

# Museum Networks: A Tool for Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development of the Years Coming

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## Abstract:

The recent global pandemic, due to the spread of Covid-19, has highlighted the fragility of our planet and the need to increase the collective effort towards dynamics of sustainable development. A new scenario has emerged in which it is necessary to accelerate environmental protection actions and the use of more rational production and consumption models. In this framework, therefore, not only the governments leading the individual countries are called to act, but also all the other players in society (local institutions, companies, associations, individual citizens). A significant role can be played by museum networks. Organizations which, through adequate integrated management of cultural heritage, can contribute to the achievement of some of the 17 objectives defined by the Agenda 2030 which must be achieved in the coming years. In the last decade, important scientific studies have highlighted the strategic role of museum networks both for a more efficient management of cultural heritage and for the cultural, social and economic growth of the territories. The following work fits into this line of research and, through the analysis of a case study, intends to investigate the economic and social benefits that can be generated by the aforementioned systemic organizations. The aim is to strengthen the thesis according to which museum networks can favor both a better management of cultural resources, promoting economies of scale, and the local development of the communities in which they are located. Tools capable of stimulating sustainable growth in the coming years.

**Keywords:** Museum Networks, Management, Sustainable Development, Territory, Governance.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The recent global pandemic, due to the spread of Covid-19, has highlighted the fragility of our planet and the need to increase the collective effort towards dynamics of sustainable development.

Sustainability is an objective that can be achieved not only by establishing rules for the protection of the environment but also through a general assumption of responsibility by every single individual and institution such as to make it customary to adopt rational behaviors and processes and common sense. Therefore, aiming for sustainable development means encouraging the evolution of the community according to models oriented towards the protection of natural resources but also towards the economic, social and cultural growth of society. The 2030 Agenda, for example, with its 17 goals, highlights how sustainability represents a goal that can only be achieved through the implementation of a vast and complex program that involves all the different sectors of society.

This means that, in addition to the governments of the individual countries who have signed up to this ambitious action program and who will therefore have to work to translate the general lines of the Agenda 2030 into operational plans and programs, the actors present in the individual territories will also have to provide their contribution by encouraging good sustainability practices.

In this sense, it is important to underline how some institutions, precisely because of their peculiarities, lend themselves more than others to playing a central role in the sustainable growth of the communities in which they are inserted. Museums in particular represent cultural realities, which are now recognized as having a central role in the dynamics of growth. "They are asked to affirm national, regional, local identities, those of specific groups or minorities. They are required to promote formal and informal education, they are expected to be active scientific research centers, they are sometimes required to be able to attract tourists and to be able to contribute to local economic development" (Lanzinger & Zan, 2007, p. 123). Management studies, for several decades, tend to configure museums as institutions capable not only of managing and enhancing cultural resources but also of stimulating the cultural and social growth of the community through the performance of educational functions, stimulating the participation of young people and the elderly, promoting the inclusion of the most fragile categories and the disabled. The evolution of the museum over time, the greater complexity of the role it is called to play today and the necessary recourse to innovative tools to attract visitors and tourists, nonetheless require a great ability to maintain an adequate balance between a good quality of services and museum activities and the economic and professional resources employed. For

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these reasons and due to the fact that not all museums have similar characteristics (in terms of size, geographical location, number of users, cultural offer, economic resources, etc.), especially in recent years, the debate on the need to resort to new management tools in the museum sector has greatly intensified.

Indeed, in the last decade, important scientific studies have focused on the strategic role that museum networks can play both for a more efficient management of cultural heritage and for promoting the local development of territories. This is a line of research that has explored the topic in depth by trying to clarify the distinctive features of museum networks and systems, focusing on the potential of these structural and managerial arrangements to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of network organizations (Maffei, 2012; Montella, 2014) as well as investigating their propensity to create value for both producers and users of cultural products (Pencarelli & Splendiani, 2011; Cerquetti, 2014). There are numerous studies conducted with a qualitative approach which, through the analysis of case studies, have tried to grasp its peculiarities by highlighting the main strengths and weaknesses in the organizational, management and governance models adopted. Still others have highlighted how forms of museum cooperation are able to stimulate better training paths through an enhancement of orientation activities (Corradini, 2017). Finally, the scientific works which in recent years have attributed a certain importance to the way in which innovative governance models can foster sustainable growth processes are also significant (Rota, 2019; Piraina & Vanni, 2020). The following work is part of this line of research and, through the analysis of a case study, intends to investigate the economic and social benefits that can derive from the management of cultural heritage through the use of systemic organizations. The aim is to strengthen the thesis according to which museum networks can contribute both to a better management of cultural resources, favoring economies of scale, and to the cultural, social and economic growth of the territorial areas in which they are located. Tools capable of stimulating sustainable growth in the coming years.

## 2. LITERATURE ANALYSIS

Although the literature on the theme of cultural heritage management is quite extensive, as far as the specific topic is concerned, the models of reticular organization of museums, it seems instead that scientific production is focusing more on identifying more efficient governance models in the management of cultural heritage only in recent years. As already anticipated in the introductory paragraph, over time the efforts of scholars have mainly focused on the analysis of specific cases, trying to highlight those elements that have determined its success and continuity over time.

The analysis of museum networks and systems has often been oriented towards identifying the objectives pursued, the organizational models and the related success and crisis factors. Furthermore, there was no lack of investigation of corporate networks to grasp elements and models that can be replicated in the museum context. Much more frequent are the scientific contributions that have tried to link the study of systemic organizations to the creation of value and to the social and economic themes of valorization, sustainability and development. In particular, the studies highlight the reasons that can push individual museums to join together and the advantages that can derive from it. "It is necessary to adopt system and network logics, in particular for smaller museums and for museums more linked to the territory, in order to define unified strategies, to develop common programs and projects, to share resources, in particular human and instrumental" (Donato & Visser Travagli, 2010).

The networks "represent essential links in order to connect the tourist and cultural demand with the territorial resources and cultural heritage, especially in areas without highly attractive museum structures" (Pencarelli & Splendani, 2011, p. 246).

There are numerous scientific contributions which, through the analysis of case studies, try to underline both the management advantages and the positive effects that can derive from them in terms of sustainable development. Forti, Falchetti, & Battisti, (2017), through the analysis of a specific case, highlight how the advantages of the museum network can derive not only from the programmatic partnership, but also from a logic of sharing and promoting identity and values of the territory. This means that the network, in addition to basing its foundations on a logic of sharing of intentions and operational strategies by the individual participating museums, will have to be able to deal with the context in which it is inserted. "Without an appropriate analysis of the nature and goals that move cultural institutes together with the other institutional and economic subjects of the territory [...] it would not be possible to fully account for the complex system of relationships that can be activated, governed and managed with the network" (Seddio, 2016, pp. 23-24).

We are therefore dealing with museum aggregations which, thanks to cooperation, can improve management logics and sometimes overcome those limits linked to the individual action of individual cultural institutions, especially when it comes to small-sized museums which, relying on limited resources, they find some difficulty in being competitive and attractive. Systemic organizations capable of stimulating and implementing the cultural offer, through a joint and more efficient use of resources (economic and professional) and a greater use of new technologies. Tools through which to stimulate citizen participation and the inclusion of the most fragile categories. Means through which to promote growth through the involvement

of economic actors and local administrations. The construction of museum networks and their subsequent implementation, also through the involvement of external subjects (such as associations, tour operators, public and private bodies, etc.) can facilitate the promotion of a territory and the enhancement of its cultural heritage, through an integrated tourist offer, improving the prospects for cultural, social and economic growth of a community.

Finally, just as in the corporate context the use of systemic organizations is considered by companies as a strategic choice to obtain a multiplicity of advantages (both in terms of management and in terms of greater contractual power towards their stakeholders), also in the cultural sector the models of cooperation are increasingly considered optimal solutions capable of generating benefits in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. The creation of a museum network can therefore make the use of the resources necessary for the management and enhancement of cultural heritage more rational. Think of the possibility for participating museums to be able to take advantage of highly specialized professionals, sophisticated security systems, training and refresher courses, advanced technologies to improve the visitor experience, etc. and to be able to do it at lower costs, precisely by virtue of sharing. In other words, as for business networks in the corporate sector, the use of shared management models can also favor the creation of economies of scale in the cultural sector. In this regard, an interesting study on museum networks conducted by Tiziana Maffei (a diagram of which is shown below, Table 1) provides a series of explanatory examples of economies of scale, scope and variety that can be generated through sharing between museums resources (professional, scientific, technological), activities (training, monitoring, safety) and spaces (laboratories, warehouses).

**Tab 1. The advantages of museum networks**

<b>Economies of scope (input)</b>	<b>Economies of scale (processing)</b>	<b>Economies of variety (output)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Legitimation of the cultural system introduced by the web</li> <li>- Credibility in finding partners</li> <li>- Creation of a research center on various subjects which can give life to more qualified scientific projects</li> <li>- Development of a cultural atmosphere that will lead to consolidating an aptitude for cultural production and consumption</li> <li>- Personal stability and consequent specialist training growth</li> <li>- Dissemination of greater sensitivity on the subject of the protection of cultural heritage</li> <li>- Cultural innovation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personnel training and refresher courses</li> <li>- Launch of integrated inventory campaigns</li> <li>- Availability of highly specialized network professionals</li> <li>- Implementation of an efficient active safety system</li> <li>- Use of capital goods (control system, restoration laboratories, etc.)</li> <li>- Ability to initiate service contracts by renegotiating expenditure (lift maintenance, plant maintenance, etc., night security service)</li> <li>- Creation of a single promotion center that also uses innovative forms of communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Launch of services thanks to the joint and cooperative use of human and instrumental resources</li> <li>- Ability to be a point of reference for local cultural heritage</li> <li>- Launch of various cultural initiatives (exhibitions, conferences, research projects, relations with research and training bodies and institutions)</li> <li>- Activities of exhibitions and loans with other museums</li> <li>- Creation of a coordinated image that can be used throughout the territory both in terms of orientation and in the creation of itineraries</li> </ul>

(Source: Maffei (2012), The Museum Network in Cataldo L. Networked Museums and Heritage, p. 45, adapted by the author)

If museum networks and systems are therefore able to improve the quality of management, no less important is the contribution they can provide in strengthening and improving the social role that all museums are called to fulfill today. Thanks to the greater legitimacy that a museum system can enjoy vis-à-vis its stakeholders, the better planning of activities and the sharing of cultural projects, actions aimed at encouraging the active participation of citizens and the inclusion of the weakest groups could also be conducted more effectively. By leveraging the identity values of which the system becomes the interpreter and main disseminator, the contemporary challenge of sustainability would also assume greater credibility. Moreover, it is essential to remember that "The role of cultural resources in the development of a country, compatible with adequate levels of welfare, presupposes harmony and integration between the cultural dimension and the local economy. These assumptions must be ensured by a "multilevel governance" capable

of systematizing different sectors capable of achieving growth objectives consistent with cultural heritage policies from a sustainability perspective” (Ferri, 2009, p. 132).

### 3. A LOOK AT THE ITALIAN CONTEXT

As happened previously in other European countries, also in Italy we realized the strong need to review the organization of the cultural heritage sector and in fact starting from 2014 thanks to the "Franceschini Reform", which bears the name of the 'then Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities, an important reform process was launched which involved the entire Italian museum context. An important process of modernization has thus emerged in the management and enhancement of the significant cultural heritage of which Italy can boast. In particular, with the ministerial decree n. 23 of 12 December 2014, the creation of the national museum system was launched with the primary objective of networking the more than five thousand museums present in the national territory. Important innovations have also been introduced in relation to the role of the museum through the preparation of new rules and forms of management as well as giving greater consideration to the social role that it is called to play in society.

The creation of a national system into which all Italian museums, whether public or private, converge, as well as the recognition of greater autonomy towards these cultural institutes is at the center of a management strategy aimed at pursuing some important objectives. In particular, the possibility of facilitating the management of museums at a regional and local level by stimulating dynamics of collaboration between the museums themselves, enhancing the role of tourist attraction entrusted to museum institutions and improving the quality of services also through easier access to financial resources. It is therefore a reform that aimed to make the management of cultural assets more efficient by following the typical logic of the corporate system. A process of modernization in which “The instances of corporatization, [...], are not aimed solely at making profits, but at generating value by responding to the expectations of the social context and giving answers in terms of economic sustainability. To implement this concept it is necessary:

- adopt a systemic perspective: support the museum in the search for a dynamic balance, and always evolving to adapt to the context, through the experimentation of new configurations of the structure and flexible management forms;
- create a solid platform and network for the exchange of best practices in the cultural field at national and European level;
- improve coordination at the local cultural and tourist system level (hotels, restaurants, museums, tourist offices) for information, common projects and logistics;
- diversify and innovate the exhibition initiatives and cultural activities offered, which should from time to time address specific target audiences to achieve a good degree of inclusiveness and participation” (Brigato, 2016, p.113).

Currently, the functioning of the SMN is guaranteed by the Central Management and its peripheral branches (the current Regional Museum Management) and the museums distributed within the Italian borders, whether they are public (owned by the State, regions or municipalities) or private, have the opportunity to become part of it through a simple accreditation process which requires the possession of precise quality standards. It is therefore up to the individual museum institutions to decide, in a completely voluntary way, to join it and in this case, to proceed with an accreditation process to verify the possession of minimum quality levels in relation to the organization, the collections, the communication and the relations with the territory, etc. with the intention of ensuring a certain homogeneity among all the museums that adhere to the SMN. The reform of the entire sector therefore goes in the direction of improving the management of cultural heritage by promoting dynamics of collaboration and sharing between museums in every way. “The networks, in fact, appear to be absolutely essential for the more than four thousand local Italian museums to create value for themselves and for their stakeholders” (Montella, 2014, p. 639).

## 4. THE CASE STUDY

### 4.1. Research Methodology

The research activity was conducted according to a qualitative approach through the analysis of a case study: "the Museum System of Padula". It is a museum system located in a region of southern Italy, Campania. A system which includes museum institutes, different in type, located in the city of Padula. Museums that have been collaborating with each other for years by sharing initiatives and projects of various kinds with the aim of strengthening their potential and contributing to the development of a better cultural offer and which have understood the natural consecration of these synergies in the creation of the system.

The choice to analyze the following case derives from some precise considerations. The first concerns the fact that the system in question, if adequately supported by the institutions, could increase the attractiveness of the entire territory in which it is inserted, in terms of regional, national and international cultural tourism flows, also in terms of seasonal adjustment.

The second refers to the possibility of considering the system as a Best Practice not only for the Campania region but also for the whole of Southern Italy.

As already anticipated in the previous paragraph, the need to initiate or implement forms of collaboration between museums also derives from the profound reform process started in Italy in 2014 with an overall reorganization of the sector and which envisaged the creation of the National Museum System.

The last consideration draws attention to the social and democratic role that is now recognized to museums. The system's ability, therefore, to constantly interact with the local community by carrying out social inclusion and awareness-raising activities on sustainability issues.

Once the object of the research had been defined, the study was conducted through the analysis of all the related documents and interviews addressed to the subjects who took part in the project with the aim of understanding their points of view on the evolution taking place in the sector, on the consequences of the crisis due to the pandemic and on the necessary strategies to be adopted to relaunch the places responsible for enhancing the cultural heritage and the tourist attraction activities connected to them.

#### **4.2. The Case Study: The Museum System**

The case analyzed in the context of the research concerns the creation of the Museum System of Padula. It is a systemic organization formalized through an enhancement agreement between the Museum Pole of Campania and the Municipality of Padula signed in 2017 and with which the aims, strategies and common objectives for enhancing the system of assets were circumscribed cultural. A project which, through the involvement of some important museums, intended to enhance the cultural heritage present in the area of the municipality of Padula according to an integrated management model and with the primary intention of making the system central to economic, social and cultural growth of the entire territorial area.

The museums that are part of the museum system are the great cultural attraction the Certosa di San Lorenzo, the early Christian Baptistery of San Giovanni in Fonti, the Cosilinum Archaeological Park, the Civic Multimedia Museum and the Joe Petrosino House Museum.

The system turned out to be the final result of a long collaboration between the museums and their respective reference institutions, which deemed it necessary to identify an integrated management model with the aim of improving the enhancement activities and the quality of use of the services as well as with the aim of increasing the degree of attractiveness of the territory and stimulating the economic fabric of the entire area concerned.

The valorization agreement was considered a necessary tool for defining the objectives to be pursued and the relative strategies to be adopted, the valorization actions and the management methods, for identifying the buildings, the exhibition spaces and the areas to be shared as well as for outlining the general lines of the program and the use of a single ticket.

With the agreement, shared visit itineraries and tourist itineraries were also prepared, measures for experimentation and innovation in the field of communication and management, innovative education tools, targeted actions for the improvement of infrastructures, communication activities with the stakeholders of the territory.

On the other hand, going into the merits of the organizational, managerial and operational structures of the museum system, some important aspects deserve to be highlighted regarding:

- the choice of management model;
- organizational coordination;
- the identification of different access formulas for visitors;
- the commitment to the community, the most fragile categories and sustainability.

As far as the management model is concerned, it was decided to opt for the assignment of all services and enhancement activities to an external subject selected through the preparation of a public call for tenders by the municipality of Padula. It is a consortium, Arte'm net, established in Naples in 2008 and engaged in the promotion and creation of a network of companies of excellence in the value chain of cultural heritage, integrated communication and cultural tourism. Since 2018, the consortium has been called upon to take care of the management activity, trying to ensure the maximum valorization and usability of the cultural heritage, enhance the image of the museums towards visitors and maintain a high-quality standard of the services offered, dealing with reception activities, reception and information to the public, management of the ticket office and the different types of cards, management of the bookshop, guided tours and educational activities.

As far as the organization is concerned, the museum system has managed to acquire a coordination formed by representatives of the Municipality of Padula (Mayor or his delegate - Councilor for Culture), the Regional Directorate of Campania Museums and the service concessionaire, Arte'm net, leaving the latter a role of address and connection. This aspect turns out to be interesting since at the basis of the functioning of any systemic organization is the predisposition of a body capable of coordinating the activities between the various subjects involved in the system itself and of supplying the general indications for joint and constant action over time.

The third aspect considered instead refers to the methods of access to the museums of the system by the public. In fact, various museum cards have been envisaged, with different prices based on the type of access (if provided for all the museums in the system or limited to the Certosa only) and the category of users (reduced rates are in fact envisaged for the youngest). The purchase of museum cards also allows users to take advantage of certain discounts at various catering and craft businesses, thus helping to provide a positive boost to the local economy.

Finally, one last aspect that deserves to be mentioned concerns the commitment undertaken by the museum system to actively contribute to the sustainable growth of the territory, both through awareness-raising activities on the subject and through concrete actions of inclusion. The system of museums in Padula was immediately activated with significant interlocution with numerous associations (local and national) to promote cultural projects and activities aimed at ensuring maximum inclusion of the most fragile categories.

In particular, numerous local and national realities have been involved: Scabec, Libera, the Joe Petrosino International Association, the FaqTotum Cultural Association, Certosa Estesa, the Mida Foundation, the Vivicilento Cooperative, IgersItalia, Via Silente. Subjects who have shared the strategies implemented by the Municipal Administration, proposing a model of active participation in which everyone has contributed concretely in relation to specific skills and fields of action. A strategy that has favored an important synergy with Cilento. Social inclusion has been a fundamental element of the work carried out over the years because many "bottom up" activities have been carried out, i.e. valorization from below, involving associations, local artists, citizens, who have been able to contribute to the knowledge and dissemination of Museum System of Padula.

To make the analysis more complete, a summary of the main characteristics of the museum system is provided below (Table 2).

**Tab 2: Summary sheet of the main characteristics of the museum system**

Museum system	Museum System of Padula
Geographical location	Municipality of Padula
Legal form	Enhancement agreement (signed in 2017)
Nature of the members	Public subjects
Dimensions	Contained, as it is made up of 5 museum institutes.
Cultural offer	Multidisciplinary: it is characterized by the presence of historical, artistic, religious, archaeological, multimedia and contemporary content.
Mission	Strengthen the enhancement activities intended to increase the degree of use also with management integration actions of the cultural offer with the primary objective of expanding the circuits of visits to the entire territory of the municipality of Padula and involving the socio-economic fabric of the whole area.
Performed activity	Sharing of exhibition initiatives, exhibitions and cultural events and all related communication and promotion activities.
Offered services	- ticketing - bookshop - audio guides and whispers
Governance model	There is a governing body made up of a coordination figure (Arte'm representative) and representatives of the other institutions involved (municipal administration and Campania Region Museums Directorate).
Communication and promotion tools	Paper material, website, mailing list, social pages dedicated to the museum system.
Personnel Management	The Arte'm Consortium has foreseen and employed specific professional resources for carrying out the activities and providing the services.

*(source of our elaboration)*

### 4.3. Results

The results achieved, and reported below, are the result of some reflections that have been reached through the analysis of the information that emerged from the examination of the documents collected and from the direct dialogue with the subjects involved in the realization of the project.

The study conducted allows us to confirm the initial hypotheses of the work. In particular, through the analysis of the case study, it is believed to be able to confirm how the use of a network organization can generate advantages both for the individual museums that adhere to it and for the subjects who have, directly or indirectly, with them to do.

The assignment of museum activities and services to an external subject facilitates the work of the relevant administrations and improves management in terms of efficiency. Choosing an indirect management model

appears to be a rational choice, especially in a period of economic hardship like the current one. A model capable of facilitating relations between the various institutions involved, ensuring integrated management of the cultural heritage and, above all, lightening the management tasks of the public administrations involved. The creation of the museum system allows the individual institutions that have joined it to deal with even extraordinary situations such as the one due to the Covid-19 pandemic with greater peace of mind. Furthermore, through the sharing of activities, the system manages to be more incisive and to reach the various audiences more widely.

Thanks to this network model, it is possible to increase awareness in the local community of the role of museums and the proliferation of cultural events as well as educational activities by stimulating citizens to frequent these places more.

The system as a whole acquires greater legitimacy which allows it to strengthen its relations with external interlocutors and to contribute more incisively to the dynamics of sustainable growth for the entire territorial area.

If well organized and with the will to carry out specific projects, it can contribute to strengthening the tourist attraction capacity. The system welcomes different museums, each with its own specificities, which are integrated into a broad cultural offer, without overlapping and respecting the diversity of each. Furthermore, these are museums close to each other and easily accessible and this is a great strength for the development of sustainable tourism. A business card for the entire area involved

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

“A cultural system does not arise through processes of spontaneous aggregation and does not originate with the mere presence of cultural resources, however excellent, but needs advanced shared strategies, ad hoc designed tools and, above all, a greater effort to listen, comparison and participatory and shared planning” (Seddio, 2016, pp. 126). In this sense, on the basis of the survey conducted, it can reasonably be stated that the managers of the museums participating in the system and, even more so, the respective administrations of reference, have been able to grasp the importance of online management of cultural heritage and consequent benefits not only for the subjects within the system but also and above all for the social and economic repercussions that the entire territorial area concerned will be able to enjoy. Indeed, it is a precise commitment on the part of the institutions involved in the project to enhance local cultural resources with an attentive eye towards the community and its most fragile categories.

The Museum System of Padula is a tangible example of the immense potential of a healthy and transparent collaboration between the 'public' and 'private' through the assignment of the management activity and enhancement services, with the preparation of a notice public, to a third party. It is in fact the start of an integrated management process centered on the energies of a community ready to experiment through the use of good management practices.

The survey therefore shows how the management of museums through the use of network organizations is confirmed as a strategic tool for integrated management to be encouraged and on which to bring together the efforts of all institutions (local, regional and national). Cultural networks and systems currently represent the only viable way to ensure not only better management and enhancement of cultural heritage but also to encourage good practices capable of promoting dynamics of cultural, social and economic growth.

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