

# Evaluating Participation and Entrepreneurship in the Cultural and Creative Sector: Experiences from Italy



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**Abstract** This chapter analyses participative and entrepreneurial activities in the cultural and creative sector in Italy, by adopting a benchmarking approach. We present the case of a call for projects addressed to all actors working in the cultural sector by Lazio Region, regarding the promotion of the region's cultural heritage. Projects are evaluated and graded by a team of experts: those scoring more than 70/100 points are included in the collection of "BuonePratiche", a publication by the Regional Directorate for Culture. We propose a research design based on the following steps. First, we build the theoretical framework by defining the cultural and creative sector, and then we illustrate our chosen approach, i.e. evaluation in the cultural sector. Then, the case study regarding "BuonePratiche" is presented and analysed. Data was collected from the direct observation of the call for projects and subsequent evaluation by experts, and from accessing the database containing all projects and their scores. Results indicate that actors in the cultural sector prioritise the enhancement of cultural heritage over entrepreneurship: this may represent an opportunity for improvement by educating cultural players on combining entrepreneurship and culture. We also find that networking has a positive influence on achieving better scores.

**Keywords** Benchmarking · Cultural and creative sector · Participation · Entrepreneurship · Evaluation

## 1 Introduction

The application of managerial principles in the public sector, a key feature of New Public Management, extends to the artistic and cultural sector. This is a well-established international phenomenon, as indicated by the launch of the first

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Museum Management degree by New York University in 1963; it reached Italian cultural institutions and organisations in the 1990s, both at central and local level. Mentioning the Italian context is relevant as it is the setting of the case study that will be analysed in the chapter, and because of the importance of cultural activities in the country.

The development of managerial approaches in the cultural sector was studied by Pérez-Cabañero and Cuadrado-García (2011), who conducted a bibliometric analysis of over 900 papers and identified three main phases and a decisive turning point in 2005, with the affirmation of cultural marketing. The first phase is characterised by the prevalence of research and contributions on management and cultural policies, probably influenced by Colbert's work (2003) on management and marketing in the cultural sector; the second phase indicates a shift from management to cultural marketing, and the third is even more focused on issues such as user experience and behaviour.

Within this field of research, the chapter discusses strengths and weaknesses of benchmarking cultural projects and activities, as well as the difficulties of analysing the rate of innovation and originality from the public administration's perspective. More precisely, we want to answer the following research question: "What is the output of evaluating innovative cultural projects in the public sector?"

The chapter presents the case of the call for projects held by Lazio Region, in Italy, and addressed to all actors in the cultural sector (local public administrations, private organisations, non-profits, citizens' associations etc.), asking them to submit their experiences and projects aimed at promoting the region's cultural heritage. The core issue is the role of "BuonePratiche" (best practices award given by the Region) as a quality-oriented advantage in the cultural public policy of the area. The collection and selection of "BuonePratiche" is aimed at identifying best practices in the following areas: enhancement, promotion and communication of cultural heritage and the ability to network, to do business and to innovate and promote inclusion by local players. It is a collection of cultural initiatives and projects that were implemented in Lazio by public and private entities, preferably through various forms of partnership and/or collaboration. The Regional Directorate of Culture issues the call for projects, and then selects experts to evaluate collected projects based on the aforementioned criteria. All projects are given a score going from 0 to 100, and those whose score is higher than 70 are included in the Regional Catalogue of Best Cultural Practices. The Catalogue is a new tool that the Region is implementing in the Benchmarking Area—Culture and Quality framework.

The chapter is rooted in the framework of cultural and creative industries, to which the concept of benchmarking is applied, and it is structured as follows: first, we define the theoretical framework of cultural and creative industries, then explain the approach that we adopt, i.e. benchmarking in the cultural sector.

Secondly, the chapter traces the evolutionary nature of "BuonePratiche":

- the first stage explores the design of the call for projects by the Region;
- the second stage covers the collection and design of the database of potential “BuonePratiche” by exploring the selected evaluation criteria and their importance for cultural initiatives to be evaluated;
- the third stage concerns project evaluation, which was performed independently by each selected expert in a benchmarking perspective; results were then brought together to obtain the final ranking of projects;
- the fourth stage analyses the final database of 200 collected projects: first by providing descriptive statistics (type of project, stakeholder responsible for the project, main goal of the project) and then by examining results. The aim is to understand what projects got the highest ranking, whether there is a recognisable pattern in terms of projects type and their ranking, and what could be improved in projects that were ranked poorly.

The final part of the chapter, regarding results and conclusive remarks, provides an original contribution as it reports a case of evaluation of cultural projects by the public sector, and also because it is based on the analysis of 200 cultural projects and initiatives that were implemented in a specific Italian setting.

The chapter allows to analyse the output of carrying out benchmarking projects in the cultural sector. In addition to this, the chapter highlights features of the highest-ranked projects, examining their strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, the chapter concludes by setting out a number of observations based on the “BuonePratiche” experience for the use of benchmarking as a leverage of quality-oriented cultural programmes.

## **2 Theoretical Framework: Cultural and Creative Industries**

Cultural and creative industries are often mentioned as a unit, but the literature indicates two separate concepts. Creative industries were defined by the Creative Task Force of the British Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as “those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have their potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property”. According to DCMS (1998, 2001), creative industries include the following professional activities: advertising, architecture, arts and antiques, crafts, design, fashion, film, leisure, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television and radio. This classification was designed to pressure policy-makers to include creative industries in their agenda in order to ensure their ability to create economic value. A similar classification is provided by Howkins (2007), who adds research and development activities and toys and games. The two criteria identifying creative industries are the use of creativity as the main productive input, and the ability to market ideas to generate value (Santagata 2007). Galloway and Dunlop (2007) find the definition by DCMS to be too wide, as it does not refer to “symbolic meaning and could involve any type of creative activity”, such as

scientific innovation. According to them, it complicates matters such as policy-making since “there is nothing cultural about the creative industries besides the common link of creativity” (Galloway and Dunlop 2007; Cunningham 2001). On the contrary, several authors agree that definitions used for policy-making should be strongly grounded in theory because of their relevant implications and measurement and evaluation issues (Galloway and Dunlop 2007; Cunningham 2001; Pratt 2001; Howkins 2002; Towse 2003; Martin 2004).

The ability of creative industries to create wealth is rooted in the concept of copyright: in fact, the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) (2013) defines them as “copyright industries”, and divides them into three categories (pivotal, accessorial and contributory) based on their role in intellectual property production. Despite the intellectual property model being mostly used in the United States (ERVET 2012), it is widely accepted as being the core of creative industries (UNCTAD 2010). Creative activities are also a key driver of sustainable development (UNESCO 2013), and based on a recent study (WIPO 2013) they contribute around 5% to national GDP in terms of employment creation.

Cultural industries, on the other hand, are those that produce goods and services whose value is first and foremost cultural, then (and not necessarily) commercial: this aspect of cultural value differentiates cultural industries from other economic sectors.

Throsby (2001) studied the relationship between cultural and creative industries, and he suggests to picture it in terms of radiating circles, where creative ideas and activities are the core of the process and result in cultural content. According to him, cultural industries include activities whose objective is to educate and enlighten the human mind, and they have three main features: first, they require a certain degree of creativity in their productive process; second, they deal with generating and circulating symbolic media; third, their final product can be somehow related to intellectual property.

KEA European Affairs (2006) describes the cultural sector as including “non-industrial sectors producing non-reproducible goods and services aimed at being consumed on the spot (a concert, an art fair, an exhibition)” and “industrial sectors producing cultural products aimed at mass reproduction, mass dissemination and exports (a book, a film, a sound recording)”. According to KEA (2006), in the creative sector “culture becomes a creative input in the production of non-cultural goods”, while creativity is “the use of cultural resources as an intermediate consumption in the production process of non-cultural sectors, and thereby as a source of innovation”. Consequently, KEA states that the economy of culture includes both a cultural and a creative sector, and it is structured with arts as its core field, surrounded by radiating circles of cultural industries (film, television, radio, publishing), creative industries (design, architecture and advertising) and complementary industries such as manufacturing. This distinction is confirmed by several authors studying cultural and creative industries: the former are defined by cultural expressions and include traditional arts sector, the latter use culture as an input to produce outputs with commercial value (Söndermann 2007; Richeri 2009).

Cultural and creative industries display entrepreneurial features, such as the capacity to innovate and create new products, the creation of new organisational forms, the exploration of new markets, the introduction of new methods of production and the search for new sources of materials (HKU 2010). Like any business venture, cultural and creative industries face entrepreneurial risks, which can be divided into two main sources: on the one hand, quick changes in digital media, which influence copyright and intellectual property as well as distribution strategies; on the other hand, the high degree of uncertainty linked to the launch of new products.

For what concerns organisational forms, cultural and creative industries are mostly populated by SMEs and micro-firms, and self-employment is also relevant (HKU 2010). Kooyman (2009) highlighted the following aspects as typical of cultural and creative industries: non-conventional forms of employment and holding multiple jobs, with extensive working hours and little scheduling; cultural uniqueness and short lifespan of products; hypercompetitive environment and large supply of skilled professionals; labour-intensive inputs and considerable knowledge base.

The EU Green Paper on cultural and creative industries (2010) indicates the condition for their development in member states, which can be grouped in three main categories. The first are basic, enabling conditions for the existence of cultural and creative industries, such as the possibility for them to innovate and experiment, the need to network with education institutions in order to build strong skill bases, and the improvement of funding availability. Secondly, the paper highlights the importance of developing strategies within cultural and creative industries at local, national and international level, because of their strategic relevance for development. This aspect is also linked to the third group of conditions regarding spill-over effects of cultural and creative industries: given their potential impact on other economic sectors, partnerships and networks should be promoted so that creative knowledge can be spread beyond the borders of cultural and creative industries.

### **3 Arts and Cultural Management: The Benchmarking Model**

Benchmarking consists in a continuous and systematic procedure for assessing products, services and operational procedures by organisations; it is acknowledged among the best procedures for achieving improvement. Hence, it involves rational comparison addressed at achieving better performance by implementing best practices.

Regardless of what sector the organisation belongs to, benchmarking looks for best practices in leading organisations in various market sectors.

Comparison takes place through benchmarks (reference parameters) emphasising effectiveness and efficiency (quality, cost, time) of what is being analysed. The goal is to identify procedures, methods and systems that create value and hence are

capable of satisfying clients' needs. In other words, benchmarking does not mean copying what others do, but creating reference points for learning processes, capable of challenging existing working methods, identifying step by step changes that can bridge the existing gap between current performances and best practices.

"Best practices" are often discovered from observing successful policy implementation in other countries or companies—hence through case studies—and the following analysis of general principles that can derive from direct experience. Best practices are increasingly important for cultural operators, who need to know whether the combination of practices, policy strategies and funding are appropriate and suitable for achieving results.

In the managerial world, benchmarking means measuring an organisation's performance excellence; a reference point or unit for comparing; a level of performance considered the standard of excellence for a specific company process. It is hence a method addressed outwardly, looking beyond one's own company, to discover excellent performance.

Objects of benchmarking can be extremely varied, for instance:

- Comparing features, performance, perceived quality and costs of products and services;
- Reviewing working processes and performances of all activities;
- Linking strategic, organisational and financial structures.

Since 2001, benchmarking was also identified by European Union representatives and experts as one of the means for promoting the exchange of experiences and for learning good practices within the framework of digitalising cultural heritage.

Activities regarding culture promotion and cultural heritage protection have also moved in the direction of improving management and developing new services, which led to an evolution of institutional, financial and managerial models.

Benchmarking represents a structured approach allowing to improve performance and results linked to services and processes within an organisation through constant comparison. Benchmarking is a system of comparisons between organisations, the objective of which is to discover the best way of doing things, comparing in a structured manner performances of one's own organisation to the best results achieved in other organisations, so as to learn how to improve results and processes.

The first step is an assessment evaluation. Assessments are carried out in order to verify that the analysis underlying policies and strategies succeeds in avoiding inconsistencies and contradictions, ensuring transparency and value for money; improving, refining current policies, and eliminating unproductive ones with the objective of implementing best practices.

The next step consists in determining how such practices can be learned, applied, and tailored to other organisational contexts. In organisations operating in cultural and creative sectors, the concepts of learning and translatability are fundamental for activating change and continuous improvement.

A correct benchmarking process should be based on codified and strong working methods. However, a process cannot be applied mechanically, it needs to be adapted to the specific necessities of different organisations.

The benchmarking process can be described through a range of different steps, which can be connected to the cycle of continuous improvement. A basic benchmarking process model (Spendolini 1992) includes 5 steps: Step 1 (Planning); Step 2 (Finding partners); Step 3 (Collecting information); Step 4 (Analyse) and Step 5 (Improve).

The benchmarking process shows the organisation's will to bring about change in a "constructive" and not "reactive" manner. In fact, benchmarking provides decision makers with immediate awareness of the existence (potential or real) of a "disadvantage" compared to other organisations, through a comparative analysis based on objective facts (not on personal opinions), starting from the judgment on results expressed by users/customers of goods/services produced.

From this strategic viewpoint, communication appears as an excellent means that is addressed at customer satisfaction with constant and transparent "accountability".

## 4 Case Study: Methodology and Data

This work is based on a case study, whose evolution was closely followed by the authors in all its stages. Data were collected by the authors at each stage of the project, and were then described and analysed to understand how cultural practices are evaluated and ranked in the Italian context.

The call for "BuonePratiche" was open to all cultural organisations, both public and private, working in the Lazio Region. In order to be able to participate, organisations had to submit an application concerning a cultural initiative that they had carried out in the previous year, including both administrative information and specific descriptions. Aside from administrative information, each candidate was asked to describe the following aspects, defined in Table 1.

The Regional Directorate for Culture received 199 applications from different types of organisations and institutions (private, public and non-profit) working all over the Region.

The second stage of the case study concerned the evaluation of proposals, which was based on a set of criteria, each assigning a specific number of points to each project. Table 2 identifies the evaluation criteria.

The "global evaluation" criterion represented an additional evaluation tool that allowed to express a comprehensive judgement of the project by assigning it an amount of points ranging from one to three.

Criteria were defined by a panel of professional experts, academics and researchers, together with the Regional Directorate for Culture; the selected experts were also in charge of carrying out individual evaluations of the entire pool of applications.

It is important to note that one author was a member of the experts panel, and all authors cooperated in evaluating proposals.

Individual evaluations by each expert were then combined into a single final evaluation: this stage required that all experts, as well as the Regional Director for

**Table 1** Descriptors required in the application

Descriptors	
1. General aim of the project	Enhancing, promoting and communicating cultural assets
	Working in networks
	Entrepreneurship
	Innovation and inclusion
2. External stakeholders engaged in the project	Local and national public administrations
	Universities and research centres
	Foundations
	Schools
	Firms
	Category associations
	Professional associations
3. Geographical area	Other stakeholders
4. Specific goals and expected results	
5. Brief description of project content	
6. Actions carried out to implement the project	
7. Actual results and outcome evaluation	
8. Transferability and replicability of results	
9. Methodology	
10. Materials produced to support the project	
11. Main strengths	
12. Difficulties in project implementation	
13. Three keywords to describe project	
14. Online promotion and communication	
15. Exact geographic coordinates	

Source: Own elaboration

Culture, sit together in order to discuss the final evaluation and ranking of all proposals.

Any project obtaining more than 70 points would be included in the final count of “BuonePratiche”, and those totalling more than 90 would be identified as excellent examples.

Methodology, especially for what concerns evaluation, is thus based on a benchmarking perspective, which requires knowledge and analysis of the whole database by each expert before evaluating any project. The publication of rankings and the attribution of excellence features to selected best practices, on the other hand, allow to activate a learning process, which is a chance for all organisations that had previously submitted an application and are then able to learn from projects that are identified as best practices.



**Table 2** Evaluation criteria

Criteria	Points to be assigned	Sub-criteria
1. Consistence and relevance of the proposal with its general and specific aims	Max 25 pts out of 100	1a. Consistence (max 8 pts)
		1b. Relevance (max 8 pts)
		1c. Objectives (max 8 pts)
2. Originality and innovation	Max 25 pts out of 100	
3. Methodology and degree of engagement of external stakeholders and partners	Max 15 pts out of 100	3a. Methodology (max 5 pts)
		3b. Partnerships (max 10 pts)
4. Actual results and territorial impact	Max 25 pts out of 100	4a. Quantitative results (max 6 pts)
		4b. Materials (max 6 pts)
		4c. Possibility to reproduce project (max 4 pts)
		4d. Impact (max 8 pts)
5. Transferability to other contexts	Max 10 pts out of 100	5a. Diffusion of the project (max 5 pts)
		5b. Replicability (max 5 pts)
Global evaluation	Max 3 pts out of 100	

Source: Own elaboration

## 5 Results and Analysis

The analysis of “BuonePratiche” shows interesting results and is useful for cultural policy evaluation if carried out as a longitudinal tool of monitoring.

First, it is interesting to notice that almost all applicants were evaluated as “BuonePratiche”, 198 out of 199, and 17 of them were selected as excellent.

Taking into consideration descriptors requested by the Regional Director for Culture, the most significant are found in the “General aim of the project”, as indicated in Table 3. The analysis divides projects based on the amount of aims that were declared in the submission (applicants could select only one, two, three or all four aims).

According to results shown in Table 3 the general aim with the highest number of preferences was “Enhancing, promoting and communicating cultural assets”, followed by “Innovation and inclusion”.

The aim that was not chosen by any project as its principal aim is “Entrepreneurship”. This evidence is quite relevant in terms of perception of cultural activities and projects as something distant from business. On the other hand, scientific literature indicates that innovation is a key aspect in entrepreneurial practices in the cultural and creative sector. Many projects fell in the “Innovation and inclusion” group, which means that applicants are in fact carrying out entrepreneurial activities, but there is a clear issue regarding the way they perceive the concept of entrepreneurship itself and how it applies to their work.

**Table 3** Analysis of the “Aim of the project” descriptors

Aim of the project	No. of projects	No. of excellences
Projects declaring only one aim		
Enhancing, promoting and communicating cultural assets	45	8
Working in networks	11	1
Entrepreneurship	/	/
Innovation and inclusion	26	2
Projects declaring two aims		
Enhancing, promoting and communicating cultural assets + Innovation and inclusion	8	1
Enhancing, promoting and communicating cultural assets + Working in networks	5	/
Working in networks + Innovation and inclusion	3	2
Projects declaring three aims		
Enhancing, promoting and communicating cultural assets + Innovation and inclusion + Entrepreneurship	1	/
Enhancing, promoting and communicating cultural assets + Innovation and inclusion + Working in networks	8	2
Projects declaring all four aims		
Enhancing, promoting and communicating cultural assets + Innovation and inclusion + Working in networks + Entrepreneurship	7	1

Source: Own elaboration

**Table 4** Analysis of the geographical distribution

Geographical area (province)	No. of projects	No. of excellences
Rome	61	8
<i>City of Rome</i>	43	5
Viterbo	13	2
Latina	19	3
Rieti	6	2
Frosinone	11	2

Source: Own elaboration

Another descriptor that has to be analysed is geographical distribution. As expected, Lazio Region “suffers” from the presence of Rome as the main cultural centre. Indeed, out of 199 projects 61 are based in the province of Rome, 43 of which in the city of Rome itself. Despite the irregular distribution, the number of excellences seems quite well spread all over the region, as shown in Table 4.

The call for “BuonePratiche” was open to all cultural organisations, both public and private, working in the Lazio Region, therefore we examined juridical forms to provide a clear picture of participants. As highlighted by Table 5 the majority of cultural organisations involved in the call are associations or public administrations; the participation by municipalities is also considerable. It is interesting to note that all projects were carried out by networks of organisations: in most cases, the network

**Table 5** Juridical forms

Juridical form	No. of projects	No. of excellences
Association	46	8
Public administration	36	5
<i>Municipality</i>	22	2
Enterprises	19	3
Foundations	4	1

Source: Own elaboration

includes 3–8 members and at least 2 different juridical forms are represented. This finding is in line with the literature presented in Sect. 2, according to which cultural organisations are usually SMEs and micro-firms: for such small actors the ability to network becomes vital, and it represents a core feature of cultural projects.

For what concerns strengths and weaknesses of benchmarking cultural projects, findings are interesting with respect to the amount of applications received. We believe that the possibility of being labelled as “BuonePratiche” encouraged many cultural workers/associations to submit their projects, and that competition may have been fostered by the chance of receiving an extra “excellence” award. However, almost all projects ranked as “BuonePratiche”, which is somehow controversial: on the one hand, it certainly indicates that average project quality was high. On the other hand, this result does not help the Regional Administration nor the applicants in carrying out an actual benchmarking process. Thus, we find that this specific application of benchmarking in the cultural sector has a two-fold outcome: on the one hand, participants and cultural organisations will be able to learn from the 17 projects that ranked “excellent”; on the other hand, the quality of all projects was quite satisfying to begin with (since all of them—but one—are “BuonePratiche”) so there may be little room for improvement.

## 6 Conclusions

Public administrations are increasingly adopting benchmarking approaches in the cultural sector, with the aim of finding best practices and success cases to be used as a learning base. The result of a proper benchmarking process should lead to benchlearning, and it might represent an interesting research area concerning the outcomes of benchmarking activities instead of their outputs. However, as we pointed out in the analysis, in this specific case there may be little room for improvement following the benchmarking process, since overall quality appears to be quite high, as indicated by the high ranking of all projects (although this may be a consequence of the evaluation procedure itself). Future research should look into how the process of “BuonePratiche” develops over time in terms of number of applicants and rankings. Then, interviews should be carried out with participants of previous editions to understand whether taking part in a benchmarking program actually helped them improving their organisation and/or their activities.

The four aims identified by the Lazio Region, i.e. “enhancing, promoting and communicating cultural assets”, “innovation and inclusion”, “entrepreneurship” and “working in networks” indicate that this public administration strongly values cross-sector cooperation and social innovation, which shape current academic research. Moreover, the aspect of inclusion is also included, which may be useful for evaluating specific projects that target cultural minorities. The cross-sector dimension can be analysed in parallel with the one about “working in networks”, since both of them focus on project leaders’ ability to include different organisations from various sectors in their actions, and to build effective and active networks for the promotion of cultural assets.

Finally, Lazio Region focuses on two additional dimensions in its evaluation process, namely the ability of projects to enhance and communicate cultural assets, which also happens to be the most selected by applicants, and the ability to activate entrepreneurial processes in the cultural sector, which indicates a broader view of culture and tries to link it to “business” aspects. The latter dimension, however, was never included by applicants: this may highlight the fact that cultural workers and organisations in the field may have a view of culture which is almost completely separate from entrepreneurial aspects. Future research may address this finding, both by analysing the evolution of entrepreneurial activities in “BuonePratiche” over the course of several years, and by drafting appropriate strategies with cultural organisations.

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