, de facto

autonomy is influenced by a number of determinants, including organizational size, tasks, slack resources, political institutions, economic contexts, social values, and inclusion in supranational and transnational networks (Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014; Yesilkagit & van Thiel, 2008).

This article aims to add to our knowledge of the determinants of de facto autonomy by investigating the influence of space on agencification processes. As noted in previous studies, the debate on agencification in the public sector has, in fact, “traditionally overlooked the ways in which organizing is bound up with the material forms and spaces through which humans act and interact” (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 435, see Cooren, 2020, for a review and a critique of sociomaterial approaches in organization studies). More broadly, public management literature has not adequately dealt with space in organizations (Pollitt, 2012; Rämö & Skalén, 2006), neither in theoretical reflections on the constitutive elements of an autonomous organization (see, for instance, Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000), nor in processual studies on how de facto autonomy unfolds (Asquer, 2012; Korinek & Veit, 2015; Ongaro, 2006).

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This gap is surprising for two reasons. First, as scholars of sociomateriality in organization studies contend, space both enables and constrains actions, rather than functioning as a neutral, stable container (Dale & Burrell, 2007; Taylor & Spicer, 2007). Second, although there is a long tradition within public management literature of assessing how legacies from the past affect the implementation of reform (Bezès, 2010; Pollitt, 2008), the lack of attention to material artifacts and infrastructure is curious, because it is difficult to think about something more “path dependent” than space (see Pierson, 2004 and Sydow et al., 2009 for a broader discussion of the path-dependence logic). As Bourdieu notes, buildings are objectified histories, in the sense of being “systems of classifications, hierarchies and oppositions inscribed in the *durability* of wood, mud and brick” (Bourdieu, 1981, p. 306–306, emphasis added).

Our work is informed by a sociomaterial view that understands space “as comprising interconnections among the people, things, and activities that surfaced in organizing” (Stephenson et al., 2020, p. 806), and in particular by the spatial practices of Dale and Burrell (2007). The research question we seek to address is: How do spatial practices influence de facto autonomy in the context of the broader pattern of agencification triggered by NPM reforms?

To answer this question, we analyze the process of agencification of the Italian Ministry of Culture in three museums that have been granted an autonomous status in 2014 following the so-called Franceschini reform (from the name of the minister of culture, Dario Franceschini). This empirical setting is best suited for analyzing the influence of spatial features on agencification processes. On the one hand, Italian cultural organizations have been affected by agencification processes (Bonini Baraldi, 2014; Cavenago et al., 2002; Ferri & Zan, 2014; Zan, 2006; Zan et al., 2018), thus following the pattern of NPM-driven reforms in the cultural sector in European democracies (Lindqvist, 2012). On the other hand, museums can be seen as sociomaterial systems. Indeed, the interplay between material and social dimensions can be observed in several museum practices, such as conservation spaces that comply with professional standards, permanent or temporary artwork displays to direct visitors’ attention, the functionalization of space for different activities and different people (see Lord, 2011). Moreover, museums are not just containers of heritage: In many cases, they are heritage buildings themselves, reflecting a particular period, architectural style, or societal habit (Yanow, 1998). Therefore, they come with restrictions for use that predispose them to path-dependent spatial practices.

The study findings complement existing theoretical and empirical work on de facto autonomy (Hanretty & Koop, 2013; Korinek & Veit, 2015; Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014), illustrating how space comes into play when agencification unfolds in practice. Through an in-

depth qualitative method, the study outlines that space constrains and enables de facto autonomy. The paper claims that space has distinctive features compared with those constraints typically discussed in the literature on agencification (level of financing, legal status and hierarchy) in terms of nature, origin, and effects. Additionally, the paper strengthens the understanding of de facto autonomy as a dynamic rather than static concept (Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014; Verhoest, 2017; Waluyo, 2022) by showing how space is purposely modified by agency managers to enable de facto autonomy. In terms of policy implications, the study underlines the need to seriously consider space when dealing with agencification reforms. It suggests to policymakers and site managers to conduct an appraisal of space-related constraints in the processes of “cutting the cord” (Wiedner & Mantere, 2019, p. 1) between the parent ministry and the agency. This would include a focus on the revenue and cost implications of spatial solutions and a clarification of areas of responsibility on objects and buildings.

In the next section, we review the key ideas and concepts related to the agencification debate. Section 3 reviews the organizational literature concerning space and provides an analytical framework for our analysis. In the methodological section, we introduce the empirical setting, clarify the criteria for case selection, and present our procedure for data collection and analysis. We then move to the microlevel and investigate the relationship between space-related issues and the transformation of three Italian museums into autonomous entities. In the discussion, we present our findings on the influence of space on autonomy. The paper concludes by outlining policy and managerial implications, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

## STATE OF THE ART IN AGENCIFICATION RESEARCH

Agencification has been prominent on the reform agenda in numerous countries, and much public management research has focused on the autonomy of agencies (Verhoest et al., 2010). An agency is defined as a public body that is formally separated from a ministerial unit, and that carries out public tasks on a permanent basis, is staffed by public sector workers, is financed mainly by the state budget, and is subject to public legal procedures (Verhoest, 2012). Central to the NPM style of agencification is the idea that autonomy improves both managerial process and outcomes: In terms of processes, autonomy allows agency managers to react swiftly on changing environments, and in terms of outputs, autonomous organizations are able to organize their resources around achieving goals (Bach, 2018; Verhoest et al., 2021).

Autonomy is thus a constitutive component of agencification, and it is not surprising that much research has focused on theoretical discussion (Ahlbäck Öberg & Wockelberg, 2021). Some consensus has grown around a conceptual distinction between two dimensions of autonomy (Verhoest et al., 2004). The first dimension is determined by the scope and extent of the agency's decision-making autonomy. An agency can have autonomy with regard to human resource management (e.g., selecting employees), financial management (e.g., freedom in generating new revenue streams and modifying the cost structure), or operational issues, that is, the management of other production factors such as logistics, the selection of input, or the design of the user experience. The second dimension represents the degree to which agencies are subjected to constraints concerning their decision-making autonomy, and it is determined by features like the level of budget financing (an agency is less autonomous when it depends on governmental funding), legal status (decision-making autonomy delegated to agencies without legal personality can be taken back quickly), and hierarchy (agency heads are less autonomous when they are appointed by the government).

Most of the empirical research on agencification focuses on the causal link between autonomy and performance (Overman & van Thiel, 2016), but it delivers inconclusive results (Cingolani & Fazekas, 2020). Several explanations have been posited. For instance, speaking about autonomy in a general sense risks conflating different dimensions that tap into different aspects of organizational activities, making their aggregation into a single measure of autonomy highly questionable (Bach, 2018; Verhoest, 2017). An additional weakness is the intrinsic difficulty in assessing the link between autonomy and performance at a generic level, without embedding it in its institutional milieu (the national political system, organizational characteristics at the agency level, individual aspects related to leadership, and the qualities of those involved in the daily matters of the agency). This suggests there are still outstanding variables to consider. However, the literature on agencification and performance overwhelmingly uses quantitative analyses, with all the problematic implications this has for examining complex interaction effects (Hall, 2003).

As a reaction to survey-based research in the field of agencification, a distinct stream of research has started addressing autonomy as a process rather than a property. This stream draws on the broader theoretical perspectives in the field of organizational studies (Asquer, 2012; Brown et al., 2003; Ongaro, 2006). As Waluyo (2022) maintains, the focus is on qualitatively assessing "the actual practices conducted in day-to-day life, how ordinary actions are practiced in the agencies, and how practices and procedures are worked out in local agency settings." Contributions aimed at understanding *de facto* as opposed to formal autonomy acknowledge the

influence of path dependence in shaping agencification (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2021; Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014). This means that agencies are the product of a historical trajectory and that they are embedded in structures that were already in place at the time of agencification (Moynihan, 2006). This insight resonates with broader research arguments about the role of time in public management literature (Pollitt, 2008).

In parallel, microlevel, interpretative research in agencification attempts to understand "how agency managers will act upon the autonomy they perceive to have [...], rather than following the formal affiliation of their organization" (Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014, p. 243). For instance, Busuioc et al. (2011) show how agency directors use accountability initiatives as a resource to promote agency credibility and gain greater autonomy. Similarly, Rommel and Verhoest (2014) highlight that agencies use interorganizational relations to build up expertise and increase autonomy in relation to the parent minister. On the other hand, Kleizen et al. (2018) demonstrate how continuous reform negatively affects the *de facto* autonomy of agencies, as the senior managers of organizations undergoing frequent change are unable to develop specialized knowledge or invest in long-term (personal or interorganizational) relationships.

Our study is positioned in this second stream of research. It aims to improve the negotiated, contingent, and dynamic understanding of what influences *de facto* autonomy (Hanretty & Koop, 2013; Korinek & Veit, 2015; Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014). As highlighted in the next section, we build on the organization studies literature to provide an appropriate frame of reference about the influence of space on agencification processes. Starting from the premise that there is "no organizing without space" (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019, p. 3), we expect there is "no autonomizing without space," and that the interplay between autonomy and space must be explored to understand agencification.

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Although not dealing directly with agencification processes, recent work in organization studies underlines the influence of space in organizational creation and endurance (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019; Hirst & Humphreys, 2013; Rodner et al., 2020; Siebert et al., 2017). For instance, Hirst and Humphreys (2013) analyze how the physical separation of non-value adding activities from the new headquarters of a public authority played a crucial role in its modernization, while Siebert et al. (2017) describe how spatial practices have a stabilizing effect on an institution, thus ensuring its durability. These works embrace a sociomaterial understanding of space and are inspired by the work of Lefebvre (1991) and by further adaptations of Lefebvre's key analytical dimensions to organizational settings (Burrell &

Dale, 2015; Taylor & Spicer, 2007; Weinfurter & Seidl, 2018).

Our approach draws on and complements the notion of spatial practices (Dale & Burrell, 2007) to disentangle the influence of space on the creation of new autonomous entities. Following Lefebvre (1991) and Dale and Burrell (2007), we contend that space is part of the production and reproduction of power relationships (see also Alonso González, 2016; Rodner et al., 2020). The framework proposed by Dale and Burrell (2007) is particularly useful for our purposes, because the reform we analyze involves a reconfiguration of power relationships between the state and its local branches (now agencies), a new hierarchical structure, and new expectations and responsibilities. Indeed, it has been shown that “space evolves and is manipulated in line with socio-political shifts, so that actors strategically use available space to enable or constrain social interactions” (Rodner et al., 2020, p. 1055). However, the manipulation of space should not be understood only in terms of domination, intimidation, discipline, or surveillance: Space can, in fact, also foster identity, pleasure, and self-fulfillment (Siebert et al., 2017).

Dale and Burrell (2007) posit that the relationship between power and space is evident in three practices: emplacement, enchantment, and enactment.

*Emplacement* is about “constructing spaces for certain people and for certain purposes” (Siebert et al., 2017). It makes boundaries, and the related patterns of inclusion and exclusion, visible (Stephenson et al., 2020), and it involves the deliberate design of space to incorporate meanings, values or concepts (Dale, 2005). In addition, an emplacement creates distinctive affordances (Stephenson et al., 2020): It suggests to individuals how to interact with an artifact, a room, or a building in a predefined way, with varying degrees of rigidity.

The practice of *enchantment*, on the other hand, involves the fusion of material and symbolic aspects to produce emotional responses. Height, monumentality, aesthetic features, and symbols like flags or artifacts are all elements that can be used to trigger power effects, such as to impress, intimidate (Alonso González, 2016; Dale & Burrell, 2007), or create a sense of closure within a community (Siebert et al., 2017).

*Enactment* concerns the lived experience or “the use of space by people” (Alonso González, 2016, p. 22). People’s behavior as they encounter spaces designed for certain purposes and certain groups may confirm or challenge boundaries set to divide people and activities. Borrowing terminology from Stephenson et al. (2020), we argue that while emplacement stresses fixity, enactment requires understanding movement and assemblages, which are new combinations of people and things. Hence, enactment may imply physically modifying space to serve “the needs and possibilities of a particular group” (Dale, 2005, p. 658). This process is also called “appropriation” and can be seen as a

complement to the “affordances” offered by a specific emplacement.

Although the three spatial practices described by Dale and Burrell (2007) are intertwined, processual research on the influence of space in organizing shows that decision makers can prioritize one practice over others to stimulate change in specific phases, depending on the spatial constraints set in prior phases (Alonso González, 2016). In other words, certain phases may involve symbolic interventions, while others focus on physical features or uses of space. In addition, studies demonstrate that organizations are more durable when the three aforementioned spatial practices interweave and support one another (Spicer, 2006). For instance, Siebert et al. (2017) show how emplacement, enchantment, and enactment all play a role to maintain closure and reproduce the existing status order within an institution. This is important to acknowledge when analyzing how spatial practices sustain or jeopardize the autonomy of newly created entities.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research setting

The research question is explored in the context of the agencification of three state museums in Italy. Agencification has occurred in the Italian cultural sector in recent decades, in a context traditionally marked by a highly integrated ministry (Baia Curioni, 2018; Bradburne, 2018). Until the early 1990s, in fact, the Ministry of Culture performed heritage protection and management tasks through a complex set of territorial branches called superintendences (Fedeli & Santoni, 2006). Their responsibilities ranged from heritage identification and protection to direct management of state-level cultural sites. The superintendences depended on the ministry in Rome for scientific, organizational, and financial support, including human resource management.

However, from the early 1990s onwards, in addition to traditional activities of heritage protection and conservation, more attention was paid to access, participation, promotion (Bertacchini et al., 2018), and revenue generation, in a context of cuts to public funding and increasing competition for funds that has also been noted at the international level (Ebberts et al., 2021). To experiment with new forms of management that would support this agenda, in the late 1990s, the Ministry began granting autonomy to a few sites, like the archeological site of Pompeii and the state museum hubs in Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples (Bonini Baraldi, 2014).

More recently, in 2014, the Franceschini reform introduced additional innovations in the Italian cultural sector (DPCM 171/2014). The reform assigned protection tasks to the superintendences and site management to



32 so-called “autonomous museums” and 17 “regional directorates.” The 32 “autonomous museums” are in charge of the most important state-level heritage sites, while the 17 “regional directorates” are responsible for minor ones. The new autonomous museums stand out for their status as first-level executive offices with scientific, financial, accounting, and organizational autonomy, both from the ministry and the superintendences. Since the reform, they now plan their own cultural projects without ministerial approval, and they keep the revenue they earn to complement ministerial funding. Each museum has a statute, a charter of services, a budget, and financial statements. In other words, the new museums are agencies with autonomous powers that have been devolved to them (Casini, 2018). It is worth noting that the “new” autonomous museums in the Franceschini reform were not built from scratch. They are the result of breaking up and merging previously existing organizations. What is currently underway is a complex process of redefining organizational boundaries (Wiedner & Mantere, 2019) and inter-organizational relationships (Grant et al., 2020; Struzyna et al., 2021) regarding personnel, financial resources, and, as we will observe, physical spaces.

For our study, we analyzed three museums: the Archaeological Museum of Taranto (MARTA) in the Apulia region, the Archaeological Museum of Reggio Calabria (MARRC) in the Calabria region, and the Caserta Royal Palace in the Campania region. The three museums were selected as “cultural attractors” by the Italian Government to be investigated under the OECD’s Economic and Local Employment Development Agency in 2015 and 2016.<sup>1</sup> The OECD contracted one of the coauthors as a senior expert to investigate issues related to museum management. The three organizations suited the purpose of the research for the following reasons. First, the three museums were among those selected in 2014 to become autonomous under the Franceschini reform. The OECD project was, therefore, a unique opportunity to investigate the early stages of the agencification process. Second, as there is a long tradition of failed reforms in southern areas of the country—which are seen to operate under less-favorable institutional conditions than their northern counterparts (Ongaro & Valotti, 2008)—the inclusion of three southern museums allows us to keep the influence of the north–south divide constant. Lastly, and most importantly, space-related issues were prominent from the early stages of the OECD’s investigation in all three cases: It was challenging to make sense of the museums’ recent administrative history without considering changes to the physical structure of the buildings. Examining similarities and differences between the three cases gave us a broader understanding of the complexity of spatial issues in the agencification process.

We emphasize that this paper reflects our independent view of the reform process, as none of the authors is currently taking part in any project funded by the selected museums or by any national or supranational institution connected to the reform.

## Data collection and analysis

Table 1 shows the empirical evidence collected and its use in the analysis. First, documents relating to the Franceschini reform were collected and analyzed. Then, field research was conducted between May 2015 and June 2016 comprising meetings, interviews with past and current directors and other stakeholders, and nonparticipant observation. This process produced 3675 min of recordings, which were fully transcribed. We also collected additional documentation and took extensive notes about the experience of visiting the museums.

Data analysis was carried out in different phases. The first phase aimed at generating an initial understanding of the data (Wolcott, 1994), which led us to focus on space as the central orienting concept. Our initial analysis included drafting a chronology of milestones in the spatial and administrative transformations of each case. Figures 1–3 provide a visual timeline of “who did what when” (Langley, 1999, p. 692) for each cultural site.

In the second phase, we reread the reform-related documentation and material from the case studies (documents and transcripts), paying additional attention to how space was discussed, by whom, and concerning which issues. In line with qualitative studies on space in organizational settings (Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Rodner et al., 2020), we followed the recommendations of Gioia et al. (2013, p. 18) and labeled space-related evidence in each case study using “informant-centric terms and codes” (see the second column in Table 2). The example of these first-order concepts included reference to specific museological ideas, physical boundaries between activities or actors, uses of space, emotions triggered by space, and problems raised by space. Triangulation with other sources (design documents, project-related brochures, and direct observation) and comparison across informants helped us refine and strengthen our emerging interpretations.

Next, we divided evidence and the related first-order concepts depending on whether they referred to the situation before or after autonomy. This was suggested by the diversity of views concerning space expressed by the pre-autonomy and postautonomy museum directors and by the fact that some codes were present only in one period (for instance, complaints over space and ideas about future projects emerge only after the reform).

Starting from first-order concepts, we identified second-order themes and aggregate dimensions (see the third and fourth columns in Table 2), developing a data structure that attempts to describe and explain the

<sup>1</sup>We excluded the fourth area of attraction investigated in the project (Trapani) from this analysis, as it is located in a special autonomous region (Sicily) with a different heritage administration system.

**TABLE 1** Sources and their use in the analysis

Source	Focus	Participants/interviewees/documents	Use in the analysis
Meetings (11)	MARTA (2)	1 meeting with 5 local cultural associations; 1 meeting with the regional secretariat of the Ministry of Culture and local public bodies	Gather contextual data on each museum's role in its territory, the museums' past and present challenges, and museums' relationships with stakeholders
	MARRC (2)	1 meeting with local cultural associations and businesses; 1 meeting with Reggio Calabria municipality and university	
	Caserta (7)	1 meeting with Naples University and a territorial development foundation; 1 meeting with Caserta major and other officials of the municipality, 4 meetings with officials of the municipality and local associations; 1 meeting with regional secretariat of the Ministry of culture, Caserta royal site official, and local public bodies	
Interviews with directors (5)	MARTA (2)	Former director (1998–2015), current director (2015–)	Achieving a deep understanding of the administrative context, the museum concept, the renovation project and spatial practices, and the reform process and its implications
	MARRC (2)	Former director (2009–2015), current director (2015–)	
	Caserta (1)	Official with delegation on ordinary administration (February 2015–October 2015)	
Interviews with other local branches of the Ministry of Culture and other public officials in the Region (11)	MARTA (4)	Archeological superintendent for Taranto, Director of the Aragonese Castle, President of the association Friends of MARTA, President of the cultural commission of local businesses	Gather data on the Ministry of Culture's territorial articulation, the reform process, and the role of other public cultural entities in the territory
	MARRC (3)	Alderman for culture of the municipality of Messina, Alderman for culture of the Reggio Calabria province, Director of the Calabrian Regional Secretariat of the Ministry for culture	
	Caserta (4)	Two officials from the Archaeological Superintendence for fine arts and landscapes for the Provinces of Caserta and Benevento, official of the municipality of Caserta, administrative director of San Leucio Royal site	
Documents on cultural and administrative issues	National level	Law Decree 83/2014, DPCM 171/2014, Decrees of the Minister of Cultural Heritage of 27/11/2014 and 23/12/2014, D'Alberti (2013), newspaper articles	Gather data on the content of the Franceschini reform
	MARTA	Archaeological Superintendence of Taranto (2016b) Temporary exhibitions from 1984 to 2015; MARTA (2016b) Budget 2016; MARTA (2016c) Data on personnel and organizational chart	Gather data on museums' cultural meanings and history, concept, human and financial resources, and activities
	MARRC Caserta	Malacrino (2015) Motivation letter UNESCO (1997) WHC Nomination documentation; OECD-LEED (2015) Confidential report Campania	
Documents on spatial issues	MARTA	Archaeological Superintendence of Taranto (2016a) The archeological museum of Taranto; MARTA (2016a) The new museum of Taranto; Archeological Superintendence of Taranto (2016c) DECH-Design for Cultural Heritage. MARTA communication project	Gather data on the origin of the projects, their rationale and contents, the main actors involved, the timing, the expectations and the problems originating during the implementation

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Source	Focus	Participants/interviewees/documents	Use in the analysis
	MARRC	President of the Council on Ministries [PCM] (2011) Presentation of the renovation works at MARRC; Superintendence of Calabria (2013) The new museum project. A chronology; Official Gazette of the Italian Republic [GURI] (2012) Deliberation n. 39, 23 March 2012, on funding to complete the museum; Calabria region (2012), Deliberation n. 204, 4 May 2012 on changes to the financial plan POR Calabria FESR 2007–2013, Superintendence of Calabria (2012) Preliminary project on museum's setting up; 360 Gradi di Reggio Calabria (2014) The Archeological museum of Reggio Calabria.	
	Caserta	Caserta Royal Palace (2015) Internal document; Soragni et al. (2014) Project on the reallocation of spaces of the Royal Palace; DL 31/5/2014 on Actions for the preservation and development of culture	
Nonparticipant observation	All sites	First authors' visits to the museums	Gather personal observations on the visitor experience, the accessibility and uses of spaces

interweaving of space and administrative reform (Gioia et al., 2013). As shown in Table 2, and focusing on the period before autonomy, the aggregate dimension “determinants of spatial practices” includes the second-order themes “museum concept” and “administrative context.” These themes were used by informants to justify or explain the features of actual or desired spatial arrangements, or they appeared in documents relating to the renovation of buildings and exhibitions. In particular, “museum concept” relates to the thought or notion that forms the backbone of a museum project and one that drove it forward (Duffy, 2007; Lewis, 2004). “Administrative context,” on the other hand, refers to the different administrative demands on museums. Depending on the site, these related to financial expectations, organizational boundaries, or administrative status. Our next aggregated dimension—“spatial practices”—emerged from a comparison of our data with the literature on space. This led us to the view that the first-order concepts of allocation of spaces, movement or uses, and emotions resonated with three concepts from the literature of organizational spaces—emplacement, enactment, and enchantment (Dale & Burrell, 2007).

The data structure for the postautonomy period (bottom part of Table 2) is slightly different in terms of the aggregated dimensions. After the reform, the newly appointed managers criticized the prereform spatial practices, because they perceived them to be unfit for the new

museum concept and the new administrative demands. In our interpretation, the new museum concept and administrative context acted as a “trigger of perceived spatial constraints”: They referred, in fact, to arguments mobilized by museum managers to explain why the previous spatial practices constrained their decision-making autonomy. Following this logic, the aggregated dimension “spatial constraints to decision-making autonomy” pools together the second-order themes “operational” and “financial constraints,” which are inspired by the definitions in Verhoest et al. (2004) in relation to decision-making autonomy. We did not observe any relevant space-related constraints relating to human resource management. Lastly, the aggregated dimension “new spatial practices” relates to how new museum managers acted upon space to make autonomy effective. As Bach (2018) puts it, autonomy is not just about public organizations' ability to determine their own preferences but also how to turn these preferences into actions.

Moving from the data structure and analyzing the case studies, in the last phase of the analytical process, we developed a chronologically ordered narrative scheme that presents each case and explains how the prereform museum concept and administrative context determined spatial practices and how the postreform context triggered spatial constraints for the newly appointed directors who were attempting to adapt the spaces to new needs.

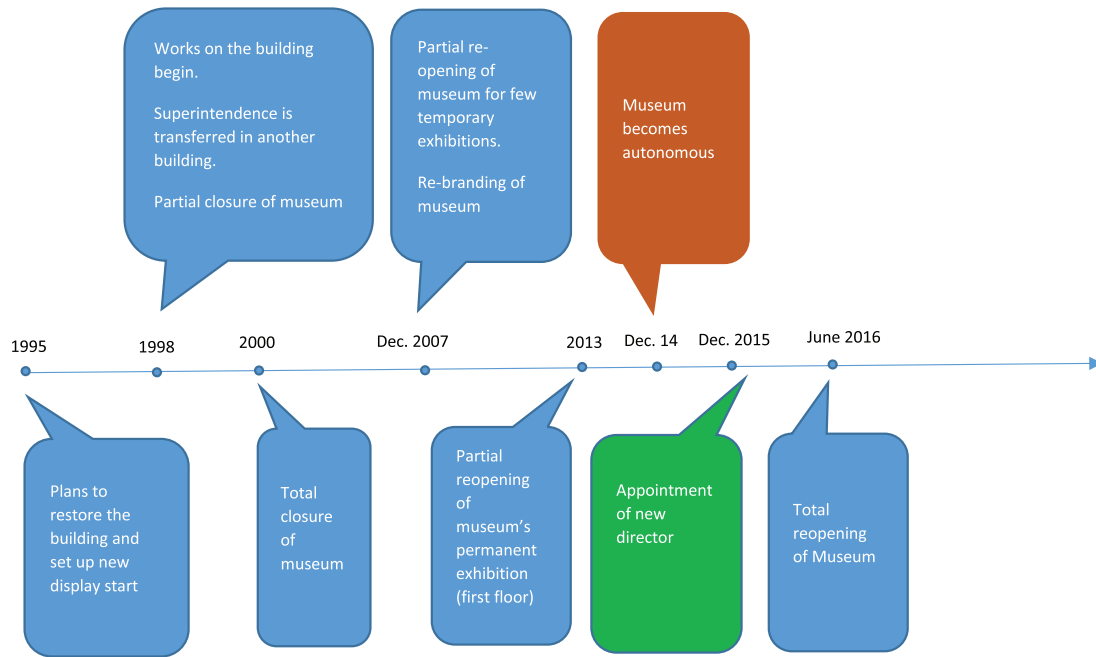


FIGURE 1 Major steps of the new museum project and administrative reform at MARTA

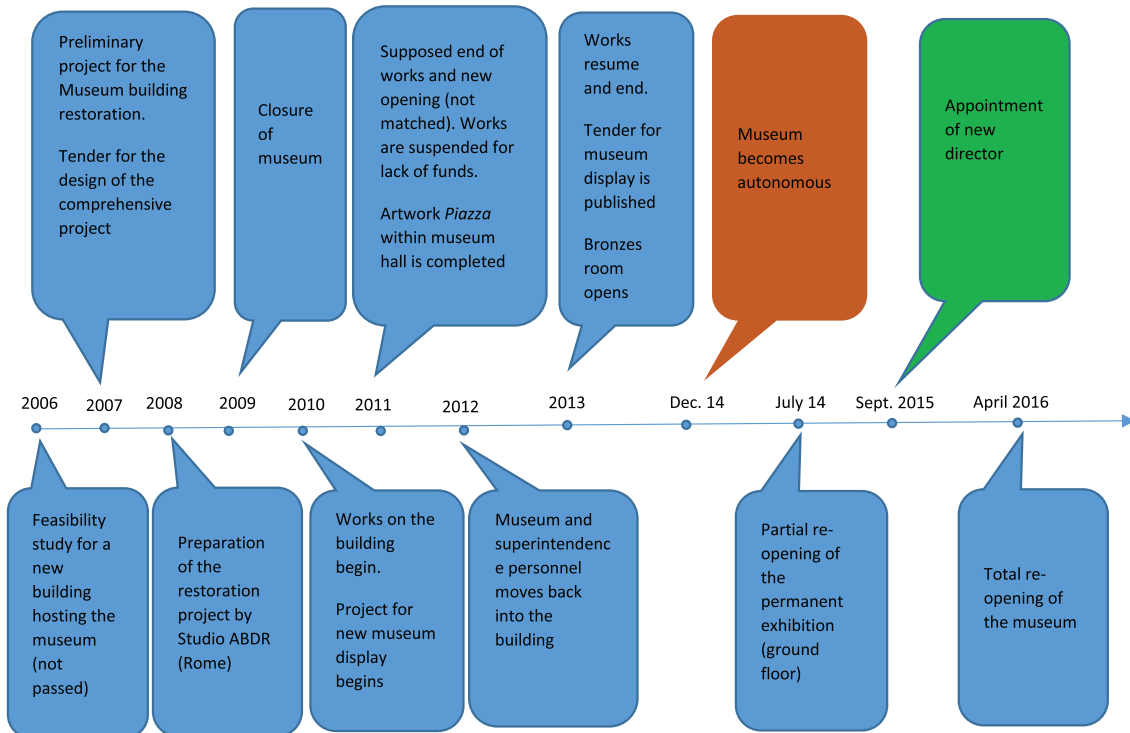


FIGURE 2 Major steps of the new museum project and administrative reform at MARRC



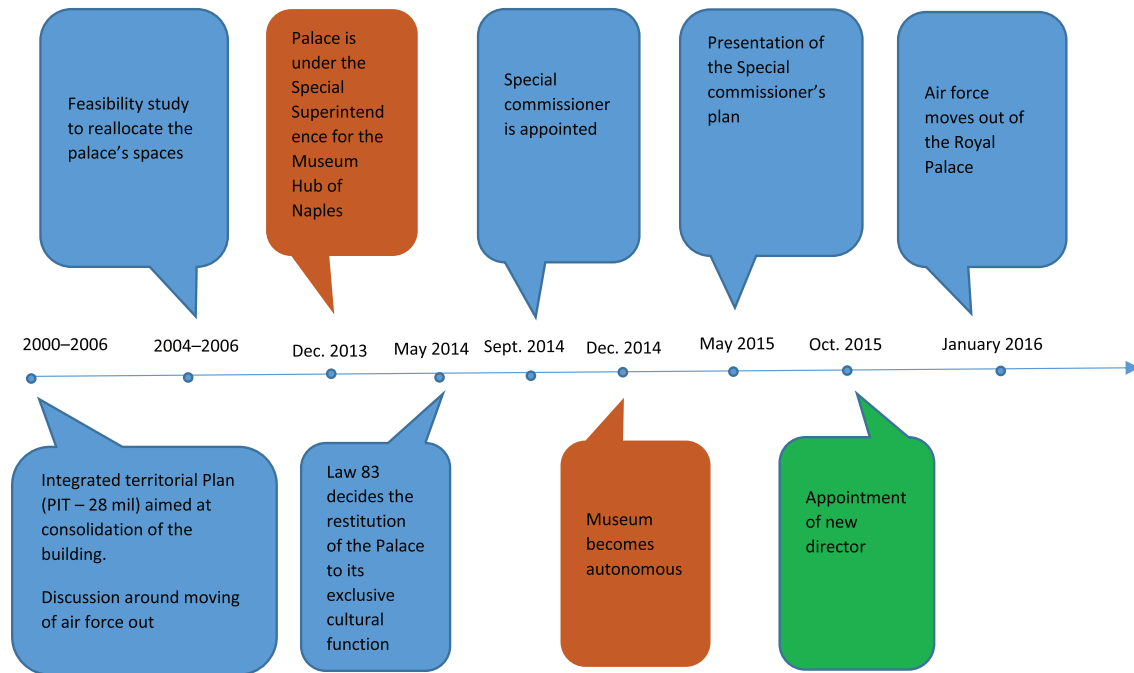


FIGURE 3 Major steps of the new museum project and administrative reform at Caserta Royal Palace

## FINDINGS<sup>2</sup>

### The MARTA

MARTA is one of the most significant museums of Magna Grecia art and archeology. The museum is located in the former Alcantarini Convent (18th century) of Taranto, repurposed in 1882 to house archeological artifacts and transformed 5 years later into a national museum (see Figure 1). The archeological superintendence was established in 1905, and it was also located in the Alcantarini Convent. Until recent years, the site incorporated the museum both physically and administratively (Archaeological Superintendence of Taranto, 2016a).

By the end of the last century, the structure needed extraordinary maintenance. This also provided the opportunity to revise the permanent exhibition, reorganize museum spaces, and design a new brand identity. Planning activity started in the mid-1990s (Archaeological Superintendence of Taranto, 2016a) and involved a scientific committee including the museum director at the time (a superintendence senior archeologist) and other experts. After a long period of construction works, changes in the collection display, and a few partial openings, MARTA eventually reopened its doors in 2016, more than 20 years after the initial plans. Meanwhile, the museum became

autonomous thanks to the Franceschini reform, with a new director appointed in December 2015 (Figure 1).

### Before autonomy

The new architectural project followed a specific museum concept: a traditional institution, with a clear focus on permanent exhibitions (Archaeological Superintendence of Taranto, 2016b; see also Table 2: 1). As the former museum director stated when asked about the rationale for the new collection display:

I'm a classical archaeologist, to me the collections speak for themselves. (interview museum director 1998–2015)

In addition, there were few expectations regarding the need to generate earned income and no control over costs and revenue at the museum level (Table 2: 3).

Spatial practices embodied in the new museum project reflect this view. Emplacement involved allocating almost all the additional space to enlarging the permanent exhibition: MARTA now features nine additional exhibition rooms, but there is not much space for teaching and learning activities, visitor services (cafeteria and shop), and temporary exhibitions (less than 200 m<sup>2</sup> in more than 8000 m<sup>2</sup> of total area) (Archaeological Superintendence of Taranto, 2016a; MARTA, 2016a; see also Table 2: 6).

<sup>2</sup>Documents cited in this section are listed with full title in Table 1.

TABLE 2 Data structure

<b>Before autonomy</b>				
	<b>Illustrative quotes from interviews and documents</b>	<b>First-order concepts</b>	<b>Second-order themes</b>	<b>Aggregated dimensions</b>
1	“The project aimed at reaching (...) an idea of museum extremely clear in the museological order, which can be visited from top to bottom or vice versa, according to a chronological progression from prehistory to the beginning of Christianity or vice versa” (MARTA, 2016a).	Developing a traditional, historically rigorous museum (MARTA)	Museum concept	Determinants of spatial practices
2	“[It is] a modern museum, adapted to international standards and the importance of its contents. (...) A new Archaeological Museum, up to the importance of collections and exceptional pieces” (Superintendence of Calabria, 2013).	Modernizing the museum (MARRC)		
3	“Unlike now, neither the regional nor the state-level administration ever asked us to maximize revenues” (interview MARTA Museum Director, 1998–2015).	Lack of expectation for revenue generation (MARTA)	Administrative context	
4	“At that time, the ownership was not an issue, because the only institutional actor was the superintendence. So I just moved the objects. (...) It was a legitimate choice as the archaeological superintendence was just one and encompassed all sites and museums. It was something that made sense. They were all happy” (interview MARRC Museum Director, 2009–2015).	Fluid organizational boundaries (MARRC)		
5	“The Superintendency manages the Royal Palace, the Park, the English Style Garden. It is a branch office of the Ministry dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali in Caserta via Douhet. It takes care of the monuments of the territory of Caserta” (UNESCO, 1997).	Administrative status of the Royal Palace (Caserta)		
6	“All the available space has been devoted to the permanent exhibition, with minimal room for temporary exhibitions” (interview MARTA Museum Director, 2015–ongoing).	Allocation of space to permanent versus temporary exhibitions (MARTA)	Emplacement	Spatial practices
7	“[Because of the] architectural choices ... made during the renovation ... we had less room for storage ... [Before the renovation project] all the big pieces were in the courtyard, which then became the covered square. Desideri’s great idea was to create a crawl space at the ground floor to give space to the entrance of the museum, where there wasn’t any space” (interview MARRC Museum Director, 2009–2015).	Allocation of space to visitor activities versus storage (MARRC)		
8	“The museum offer is essentially limited to visiting the royal apartments, which occupy a modest portion of the	Allocation of space to cultural versus noncultural users and activities (Caserta)		

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

<b>Before autonomy</b>				
	<b>Illustrative quotes from interviews and documents</b>	<b>First-order concepts</b>	<b>Second-order themes</b>	<b>Aggregated dimensions</b>
	architectural complex (equal to about 10% of its covered area) and the park” (Soragni et al., 2014).			
9	“We have a different view, especially regarding sponsors. We organized concerts too, but to a minor extent. Things like ‘buffets’ were out of my vision of museum ... Certainly, we—as a scientific group—do not agree to open up the museum to food-related activities, you cannot center all museum activities on events” (interview MARTA Museum Director, 1998–2015).	Resisting new uses or activities (MARTA)	Enactment	
10	“At that time, the ownership was not an issue, because the only institutional actor was the superintendence. So I just moved the objects ... It was a legitimate choice as the archaeological superintendence was just one and encompassed all sites and museums. It was something that made sense. They were all happy” (interview MARRC Museum Director, 2009–2015).	Moving objects across organizational boundaries (MARRC)		
11	“The furnishings of the palace are all original, but due to the absence of space, there is no storage linked to the museum in the royal apartments. There is always some room that is closed and takes on this function, where furniture is stacked in case the rooms are needed for exhibitions” (interview with official who administers the Royal Palace, February 2015–October 2015).	Making do with space (Caserta)		
12	“The text, the logo, are composed by western greek characters which were used in the past in the Taranto area. These are friendly recognizable characters, which do not need particular knowledge to be decodified. Indeed, they are accessible, but they also communicate that is something dealing with the past” (Archeological Superintendence of Taranto, 2016c).	Communicating tradition and solidity (MARTA)	Enchantment/ disenchantment	
13	“The large entrance and visitor reception hall, from which you can glimpse—through a glass—the powerful figures of the two bronzes, thus becomes the central place of the new museum” (Superintendence of Calabria, 2013).	Impress through powerful artifacts (MARRC)		
14	“In 2012, a Rai 1 television showed the entrance to the site as a bazaar, featuring a fortune teller who sells lottery numbers to tourists ... Two years later, in 2014, a La 7 show rekindled the spotlight on the palace, in particular on the 13 families who live there illegally” (OECD-LEED, 2015a).	Being on the spotlight for the wrong things (Caserta)		

<b>After autonomy</b>				
	<b>Illustrative quotes from interviews and documents</b>		<b>Second-order themes</b>	<b>Aggregated dimensions</b>
15	“We are undertaking a policy of cultural democracy through the organization of events on open days, museum nights, May 1st. This brings in a part of the population that previously felt excluded ...” (interview Museum Director, 2015–ongoing).	Integrating the museum and the city (MARTA)	Museum concept	Triggers of perceived spatial constraints
16	“The importance of the Riace Bronzes has taken attention away from the museum’s other collections ... This project could include traveling exhibitions and the promotion of culture in our district, as well as allowing us to exhibit stored objects” (Malacrino, 2015).	Enhance all collection items (MARRC)		
17	“The project of reorganizing the entire Caserta complex, with the objective to create an exclusive cultural, educational and museum destination” (Soragni et al., 2014).	Creating a museum destination (Caserta)		
18	“Clearly the museum performance should be evaluated on financial revenue. In my opinion however, the most important thing is the culture that the museum will be able to transmit to its citizens” (interview MARTA Museum Director, 2015–ongoing).	New financial and cultural expectations (MARTA)	Administrative context	
19	“[There is also] ... the issue of the division of assets between the superintendence and the museums ... [Before autonomy] the assets were unique to the superintendence and its museums. Now, with the division, this has created problems” (interview MARRC Museum Director, 2015–ongoing).	Rigid organizational boundaries (MARRC)		
20	“Starting from 2015 the Palace becomes autonomous also from the Special Superintendence of Naples (at least on paper)” (OCSE-LEED, 2015b).	Empowered administrative status (Caserta)		
21	“Space is a problem. (...) there is no space for personnel offices (...). The restoration laboratory should be enlarged (...) Furthermore, we had to reduce the temporary exhibition space even more to organize activities for primary school students” (interview MARTA Museum Director, 2015–ongoing).	Lack of space for temporary exhibitions and offices (MARTA)	Operational constraints	Spatial constrains to actual decision-making autonomy
22	“Apart from the difficulties connected to the administrative reform implementation, we are also facing many problems related to the new display, which I have inherited from the previous management” (interview Museum Director, 2015–ongoing).	Difficulties in implementing the new display (MARRC)		
23	“The designation of a large part of the complex for military use makes most of it inaccessible to the public, and makes it impossible to develop, both externally and internally, a suitable visit path. Also, it blocks access to the park and the surrounding green spaces, ultimately preventing the visual perception of the four facades” (Soragni et al., 2014).	Impossible to develop a visitor path (Caserta)		
24	“The energy efficiency system has not been completed because funds have been spent elsewhere, so today we inherit a building with incredibly high electricity costs. [...] Maintenance costs are also very high: the building has several problems, and this is why those costs are so high” (interview MARTA Museum Director, 2015–ongoing).	Difficult to pin-down costs (MARTA)	Financial constraints	
25	“He [the new museum director] is also raising a patrimonial issue, because clearly the collection is part of the assets in the balance sheet” (interview MARRC Museum Director, 2009–2015).	Reduction of museum’s assets (MARRC)		
26	“When the James Bond production came to assess the feasibility of using the site, they had about 500 semi-trailers, and we did not know where to put them. If we asked the air force	Missing revenues (Caserta)		

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

After autonomy			
	Illustrative quotes from interviews and documents	Second-order themes	Aggregated dimensions
	[which controls the parking lots], the money would have been given to them, not to us!" (interview with official who administers the Royal Palace, February 2015–October 2015).		
27	"We organize music festivals too ... The festival is loved because it's not in a typical theatre. It's in a room that—even if the acoustics are not perfect—it's intimate, cozy" (interview MARTA Museum Director, 2015–ongoing).	Opening up to nontypical uses or activities (MARTA)	Re-enactment New spatial practices
28	"A lot of my efforts are dedicated to the issue of storage, because by the end of the year everything that is inside a museum will become the responsibility of that museum. And, if I don't bring these objects back before the end of the year ... a remedy must be found ... [T]his is a battle that I am conducting personally, often picking up objects and bringing them back here by car" (interview MARRC museum director, 2015–ongoing).	Moving objects across organizational boundaries (MARRC)	
29	"With the commissioner's plan, 50% of the palace will host exhibitions, conference rooms, tourism services (bookshop, cafeteria, nursery). The remaining 25% will be assigned to a third party for compatible uses (a school, university, luxury hotel)" (interview with official who administers the Royal Palace, February 2015–October 2015).	Changing space allocation in favor of cultural uses and users (Caserta)	Re-emplacement
30	"The idea is to leave the entrance for groups and visitors with reduced mobility on Via Cavour, and have the main entry on Corso Umberto, obviously provided with security systems. The scenographic effect would be very different, and that could give the idea of a more inclusive museum ... which the current entry does not provide" (interview MARTA museum director, 2015–ongoing).	Communicating inclusiveness (MARTA)	Re-enchantment
31	"The museum, with its inner 'square' and the terrace with channel views, should become a lively and inclusive place in the city, where events can take place (evening openings, books presentation, live music, cultural drinks, happenings for university students)" (Malacrino, 2015).	Becoming a lively and inclusive place (MARRC)	
32	"The visit must necessarily begin from the monumental staircase, through the main atrium and the arcaded gallery and ... must allow to appreciate in a unified way the vision of the chapel" (Soragni et al., 2014).	Enhance monumentality (Caserta)	

Enactment of the space is consistent with these constraints. Temporary exhibitions were rare and did not charge extra for additional tickets (Archaeological Superintendence of Taranto, 2016b). Other activities aimed at attracting new visitors, earning revenue, or repurposing the collections, like concerts, or food-related events within the museum, were seen as questionable (Table 2: 9).

Even the 2007-designed museum logo symbolically recalled the idea of a traditional public institution (Table 2: 12):

The MARTA logo is placed in a square element, such that it can be used as a sort of seal for different uses. A stable, solid element, as a public cultural institution should

be ... (Archaeological Superintendence of Taranto, 2016c).

### After autonomy

The new directorship promotes a distinctive museum concept with inclusion and openness as core values, which marks a radical shift from the traditional view of the previous directorship (Table 2: 15). Using the words of the MARTA museum director appointed in 2015:

It is a museum that, first of all, should be closely related to the territory and must be fully integrated with this process of regeneration and transformation of the city.



The director is also addressing issues relating to internal organization and financial results, as dictated by the new administrative context (see Table 2: 18 and MARTA, 2016b, 2016c).

Interestingly, the constraining nature of prior space-related choices on decision-making autonomy—operational and financial—emerged strongly during the interview with the new director. This was especially the case in relation to the lack of space for temporary exhibitions (see Table 2: 21) and the presence of locked-in costs resulting from faulty or suboptimal design choices (see Table 2: 24 and MARTA, 2016b). Therefore, in a process of re-enactment of spaces, the director seeks to engage citizens and build a strong relationship with the city and to increase earned revenue through events and projects (such as open days and museum nights) (Table 2: 27). The idea of opening a new door on the main street is highly symbolic, using space as a resource to reconnect the museum to the city (Table 2: 30).

Nevertheless, the physical boundaries inherited from the past create rigidities that are difficult to overcome. The new leadership envisions creative ways to force the space to allow diversified activities and potentially increase revenue, such as using some of the rooms of the nearby convent or the foyer for temporary exhibitions and the cloister for the bar. However, after 20 years of work in progress, larger interventions that involve new construction remain difficult to plan (this explains why the “re-emplacement” section is empty in Table 2).

## The MARRC

The MARRC hosts artifacts dating back to Ancient Greece, including world-famous Riace bronzes. Until 2014, MARRC was one of 22 Calabrian archeological museums and sites managed by the Archaeological Superintendence of Calabria, which was in turn controlled by the Calabrian Regional Directorate for Cultural Heritage. While MARRC historically displays the most important artifacts found in the region, minor archeological museums under the same superintendence have traditionally displayed less significant or redundant artifacts (360 Gradi di Reggio Calabria, 2014).

Discussion about improving the building—a fascist-style edifice designed by architect Piacentini and built between 1932 and 1941—dates to 2006 (PCM, 2011). After initially considering the possibility of building a new structure, the Calabrian regional director at the time eventually decided in 2007 to enhance the quality of the Piacentini building in the areas of systems and visitor services (PCM, 2011; Superintendence of Calabria, 2012; Superintendence of Calabria, 2013). In reality, the project grew more and more complex and required more time and money (estimated costs increased from €17 million to €33 million—GURI, 2012; Calabria Region, 2012).

Following the 2014 reform, MARRC became an “autonomous museum” (see Figure 2). Minor museums and sites previously under the archeological superintendence were transferred to the newly created regional directorate. All these newly established entities are now coordinated by the Calabrian regional secretariat (a territorial branch of the ministry).

## Before autonomy

The new architectural project was based on the idea of a modern, open, and attractive museum centered on the exceptional value of the collection and above all the powerful and iconic figures of the two bronzes (Table 2: 2). Visitor enchantment via a new monumental entrance hall was central to the project concept (Table 2: 13). Enriched by a glass partition from which the two bronzes are immediately visible, the new entrance hall immediately affects the visitor experience. However, this “theatrical” solution had implications in terms of the functionalization of spaces, requiring, in particular, reducing storage areas to 800 m<sup>2</sup> (Table 2: 7).

As a result, the former MARRC director (2009–2015) temporarily moved some objects to an external warehouse (Table 2: 10). Others were “returned” to smaller Calabrian archeological museums close to where they were found. Moving objects from MARRC was consistent with the policy of restitution, an internationally accepted approach that aims, among other things, to provide better historical and spatial contextualization of archeological findings by displaying them where they were found. From the interviews, it emerged this decision was unproblematic at the time, as it implied only changing the location of artifacts under the responsibility of the same administration (the archeological superintendence), in an administrative context of blurred organizational boundaries between MARRC and the minor Calabrian archeological museums (Table 2: 4). For this reason, transfer-related documentation did not specify the legal status of the transfer and its duration—that is, temporary loan, temporary storage scheme, or permanent transfer, as reflected in the following quote by the MARRC Museum director in charge at that time:

I have transferred many pieces to the various museums of the superintendence and also to the civic museums around Calabria ... However, all this was carried out as ministerial “storage” and therefore did not imply a transfer of ownership ...

## After autonomy

With the new autonomous status, organizational boundaries between the superintendence, MARRC and minor

museums changed, with a radically different administrative context. Thus, the decision of the former museum director to move objects to other museums depots became problematic and raised ownership issues (Table 2: 19). The museum concept promoted by the new MARRC director also differentiated itself from the previous one. A letter submitted during the process to select a new director is telling, as it envisions repositioning the museum as an institution that leverages its world-famous pieces to raise awareness of the uniqueness of the rest of the collection in both permanent and temporary exhibitions (Table 2: 16).

The operational and financial space-related constraints that emerged during the interview with the new director must be understood in this context. First, while the design of the permanent collection was already defined when he was appointed, many implementation issues were still ongoing at the beginning of his term (see Table 2: 22). Second, during the interview, the new director expressed concerns for the reduction of the reported financial value of the collection in the museum balance sheet due to the previous transfer of artifacts to minor museums (Table 2: 25).<sup>3</sup> Third, the reduction of the museum storage areas decided by the former director limits, in the new director's view, MARRC's capacity to improve visitor experience by organizing temporary exhibitions and renovating the permanent exhibition through object substitution. Considering all these aspects together, this is how the newly appointed museum director describes the situation:

I am directing a museum where the permanent exhibition has just been finished by others, without a collection with which to set up temporary exhibitions, and without personnel ... It is such a mess!

To tackle these constraints, the new director attempted to get the objects back within the museum's walls by 2016, when, according to additional regulations issued after the reform, objects located inside a physical space would be administratively included in the inventory of the related institution (see Table 2: 28). For the new director, this physical enactment of an administrative boundary should enable the implementation of the new museum concept, and the museum should become a lively and inclusive place (Table 2: 31). On the other hand, a physical reorganization of spaces was not on the agenda, apart from a few marginal interventions to free small additional spaces

for storage (this explains why the "re-employment" section is empty in Table 2).

## The Caserta Royal Palace

The Caserta Royal Palace is an example of hybrid baroque and neoclassical styles. It occupies an area of almost 80,000 m<sup>2</sup>, with 1200 rooms on seven different floors overlooking a 120-ha park. In 1997, the palace complex was nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 1997).

Once the residence of the Bourbon Royal Family, during the 20th century, the palace has been used by different bodies, including as an air force education and training facility and a branch of the National School of Public Administration (Soragni et al., 2014). In 2014, the Italian Government promoted a radical transformation of the site with the aim of "returning it to its exclusive cultural educational and exhibition original destination" (DL 31/5/2014). A special commissioner was appointed in September 2014 to plan the reorganization of spaces.

Like MARRC and MARTA, from December 2014, the Caserta Royal Palace became an autonomous museum (see Figure 3).

## Before autonomy

While one would think that the Royal Palace would be a historical and cultural facility, in reality, only 20% of the space was used for cultural purposes in 2015 (exhibition or back-office space), while the remaining part was used by the air force (occupying 70%), the National School of Public Administration (5%), the territorial superintendence (3%), and other entities (2%) (see Table 2: 8 and Caserta Royal Palace, 2015). Curiously, the families of current or former employees also lived in the palace, apparently illegally (Caserta Royal Palace, 2015). The presence of the air force dates back to the end of World War II and lies outside any museum concept rationale (this explains why the "museum concept" section is empty in Table 2):

After the armistice and the German occupation of Italy, the portions of the Royal Palace assigned to the Ministry of Finance and the Air Force were requisitioned for military use; with the liberation the Allied command replaced the German one and, in the following years and until 1947, negotiations began to allow resettlement in the Palace of the Air Force Academy, which obtained, on a provisional and informal basis, the delivery of the various environments directly from the British Military Command of occupation. (Soragni et al., 2014)

<sup>3</sup>The capitalization of heritage assets for financial reporting purposes has been highly criticized by accounting scholars for its technical shortcomings, limited usefulness, and social and moral implications (see for instance Ferri et al., 2021). It is interesting to observe how abstract and apparently neutral mandates issued by accounting-standard setters become then a source of real preoccupation for heritage professionals in the field, as in this case.

In addition to this historically determined fragmentation between users and uses, it should also be acknowledged that, until the Franceschini reform, the entity in charge of heritage management at the Royal Palace was particularly weak from an administrative point of view. The palace was in fact considered a mere office of the shifting territorial branches of the Ministry of Culture (Table 2: 5), with a director appointed internally among senior bureaucrats, and no autonomy over financial resources, including earned income (Bonini Baraldi, 2014).

As a result, a cultural enactment of the space was constrained, with serious effects on the quality of the cultural offering. For instance, because the air force controlled most of the access to the palace, the public entrance did not allow visitors to see 17th century rooms before 18th century ones, interrupting the chronological narrative. Due to lack of space, temporary exhibitions could only be organized by moving old furniture from some of the rooms included in the permanent exhibition. In addition, some historical rooms were closed to visitors and were used to store material, as there was no dedicated storage space. Lastly, educational services occupied a room of only 40 m<sup>2</sup> that could host just one class at a time (even though the palace is a common destination for school trips), reducing the overall educational offer (Table 2: 11).

Several disrespectful behaviors at the site also led to a gradual disenchantment. Illegal visitors and sellers used poorly monitored entry points on the air force side to freely access the facility. Citizens and tourists used the park to play football or swim in the historical fountains, while the families of retired doorkeepers kept living at the palace as part of old practices that were hard to stop. The repeated collapses of parts of the façade contributed to the overall decay of the site, not to mention the role of outright illegal behaviors, as reported in the quote below (see also Table 2: 14):

In 2014 the picture wasn't changed and the national media reported the following situations: sportsmen jogging in the historical gardens even during closure days; the keys of the Royal Palace found in the apartment of Nicola Cosentino [a politician convicted for mafia association] with a note: affectionately yours, Ezio [the Caserta Prefect]. (OCSE-LEED, 2015)

## After autonomy

It is not surprising that the palace was the focus of a major intervention that envisioned both greater autonomy of the site thanks to the Franceschini reform and an ad hoc program to reallocate spaces under the responsibility of a special commissioner (DL 31/5/2014; see also

Table 2: 20). In the new administrative context, there were increased expectations the palace would play a role as a tourist attraction and a grand vision of using the palace as a cultural site only (see Table 2: 17).

Here, again, several constraints emerged as a reaction to prior spatial conditions, which have negatively affected not only the museum's cultural offering (see Table 2: 23) but also its financial and operational outputs. On the revenue side, for instance, the Royal Palace could not set separate, higher-priced tickets for temporary exhibitions, because the rooms where they were held could not be isolated from the standard exhibition. The insufficient space allocated for commercial initiatives also negatively affected revenue (see Table 2: 26). On the cost side, unclear responsibility for shared spaces made it difficult to control behavior and reduce extraordinary maintenance costs. As stated by the official who administers the Royal Palace:

The air force used to only pay for the ordinary maintenance expenses of the rooms it occupied, and expenses related to common spaces (roof, facades etc.) were always paid by the superintendence.

Although these weaknesses had always been acknowledged, they arguably become more pressing due to the expectations of self-generated revenue and cost control linked to the new autonomous status.

The 5-year plan (from 2015–2020) developed by the special commissioner established a budget of €24 million to radically change the allocation of space (Soragni et al., 2014). It also redefined the main entrance to the site, aiming to enchant the visitor with a unified view of the chapel (Table 2: 34). The air force was moved out of the palace to free up 55,000 m<sup>2</sup>, almost 70% of total floor space. Twenty thousand square meters of this new floor space was allocated to the museum, increasing the space for permanent and temporary exhibitions, visitor services, conference rooms, and office space. About 24,000 m<sup>2</sup> was to be leased to a third party, probably a for-profit organization, that will develop hospitality-related activities (high-end hotel and/or restaurant and conference center<sup>4</sup>) (Caserta Royal Palace, 2015; Soragni et al., 2014, see Table 2: 32).

The plan entails a new assemblage of organizations in space, as well as deep re-enactment and re-employment of the palace's spaces. However, it was approved before the appointment of the new director actually in charge of implementing it and does not include any analysis of the institutional and economic feasibility of the whole operation. Who will be responsible for the whole palace, with the power to set rents for other occupants? Will the rent paid by the for-profit organization be a revenue stream

<sup>4</sup>At the time of the data collection, this element was still under discussion.

for the museum? To what extent will this cover increasing maintenance costs associated with more than doubling the floor space of the museum? Is the space allocated to temporary exhibitions enough to generate profitable events? All in all, the risk of ignoring entities' responsibilities and cost–revenue impact is that the autonomous museum will inherit old constraints both in terms of visitor experience and control over revenue streams and cost structure.

## DISCUSSION

Informed by a sociomaterial view of organizational phenomena (Dale & Burrell, 2007; Orlikowski, 2007; Taylor & Spicer, 2007), our research furthers the understanding of *de facto* autonomy (Kleizen et al., 2018; Korinek & Veit, 2015; Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014) by exploring the influence of space on agencification processes. According to the 2014 Franceschini reform, the most relevant Italian cultural sites were to be managed by autonomous organizations. Hence, the walls of selected museums were transformed into organizations, separating the new institutions from the superintendence on the one hand, and the newly established regional directorates on the other. This implies a shift from a context of blurred organizational boundaries (museums were mere “offices” of the superintendences) and financial dependency on the central ministry, to a context of rigid organizational boundaries and increasing incentives for self-generated revenue. However, what seems relatively straightforward on paper was not so easy to implement.

Across our three case studies, space consistently emerged as a constraint to, and an enabler of, *de facto* autonomy. Space constrains *de facto* autonomy because, as shown, the museum concept (or lack of thereof) and administrative context characterizing the pre-autonomous period has structured spaces, thus becoming “durable.” At MARTA, for instance, the focus on the archeological professional community and the reliance on public funds resulted in an emplacement that committed most rooms to permanent exhibitions, and an enactment of space centered on core cultural activities. At MARRC, the goal of enchanting the visitor by focusing on few masterpieces justified the reduction of storage space and the restitution of objects to minor museums, which was also aided by a context of fluid organizational boundaries. At Caserta, the lack of a clear museum concept went hand in hand with the palace use by non-cultural actors and for noncultural purposes. As observed, the inherited spatial features are perceived as limits to the decision-making autonomy of the new entities in relation to financial and operational aspects. This is due to the fact that previous spatial practices were unfit for the postautonomy museum concepts and administrative contexts, which involve an increased attention to the visitor experience, a stronger relationship with the

territory, and a proactive approach to revenue generation and cost control. As an example, at MARTA, the lack of adequate space for temporary exhibitions and educational activity limits the policy of cultural democracy promoted by the new director. At MARRC, the new director is mostly concerned with the lack of storage areas and the impoverishment of museum collections, because these aspects hinder his idea of enhancing the whole collection.

The close relationship between administrative context, museum concept, and spatial practices extends to agencification research the argument that spaces are not neutral (Dale & Burrell, 2007; Taylor & Spicer, 2007): They are highly influenced by the cultural and administrative context in which they are created (the “determinant of spatial practices”), reproducing specific organizational boundaries and expectations about cultural and economic outcomes. Indeed, the new museum concept and administrative context act as triggers of perceived spatial constraints, limiting decision-making autonomy in the financial and operational areas.

Compared with the constraints of *de facto* autonomy usually discussed in the literature on agencification (see Verhoest et al., 2004), space has some distinctive features. First, space is a constraint that emerges outside the dyadic relationship between the ministry responsible and the agency. The source of spatial constraints must rather be found in a network of actors who operate with different roles and in different moments of the site's life. At MARRC, for instance, the idea of restoring the building was initiated by the regional director for cultural heritage and implemented with the support of the Calabrian Superintendence. At Caserta, reallocation of space was decided by the ministry and designed by a special commissioner without the involvement of the future director. In other words, space is more a site-specific issue than a centrally designed limitation to *de facto* autonomy. Second, spatial constraints are not introduced during or after autonomy-related reform in order to strengthen or reassert control from the center. Spatial constraints are instead the result of a misaligned interleaving of the physical renovation of spaces and organizational change processes (including directorship cycles). For instance, at MARTA and MARRC, the renovation process was designed and carried out before the reform, with the “new” museums opening their doors in a different administrative context, and under a new directorship that was only partially involved in emplacement-related choices. This leads to inconsistencies between spatial practices and the postautonomy museum concept and administrative demands, underlining the role of temporal dynamics related to space in agencification processes.

While inherited spatial practices reduce the operational and financial *de facto* autonomy of the newly appointed directors, it is also true that addressing these constraints via new spatial practices is central to their agenda. This suggests that space also represents an



enabler of de facto autonomy, insofar as it can be leveraged to “forge” autonomy (Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014 p. 246). An explicit recognition of the double nature of space might considerably enlarge both theoretical and practical approaches to agencification. Understandably, the spatial practices available to the new directors are necessarily limited at MARTA and MARRC, where prior emplacement choices are not reversible in the short term and without significant investments. The only possible strategy here is the re-enactment of spaces and—to a minor extent—their re-enchantment. Caserta is the only case where the renovation of spaces goes hand in hand with the agencification of the site, constituting an interesting example of synchronization between institutional and physical changes. A re-emplacement of the site, including reallocation of space to new actors and uses, is explicitly acknowledged as a way to support the new autonomous status. Although the lack of involvement of the new director in the commissioner’s plan may produce inconsistent spatial practices and jeopardize the museum’s concept, space is here, and also partially in the other cases, a crucial enabler of de facto autonomy. This finding adds to recent studies that suggest that autonomy is a dynamic rather than static concept (Hanretty & Koop, 2013; Korinek & Veit, 2015; Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014), as it can be “formed, maintained or lost” over time (Kleizen et al., 2018, p. 363).

Our set of findings also extends earlier research in the field of organizational studies about the influence of space. According to Dale and Burrell (2007), organizational endurance can be enhanced by acting on emplacement (affordances), enactment (movement), and enchantment (symbols). The higher the level of consistency between the three spatial practices the stronger will be its relative endurance (Rodner et al., 2020; Siebert et al., 2017; Spicer, 2006). We complement this view in two ways. First, if it is true that space creates rigidities, our case studies show that such rigidities mainly originate from choices relating to emplacement, which are difficult to modify in the short term and without significant investments. Second, we contribute to the previous literature by maintaining that organizational endurance is influenced by the alignment of the timing of physical renovation of spaces and organizational change processes.

## CONCLUSION

How do spatial practices influence the de facto autonomy of public bodies in the context of the broader pattern of agencification triggered by NPM reforms? By bridging two areas of inquiry—public management research and organizational studies—our study contributes to the former by highlighting that spatial practices constrain the financial and operational decision-making autonomy of newly constructed organizational bodies when spatial affordances are created irrespective of reform cycles and

senior management appointments. Indeed, timing, and especially administrative timing, is crucial when modifying space. At the same time, our research shows that space is also an enabler of de facto autonomy as new directors try to overcome the perceived restrictions shortly after their appointment with new spatial practices. Therefore, this study maintains that space should be given serious consideration when transforming ministerial branches into agencies. The implications for policy makers and managers, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research are outlined below.

## Policy and managerial implications

Given the durable nature of space, this study suggests that space should be designed to be open to different uses, with solutions that are easy to reconvert. As we find in the MARTA case, affordances that makes sense under a given administrative framework may prove ineffective when the framework changes. In addition, as the MARRC case highlights, an assessment of where objects are and who should be responsible for them should be conducted as part of the process of “cutting the cord” between an entity and its parent organizations (Wiedner & Mantere, 2019). The early clarification of areas of responsibility could avoid conflict at later stages. Furthermore, discussion about changes to physical space should go hand in hand with an assessment of its effects in terms of revenue and cost. This is an element missing in all the three cases under investigation, and most worryingly, in the case of Caserta. Finally, our analysis sheds light on a high level of heterogeneity among cases, in terms of physical features (i.e., aesthetic value and size), legacy of the prereform period, and challenges under the Franceschini reform. Each physical space has its own historical characteristics, which make it a unique site with specific challenges and possible solutions. This implies that space-related problems are site specific and cannot be solved with uniform regulation issued by the central government. Our results suggest, therefore, that policymakers and site managers should jointly pay attention to space when introducing reform. Policy makers should include an appraisal of the state of the art of spaces at the site level as part of the agencification process. Dialog with site managers should be fostered to disentangle space-related financial and operational constraints. This would involve clarification of who is in power (and responsible) for making decisions regarding space (planning renovation of buildings, designing new displays, etc.). This is an issue left unclear in our three museums (depending on the case: the superintendent on duty, the regional director, the [former] museum director, a special commissioner or the Ministry itself). In short, reducing the constraining power of space requires an effort both at the level of the minister responsible and the agency.



## Limitations and research agenda

Our research focuses on the influence of space in relation to a specific process of change (i.e., agencification) and in a sector where physical assets (i.e., collections and buildings) are part and parcel of the activities of the organization. In this context, the influence of space is magnified, allowing a better comprehension of its facets. A further promising area of investigation would be to analyze the influence of spatial features on transformation processes that pose different challenges than those relating to agencification. As far as the cultural sector is concerned, as we write, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced museums all over the world to create online spaces (Agostino et al., 2020). Future research could explore how spatial practices play out in a virtual environment and whether they replicate or overcome the constraints observed in physical spaces. Moving outside cultural sector processes, researchers could explore the relationship between spatial features and changes to public management taking place in the context of consolidation reform initiatives (Szescilo, 2020). Possible research questions could address how space is dealt with when public bodies are merged or how cuts to the quantity and quality of facilities affect service effectiveness. In addition, it would be interesting to track how spatial features influence the reform process in sectors where public service is less anchored in buildings and material artifacts, such as education and health care.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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