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RESHAPING OPERA
A critical reflection on arts management

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INTRODUCTION

OVERTURE

It was May 2014. The 2013 financial statement had just been approved, and the Venice opera house was celebrating the third consecutive year of break even, despite a continuous reduction of public subsidies. In the meanwhile, the board was up to present the 2014-2015 season which counted 124 opera performances, double the number of performances made in 2010.

I had just begun my fieldwork at the opera house as an intern, and one of the first tasks I was assigned was to put some order in the archive of the scenic design department. Two closets were filled up with folders, each one labeled with the name of the production and the year in which it was performed. I was asked to throw away useless documents and to merge folders when they refer to the same production performed in different years, in order to free some space in the closets. I started from the oldest folders, dated 2002, and proceeded chronologically. At the beginning there were very few documents to throw away and no folders to merge. But when I approached the most recent folders, something changed. I noticed that some titles were more recurrent. I started merging the folders, and eventually I was able to empty the last two shelves. While I was watching the huge *La Traviata* folder (in which I had to stick several labels in order to be able to write all the years in which it was performed) I naively asked to my colleague: “Why did you start performing the same productions so many times?”. Her reply was: “Don’t you have a master in management?”. “Yes, I have”, I said. “Then you should realize it by yourself!”, she concluded.

It was May 2014, and I started understanding the shift towards a repertory strategy undertaken in the last years by the opera house.

What is interesting about this story? Let’s contextualize it in the national system, starting from another story.

In October 2014 the CEO of the Rome opera house announced the termination of 200 members of its permanent orchestra and chorus, which were meant to be outsourced (an operation that would have saved 3,4 million euros, the CEO said). The fact had a great echo on the national and international press. The board justified the decision stating that it was the only way to keep the opera house alive. Only after a tough negotiation with the unions, the layoff was avoided. Still the workers had to accept pay cuts.

As for the Rome's opera house, many Italian opera houses are today facing similar dilemmas. Eight out of the fourteen opera houses have adopted special recovery plans to get additional financial support from the state and to improve their dramatic financial situation. All these special plans foresee strategies to reduce labour costs.

But Italian opera houses are not alone in this vale of tears. In February 2015 the Arts Council of England put the English National Opera under a special plan, threatening funding cuts if it would not improve its business model. Overseas, the Metropolitan Opera of New York (Met), one of the most famous and successful opera houses, was also facing the risk of bankruptcy and had to go through dramatic disputes with the unions in order to cut labour costs. The Met experienced similar problems in the 70s.

Indeed, the crisis of the performing arts is a long story. Policy makers have been investigating the causes and seeking solutions for years.

In Italy the reform process of the opera system – started in the mid-90s – counted a number of legislative interventions meant to face what has been for too long defined an emergency situation (the possibility for opera houses in serious crises to receive special funds on the basis of a recovery plan represents the last one). Since the problems were to be found in the inefficient management of such organizations, both their governance and the funding system have changed, with the aim of pushing a more entrepreneurial and managerial approach. But policies seem to have failed to provide adequate solutions to what seems to be a structured and, maybe, not fully understood problem.

If poor management is the real cause of financial problems of opera houses around the world – as it is usually claimed – good management is to be the solution. But what do we mean by good management?

There seems to be a lack of a deep understanding of the managerialization process of cultural organizations. There are numerous formulas, and normative provisions, but nothing that can really grasp the peculiarity of an art organization.

The story I narrated at the beginning suggests that the Venice opera house can represent an example of curing a sick system with good management. An example of “we have it all”, where both financial and artistic goals are met. By narrating and analyzing the Venetian case, this study aims at improving our understanding of the managerialization of cultural organizations: its rationales, tensions, and implications.

The study has been conducted through an six-month fieldwork at La Fenice opera house, in which I was working shoulder by shoulder with its employees at the production and planning department. As a neophyte in the opera sector, the research lines come little by little, through a sense making process in which I match my observations with existing theories and studies on cultural economics, and on arts and public management, always trying to highlight the peculiarities of the case study, rather than obscuring them for the sake of generalization. What results is a research journey of which I didn't know the destination; a journey in which my readings were suggested by the field itself, rather than defined a priori, as the careful reader will understand from the quotations and stories from the field contained in each chapter. In line with my ontology and epistemology positions, in fact, this study aims at providing a better understanding of the phenomenon, rather than generalization an prediction (see the chapter on methodological considerations for further details).

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In this chapter I will introduce the debate on arts management, retracing its origins and major influences, and outlining some critical reflections that will be then deepened with the analysis of the case study.

In the following part I will first outline some features of opera production around the world (chapter 2), and the particular case of the Italian opera system (chapter 3). The connoisseurs of this area of business can easily skip that part and jump directly to the case under investigation.

The description (chapter 4) and the analysis (chapter 5) of the case study outline the features of the La Fenice's new arts management by making use of observations from the field, interviews, and official documents of the opera house. What results is a sort of "official version" which emphasizes the positive results of the managerial turn both on financial performance, and on artistic production.

Chapter 6, takes us behind the scenes of La Fenice's new arts management, allowing us to question the rationality, neutrality and universality of arts management.

Chapter 7 will deepen the implications that arts management has at individual level, by contrasting the figure of the "creative mass" arisen from the analysis of the case, with the concept of creative class, and reasoning on the concept of frustration.

Chapter 8 contrasts the meaning of innovation in the artistic field, with the use of the same word made in management studies. It highlights, thanks to the observations made in the field, how management tends to take a conservative form when entering the art sector, focusing more on efficiency and optimization of existing resources, rather than fostering creativity and innovation.

In the light of the analysis made, chapter 9 reconsider the field of arts management under a critical perspective. It starts from the outline provided in this introductory chapter and enriches it with critical reflections coming from critical management studies, sociology and philosophy.

I decided to provide my methodological considerations only at the end of the thesis (chapter 10), because they contain "spoilers" that would have revealed the narrative if read in advance.

ARTS MANAGEMENT, PART I: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENTS

THE ANTECEDENTS: CULTURAL ECONOMICS

In 1965 Baumol and Bowen published a paper in *The American Economic Review* titled “On the Performing Arts: The Anatomy of Their Economic Problems” in which they stated that the financial problems faced by performing arts organizations are more due by their basic economic characteristics than by poor management and institutional arrangements (Baumol and Bowen, 1965). The dilemma, known as the “Baumol’s cost disease”, referred to the limited room for technological improvement which characterizes the performing arts and impede increases in productivity in such sector. A stable productivity, added to the continuously increasing in wages level in the whole economy (including the cultural sector), results in an inexorably rise in labour cost per unit of output. Consequently, unless tickets prices are to rise or the quality of the products is to lower, governments and private funds have to increase indefinitely in order to fill the increasing financial gap (Baumol and Bowen, 1965; Baumol, 1967).

The Baumol’s cost disease laid the foundations of cultural economics as a sub-discipline of economics aimed at understanding cultural phenomena from an economic standpoint. While Baumol’s cost-disease theory was having its follow-ups (e.g. Heilbrun, 2011) and some (partial) empirical confirmations (e.g. Felton, 1994; Last and Wetzel, 2011), the field of cultural economics has enlarged to investigate traditional economic issues with a specific focus on the cultural sector. The interest on the cultural sector is justified by the acknowledgment of the increasing economic relevance of it on national economies, as shown in almost all the introductions of cultural economists’ works. The field was then enriched with contributions of Bruno Frey, Alan Peacock, David Throsby, Ruth Towse, just to name a few. Some of the most studied topics by cultural economists are: arts consumers behaviors and tastes; price and income elasticity of the demand; labour market for artists; public

subsidies for the arts; pricing strategies; structures and governance of arts organizations (for a review, see Throsby, 1994; Blaug, 2001). In the performing arts, in particular, in addition to the still actual Baumol's cost disease and its developments, a considerable branch of studies focus on the structures and governance of arts organizations intertwined with theories on non-profit and public sector, welfare economics, and with the notion of market failure and public good (of which the 1981 Hansmann's study titled "nonprofit enterprises in the performing arts" laid the foundations).

ARTS MANAGEMENT AND THE MANAGERIALIZATION OF THE ARTS

In the meanwhile debates have evolved around the need of the managerialisation of cultural organizations. The sociologist Paul DiMaggio, in his study on arts managers conducted in 1981, highlighted how administrative roles were becoming more formalized in the cultural sector and how new arts managers were more likely to have administrative experience and managerial degrees than their senior peers (DiMaggio, 1987). His findings underlined the beginning of a managerialization process that was required by the need of arts organizations for stronger management.

Indeed, in the two decades preceding DiMaggio's study, arts management begun moving its first steps in the US, as a sub-discipline of management. In 1969 the first arts management journals were established (Performing Art Reviews and the Journal of Arts, Management, Law and Society), and arts management training programs begun to flourish (Evard and Colbert, 2000; Chong, 2000). As the number of specialized journals grows, so does the number of publications on arts management (Rentschler and Shilbury, 2008).

Among the publications, Raymond and Greyser's paper entitled "The business of managing the arts" and published in 1978 by the Harvard Business Review, represents an evocative example of the approach adopted by many arts management scholars. Here is the abstract:

“It is folly to rely on the taste of the public for a particular “product” of an arts organization, be it a theater, museum, dance group, or whatever. In view of the competition for the public’s attention and entertainment dollars these days, any arts institution needs to market itself. It is also folly to fly financially by the seat of the pants; a realistic budget, strictly adhered to, is a necessity. A clearly stated and clearly understood purpose and a formalized structure (not dependent on the artistic driving force) are other prerequisites to the vitality of the arts institution that permits it to continue offering its product to the community.” (Raymond and Greyser, 1978: 123)

Raymond and Greyser stressed how arts organizations, as any other business, need things such as a business model, a careful planning, a sensible financial administration, marketing mechanisms to develop the customers, and so forth. The idea was that, independently on the reliability of Baumol’s disease theory and without necessarily advocating for more public funding, there must exist ways of overcoming the financial problems of arts organizations by economizing, eliminating inefficiencies and wastes, rising income and finding alternative financing, and by increasing scale and technical efficiency. These ways, thus, had to be found in a better management, where “better” seems to mean “business-like”.

For this reason arts managers are required to have knowledge on planning, organizing, leadership, and control, and should possess skills on financial management, labour relations, marketing, and fundraising (Martin and Rich, 1998; Sikes, 2000; Rhine, 2006). Artistic sensitivity and aesthetic expertise, even if important, are qualities that are no longer considered enough for arts managers to properly manage an arts organization.

With the aim of increasing the managerial abilities of arts organizations, the mainstream approach of arts management is to take a topic in management (marketing, leadership, planning, human resource management, accounting) and adapt it to an art context.

The most mainstream pieces in line with this view, are probably the textbooks adopted in arts management curricula. For example, Byrnes (2012)’s book “Management and the arts”, after a preface on the characteristics of the arts sector, provides the reader, for the rest of the book, with general management

theories in parallel with the description of some practices and managerial cases of arts organizations.

Similar approaches characterize other managerialization processes, such as those involving the public sector. In fact, some parallelism between arts management and the reforms of the public sector inspired by the literature on New Public Management (NPM) can be drawn. Both arts management and NPM recommend organizations to increase efficiency and productivity and to become more flexible, by adopting managerial tools and strategies (Lindqvist, 2012). Moreover, the two fields often intertwine since many arts organizations are publicly owned or deeply dependent on government's decisions in terms of funding and governance.

THE DUALITY OF ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

Mainstream arts management literature bases its argument on the assumption that there is a parallelism between arts organizations and traditional businesses and, thus, that there exists a positive relationship between management and (artistic) results. In this sense, arts management can simply be seen as general management applied to a specific field of practice.

However, in arts management, many studies have increasingly focused on the dichotomy between the artistic and the managerial logics coexisting in arts organization, highlighting the potential conflicts between the two.

The already quoted paper by Raymond and Greyser (1978), which signaled the origin of arts management, pointed out repetitively the distinctiveness of the two sides and urge to make the latter (the managerial one) more professional with "the advent of more sophisticated managers" able to provide arts enterprises with "the right combination of artistic sensitivity and administrative background". For instance, they suggest to limit the financial power of the artistic director, by pulling alongside him an administrative director.

Later, the dualism that seems to characterize arts organizations have been highlighted by several studies in arts and cultural management, as it can be detected by two special issues published in different journals and in different years.

The first special issue appeared in *Organization Science* in 2000 and it was titled “*Cultural Industries: Learning from Evolving Organizational Practices*”. It focuses on some intrinsic polarities of the cultural industry and calls for a “balancing act” between the “opposing imperatives” that characterize cultural industries (Lampel et al., 2000; 263). These polarities arise from the fact that cultural products serve an aesthetic or expressive, rather than a utilitarian purpose (Hirsh, 1972). The introduction to the special issue, outlines five polarities that shape organizational practices in cultural industries:

“First, managers must reconcile expression of artistic values with the economics of mass entertainment. Second, they must seek novelty that differentiates their products without making them fundamentally different in nature from others in the same category. Third, they must analyse and address existing demand while at the same time using their imagination to extend and transform the market. Fourth, they must balance the advantages of vertically integrating diverse activities under one roof against the need to maintain creative vitality through flexible specialization. And finally, they must build creative system to support and market cultural products but not allow the system to suppress individual inspiration, which is ultimately at the root of creating value in cultural industries.” (Lampel et al., 2000; 263)

The second special issue, titled “*Paradoxes of creativity: managerial and organizational challenges in the cultural economy*”, was published in 2007 by the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. Here, the need for a balancing act is renewed in order to solve the paradoxical challenges and dilemmas faced by managers and other participants in the cultural industry (DeFilippi et al., 2007). Adopting the term creativity, the special issue covers various activities (not only the artistic core sector, but also craft and design industries).

Conflicts between artistic/cultural objectives and financial/commercial imperatives have been investigated both at the organizational (arts organizations) and at an individual (artists) level. Glynn (2000) investigated the tensions of a multifaceted organizational identity focusing on the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. Cray, Inglis, and Freeman (2007) focused their analysis on the application of business-like management style under dual rationalities. Ekman (2013)’s study investigated the ambiguities between contractual and

self-actualization oriented discourses and practices for creative workers, while Gill and Pratt (2008) focused on the precariousness of cultural workers. Eikhof and Haunschild (2004) studied the interiorization of the existing tensions between artistic and economic logics in artists engaged in German theaters.

The often claimed need to balance artistic and managerial logics in arts organizations, lies in the recognition of the opposition of the two views. The act of balancing, implies the existence of different elements which should be in equal or fair proportion in order to give equilibrium and stability (simply, there is no need to balance if two forces goes towards the same direction). On the other hand, what is the desired objective of such balancing act, is not given. Equilibrium can change according to the prevailing view, and shift more towards one pole or to another. When a managerial logic enters arts organization, the equilibrium is defined as the point where the enterprise shows good financial and economic results that allows it to continue to pursue its cultural activity in the future without fail. At the same time, the acknowledgment of the dualism typical of arts organizations as a distinctive characteristic of this field, should suggest managerial logic to take a “modest approach” (Zan, 2006: 7), rather than trying to impose its paradigm. This, however, would imply abandoning the initial spirit of conquest that seemed to motivate general management when it first approached the arts sector, and acknowledging the relevance of artistic, aesthetic, and social aspects that differentiates arts management from general management.

AN OVERVIEW OF OPERA PRODUCTION

Before presenting the case study, it is worth outlining some features of opera houses at a more general level. Opera houses around the world show some similarities but also some relevant differences. In fact, while the production process and the professionals profiles involved are more or less the same worldwide, legal status, structure, governance and financial structure can vary a lot between and within national contexts. The organization's size, the composition of the offer, and the local context, of course, influence the organizational structure and the budget level of each opera house, while different features of national contexts influence the legal status, the governance, the production strategy, and the financial structure of opera organizations. As we will see, differences between national contexts are due by the different role played by the governments in the cultural field and by historical traditions of the opera sector.

GENERAL FEATURES OF OPERA PRODUCTION AND OPERA HOUSES

THE OFFER: THE SEASON'S PROGRAM

Since the main product offered by opera houses is a live performance of an opera piece, the season's program can be seen as a sort of catalogue in which the opera house presents the products it offers for each season (which usually starts in September or October and finishes in May or June).

It consists of a list of operatic titles, each of which is performed for a number of times. The number of titles and performances can vary considerably according

to structural factors (such as the size of the organization and physical facilities) and to the production strategy adopted by the opera house (see next section for more details on different production strategies).

Concerning the composition of the program, we can identify at least two kind of products differentiation: the first related to artistic genres and traditions, the other to the novelty of the operatic piece.

With more than four centuries of history, operatic works can belong to many different genres, artistic movements and national traditions from which an opera house can draw to differentiate its products. Works of the XVIII century range from the Opera Seria and Opera Buffa of the Italian Baroque era, to the French Opéra Comique, and to Singspiel and pieces of the classical era in Germany (e.g. Mozart and Beethoven). The most famous works come from the XIX century, and refers in particular to the Italian Bel Canto (with works by Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and particularly Verdi), the French Grand Opera (e.g. Meyerbeer) and Operetta (e.g. Offenbach, Bizet), and the German Romantic Opera (which started with Weber and has its most significant contribution from Wagner). Some works inspired by neoclassicism and modernism were created in the XX century, and in recent times opera is taking new trends and experimenting new genres (e.g. the musicals).

Usually, a season's program presents works from different historical, national and artistic traditions. However some programs are more conservative, concentrating more on the 19th century repertory, while some other tends to prefer more recent genres, such as musicals. Some programs appear to be national or local oriented, emphasizing the works of influential national or local composers such as Wagner in Germany and Verdi in Italy, or supporting national rather than foreign composers for new works.

A second differentiation can be made according to the novelty of the operatic works, in absolute terms or relatively to the history of the opera house. Opera pieces can be new works, meaning that both the libretto and the musical sheet are new, or, more often, new interpretations of past works in which the artistic team (in particular the stage director and the conductor) work on musical and dramatic materials that already exist. When interpretations of past works are

new and presented for the first time, we call it a new production. After the first presentation of a new production, it can become part of a repertoire and be performed in the following seasons (or more than once in the same season). A performance of a repertoire pieces is called revival. Opera productions can also be rent to and from other opera houses. In the case of guest productions, the opera can be new to the opera house in which it is currently hosted and performed, even though it has already been presented somewhere else before. The composition of a season's program in terms of new works or productions and repertory pieces is often the result of the production strategy adopted by the opera house. In the next section I will discuss in details the stagione and the repertory systems and their different propensity in producing new works.

The season's program reflects the artistic strategy and identity of the opera house (e.g. conservative, traditional, innovative). However the choice of the titles to present in each season has also a financial rationale. Some opera works are more expensive than others, because they need additional artistic personnel (e.g. some musicians able to play particular instruments), more lights, luxury costumes, two or three changes of the set, etc. New works and new productions are usually more expensive because they require more time for rehearsals, and investments in costumes, sets, props. Nonetheless the same title can be produced with different budgets, by avoiding to hire very expensive guest soloists, or by simplifying technical components, sets, and costumes. For the season's program to be financially balanced, the management of the opera house must take into consideration also these aspects. The definition of the season's program, thus, involves both the artistic director, mainly for the artistic coherence of the program, and the general manager, who has to ensure the financial feasibility of it.

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

An opera piece is based on a "libretto", which contains the texts, and a musical sheet, and it is a combination of musical, dramatic, and visual aspects.

For the production process to start, the organizations has to provide all the resources needed in terms of people (employed staff and guests artists), time

and space (through a rehearsal calendar), and financial resources (with a dedicated budget).

Given the musical sheets of the composer and the texts of the librettist, the initial phase of the production process starts with the ideas of the artists and creative personnel involved in the design and in the interpretation of the operatic work.

Under the directive of the stage director, the designers define sets, props, lights and costumes and provide sketches and plants that go either to the workshops of the opera house for the construction, or to the scenic design office for purchases or rents.

In the meanwhile, musicians and singers start to study the music individually.

The core of the production process takes place in the rehearsal rooms of the opera house. Here the production director is in charge for the planning of the rehearsal process. The duration of the rehearsal process can vary from more than a month to a couple of weeks depending on the complexity and novelty of the work. A new production, with new scenery, costumes, lights, stage direction, and more, is considerably more labor-intensive and time-consuming than a revival of an existing production in which many of the most important elements are already in place.

In the rehearsal process each group works separately and then they gradually come together on the stage when all of the interrelationships between the groups have been established. At the beginning the soloists meet for the *leseprobe* (reading rehearsal) in which performers read through the language of the text as if it were a play. Then the music rehearsals start, under the direction of the conductor. At the beginning they involve separately the soloists, the chorus and the orchestra. Later, with the *sitzprobe* (sitting rehearsal), singers and orchestra rehearse together, concentrating on the music rather than on the dramatic aspects. Soloists (and later the chorus and the walk-ons) are also involved in the staging rehearsals, which take place under the direction of the stage director. In the staging rehearsals the focus is on the dramatic aspects of the opera. A rehearsal pianist accompanies them, but usually the conductor is not present and the soloists don't strain their voice too much. Staging rehearsals

take place initially in rehearsals room, where the set is sketched (usually with tape stuck on the floor indicating the positions of components of the set) and only the props that are handled by the soloists are used. The last staging rehearsals are made on the stage, with the complete set assembled and with the costumes. Technical groups are also involved in the staging rehearsals (props, stage, light, sound technicians, and the tailors), but specific technical rehearsals are scheduled, in order to fix and test the lights, the sounds, and the special effects, and for maneuvering the set. They also give the designers the opportunity to see how their designs will impact each other, and to make final changes. At the end of the rehearsal process there is a pre-dress rehearsal and a dress rehearsal, which take place few days before the opening night. Here all the elements of the opera are put together, and the entire performance is run from beginning to end, exactly as the real performances will be. Sometimes a selected audience can attend the dress rehearsal (e.g. schools, employees and their relatives or friends, ...).

THE COSTS OF OPERA

Opera is a highly labour-intensive activity because of the large number of artists, technicians and administrative staff it requires to run the opera house. This is reflected in the cost structure of performing arts organizations in which the personnel costs represent the biggest item that can absorb as much as the three-quarters of the total budget. (Baumol and Bowen, 1965; Globerman and Book, 1974; Auvinen, 2000; Mariani, 2006). Permanent employed personnel is a fixed cost, meaning that it does not depend on the level of production. Consequently, the cost structure of the opera house is generally very rigid, but, at the same time, it might benefit from economies of scale (Globerman and Book, 1974).

Personnel costs can be divided into administrative, artistic and technical costs: administrative costs are related to personnel dealing with planning, finance, bookkeeping, communication, marketing, human resources, etc.; artistic costs are those related to the employed artistic personnel (orchestra, chorus, company singers, principal conductor and maestros); and technical costs are

those connected with the technical groups (electricians, sound and stage technicians, tailors, etc).

Production costs are the second main item, after the personnel cost, for many opera houses. They refer to the purchases and rentals of materials and services needed for the set-up of the production: stage sets, props, costumes, light and sound system (Auvinen, 2000; Mariani, 2006).

Other costs relates to the maintenance of the opera house's facilities, and they can represent a relevant share of the total costs for those opera houses operating in historical buildings of which they are formally owners. General operational costs, services and consumptions, are part of overhead costs, which usually account for a smaller part of the total budget (Auvinen, 2000; Mariani, 2006).

By taking a performance of one production as the object of analysis, we can identify both fixed and variable costs. Fixed production costs include the rehearsal time, and, for the physical construction, the hours worked in the workshops and the purchases of the services and materials for the construction of stage sets, costumes, propos, and for the arrangement of light and sound systems (the same costs are variable in case the opera house decides to rent the production, or part of it, rather than make it internally). These latter costs are potential investments in case the new production becomes part of the repertoire and thus suitable to be performed again in the future (that is usually the case of opera houses adopting a repertory strategy), or in case it can be rented out (either the whole production or just a part, for example the costumes), otherwise they are sunk costs. Variable costs of each performance are mainly the costs related to guest artists (usually conductors and directors, but also designers and soloists), additional musicians and artistic professionals, and walk-ons. Evidently variable costs are higher for the opera houses operating with a stagione system, in which the soloists are freelancer contracted for a specific production. In addition, for every single performance there are the marginal costs of "having the theater open", such as fire brigade, and support personnel for the audience.

A new production is thus characterized by relatively high fixed costs, but in the longer period the average cost per performance declines because of the little marginal cost of each performance that comes after the first (Globerman and Book, 1974; Throsby, 1994), giving the opera house the possibility to take advantage given by economies of scale.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND PROFESSIONAL PROFILES

The organizational structure taken by each opera house reflects the number of different activities it carries out (some opera houses, in addition to opera, provide also ballets, concerts, and drama). According to Auvinen (2000)'s study on four opera houses, all the organizational structures have a relatively flat structure, consisting of a general manager and a set of directors, each of whom is in charge of a department. Even if the size of the organization can vary considerably, making the organizational structures more or less complex, in general there are five basic functions: the financial and organizational department (which can be divided in human resources, public relations, broadcasting etc); the planning and production department (artistic administration), in charge of programming and production planning; the music department, in charge of the orchestra and chorus, the ballet department, in charge of the ballet-related matters; and the technical department, in charge of the stages and workshops. These basic departments can be divided in smaller departments in bigger organizations. The core activity is the artistic production process, and the organizational structure is put in place to facilitate such process with its planning and production, music, ballet, and technical department, while the role of the managing director is to ensure that the opera house complies with the financial and organizational expectations.

In the formal structure, there seems not to be any vertical interaction among the departments, since all the directors refer to the general director. This led Auvinen (2000; 2001) to claim the existence of a dual organization: an informal organizational structure which exists alongside the formal one to allow communications and interactions between departments (without passing

through the general manager) and to give the artistic personnel, as the key factor, more organizational power than the one depicted by the formal organizational chart. The existence of a dual organization, as Auvinen claims, is often a source of conflicts and confusion in the authority.

An opera house employed a large variety of professionals. Some of them are permanently employed, other are hired or contracted specifically for a single production. Some have artistic background, others perform technical jobs, while some others have simply a long experience in the performing arts and operate as support staff on the production process and during the performances.

Creative professionals

The creative team of each production is headed by the conductor (or music director) and the director, who collaborate to give to the production an original interpretation. The conductor is in charge for the music aspects and directs the orchestra and the soloists. The director is in charge for the dramatic and visual aspects of the operatic work. He defines how soloists and choir should behave on stage in order to express what is his/her interpretation. The director also defines how the production will look like, and he/she transmit his/her interpretation to the creative team composed by set, lighting, sound, props, and costume designers. He also collaborates with the choreographer in case the operatic work includes a ballet. The designers sketches and make plants and models of the visual aspects of the production. In order to do that, not only they need to have understood the director's interpretation, but they also need to do research on the operatic work and to collaborate each other.

The soloists are the key elements on the stage. Even though they are directed by the conductor and the director, they play an active part on the interpretation of the operatic piece, so that both the conductor and the director usually tailor the characters of the piece on the basis of the characteristics of the soloists and of their suggestions. Orchestra, chorus, and soloists are the first joining link between the music and visual interpretation of the conductor and director, and what actually happens on stage. They are the actual artistic interpreters.

Technical professions

For a production to become real, technical aspects also need to be considered. The visual interpretation of the director, through the work of the designers, come to life thanks to the work of a large number of technical professionals: the plans and a model of the stage are sent to the carpenters of the workshops who have to build the set, and to the stage technicians that are in charge to assemble and maneuver it on stage; the lighting plants is arranged by electricians and light technicians; the sketches of the costumes goes to the costume workshop where tailors assemble the costumes according with the actual measures of the performers; craftspeople take care of the props (purses, swords, wall lamps, puppets, etc) after they have constructed or assembled them. Technicians and employees working on the sound, lighting, sets and costumes might be coordinated by a technical director.

Other backstage professions

Another important professional figure is the stage manager, who provide practical and organizational support to the creative, artistic, and technical teams throughout the production process, from the beginning of the rehearsal process to the final performance. His/her task is to ensure that the production runs smoothly: from scheduling and running the rehearsals, to make sure that props and costumes are ready on the rehearsals room, to warn the artists when their entrance on stage is approaching during the performances.

An important backstage work is performed by stage maestros. They usually have a background in music because they need to be able to read the score, so that they can follow along with the conductor and be prepared for the next scene at all times. They give the signals at the right moment to the lighting and stage technicians when they have to maneuver the set or the lights, and to performers when it is time to go on stage.

Administrative staff

In addition to the above mentioned professional profiles, administrative staff is involved in functional, support, and control activities. Casting, musical services, rehearsals planning and room management, work schedule and shifts planning, purchase of scenic materials, are all functional activities that enable the production phase. Support activities include marketing and communication,

ticket office, education, and IT management, while control functions deal with human resource management, accounting and reporting, and general administration.

OPERA HOUSES WORLDWIDE: AN OVERVIEW

PRODUCTION STRATEGY: THE “STAGIONE” AND THE REPERTORY SYSTEM.

There are two different systems in which opera houses organize their artistic production: the “stagione” (season) system and the repertory system. Many opera houses nowadays adopt some hybrid forms, and some organizations operate in a festival mode, which is similar to the stagione approach but limited in its time horizon (usually organized during summertime).

Italian opera houses have traditionally organized their artistic production according to the stagione system (Towse, 2011). In the stagione system a company of singers is brought together for a fixed period of time in which they rehearse and give usually seven to ten performances during a period of few weeks, which are rarely revived in the following seasons. Large opera houses in Great Britain and the USA are also more oriented towards the stagione system, even if they adopt a more hybrid form (Gossett, 1008; Tarondeau, 2008). However, while in large opera houses the production of different operas can overlap, in the smaller Italian opera houses usually operas are produced sequentially: the rehearsals of a new piece start when the previous one is on stage.

A different system of opera production is the repertory system, generally favored in German and Central Europe opera houses (Tarondeau, 2008; Payne, 2010; Towse, 2011). The opera houses adopting the repertory system, have a permanent company of singers who perform different operatic works. The productions of their repertoire rotate nightly, and each production is performed over a period of several months, and usually revived in different seasons.

Opponents and supporters of each system have long debated about the primacy of one over the other (Mitchell, 1970; Leppard, 1993; Litter, 2003; Payne, 2010; Towse, 2011).

The stagione system is often preferred because it is believed to provide higher artistic standards, thanks to longer and more concentrated rehearsals, and to the selection of specialized singers for specific roles (Leppard, 1993). It is supposed to give more options for directors and conductors (or for the composer, if living), and it is thus more adapt for rare, less-known, and non-standard versions of operatic works. For this reason it is believed to foster innovation and experimentation (Leppard, 1993). However, opponents of the stagione system argue that, due to its recourse to guest artists rather than internal ensemble, it puts too much emphasis on the individual voices and reputations of celebrated artists, and less on the music and on the cohesiveness of the dramatic performance. It is thus accused to be ostentatious and costly (both for the audience and for the organization), and to lack of a long-term orientation towards the artistic development of the company (Mitchell, 1970).

In opera houses adopting this system, only one opera may be seen during a period of two or three weeks, and, in order to protect the vocal health of the singers, only three or four performances per week are showed (unless multiple casts are involved). By adopting a stagione system, opera houses are burdened by high fixed costs for each production and are unable to take advantage of the relative low marginal costs of additional reruns (Towse, 2011). On the other hand the season strategy seems more flexible (Mariani, 2006) and easier to plan and to manage (Towse, 2011).

On the contrary, when the repertory system operates at capacity it is the most productive option and a very efficient system from an economic perspective (Payne, 2010; Corte dei Conti, 2015). This because the repertory system allows the opera house to offer a wider variety of productions and to shows up to 6 different works per week (with no “dark” nights), with a greater ability to attract wider audience. But in order to be fully implemented, it requires a strong and flexible ensemble able to fill out a wide range of roles, lots of extra rehearsal

spaces, and technical systems and processes that enable the continuous bringing on and off stage the productions. Rehearsal time is usually shorter than in the stagione system, and the rigidity of some processes and structures (e.g. for the lighting system) narrows the options for the creative professionals involved in the production (Fryer, 2014). For these reasons the repertory system pushes towards the standardization of the opera, and it is more suitable for popular works, less inventive and more rigid, with a large audience. Opponents of this system claim it is actually chosen only for economic pressures, rather than for its artistic potential (Leppard, 1993). While, on one hand, the repertory system allegedly provides singers with a lot of opportunities for their artistic development, and it improves the cohesiveness of the ensemble (Mitchell, 1970), on the other hand, it is accused to offer lower artistic level (because of little rehearsal time, and the need to cover a wide repertory with in-house singers), and to lead to a decline in quality after the first performance (due to changes in the cast and in the direction) (Leppard, 1993).

LEGAL STATUS AND GOVERNANCE

The legal status adopted by opera houses around the world are mainly non-profit or state-owned organizations.

In continental Europe, governments often operate directly in the production of opera, through state-owned institutions. That is the case of the most important French and German opera houses (while France is highly centralized and the cultural authority lies at the national level, in the federal Germany, opera houses are mainly under the authority of federal governments). The direct involvement of the government is established also in Sweden and Norway, where opera houses are public owned companies, and can also be found in some Spanish institutions (Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona).

Nonprofit arts organizations is the normal form taken by opera houses in US and in UK. Private foundations with strong link with central and local governments, can be found in Finland (the Finnish National Opera), Spain (Opera de Madrid, Opera de Oviedo, Palau des Arts de Valencia), and in Italy,

where opera houses have been transformed from public entities to private foundations through a national law in 1996.

Whether the legal status is public or private, the role of governments (at different levels) in the governance of opera houses is very relevant, especially in Europe. The formal authority of the governments in the governance of the opera houses is particularly strong when they are entitled to determine the members of the governing bodies, which can happen for both public organizations (as for German and French opera houses), and for private non-profit institutions (like in Finland and in Italy). Public authorities, thus, have a strong direct control in many arts organizations. In other cases, such for the English opera houses, the control exercised by the main cultural arm's length government body, i.e. the Arts Council, as the main source of funding, is indirect but not absent. Auvinen (2001) says the members of the governing body of the English National Opera, despite being elected by the members of the company, are to be tacitly approved by the Arts Council (pg.179).

THE FUNDING SYSTEM AND REVENUE COMPOSITION

Opera houses show different compositions of revenues structure, depending considerably on the funding system of the national and local context. In addition to earned revenues, other forms of support can derive from both public and private source.

Direct public financial support includes subsidies, grant, lottery funds, coming from different levels of governments (national or local), or from arm's length bodies (like the Arts Council in the UK). The percentages of public funds on the total revenues vary across countries. In the European context governments represent the largest supporters of the arts. The last comparative study, based on 2005 data of a sample of European performing arts institutions, shows percentages that range from 56% in UK, to 79% in Germany and 80% in Sweden (Mariani, 2009).

Private financial support can come from nonprofit organizations (mainly foundations), businesses or individuals in the forms of donations, patronage, and sponsorship. The share of private contributes are more significant in

countries such as the US and UK, where there is a longer tradition of private involvement in the arts, usually supported by specific cultural policies. Indirect public support to culture can be in the forms of tax deduction for cultural institutions, different VAT rate for cultural products, and tax incentives for companies or individuals donating or investing in the arts.

The box office represents the most significant item of earned revenues of opera houses. Even if it can represent only a marginal share of the income, it is a key indicator that can foster both public and private subsidies. The level of the box office depends on the pricing policy applied by the opera house. The pricing policy is influenced by the structure of the demand (potential audience, elasticity of the demand), by the kind of production (e.g. classics have usually more success on the box office than innovative works), and by the size of the hall. However, the pricing policy is not entirely an autonomous decision of the management, but it is also influenced by the national and local cultural policies, especially where the authority of the governments in the cultural domain is relevant. In his analysis based on 1998 data for 4 European opera houses (and one festival), Auvinen (2000) founded that box office counts for 9,5% for the Deutsche Opera Berlin, 20% for the Finnish National Opera, 25% for the Opera National de Paris, and 26% for the English National Opera.

In addition to the box office, other source of earned revenues are related with commercial activities, only indirectly connected with the core activity, such as touring, merchandising, broadcasting etc.

Evidences show that despite the public support is still the main source of funding in Europe, it has been decreasing since the 90s, while an increased attention has been given to the private sector and to earned revenues (Mariani, 2009; Klamer et al., 2006).

ECONOMICS AND FINANCIAL STRUCTURE

As we have seen, the structure of an opera house can vary a lot, and the budget it has depends heavily on the size of the organization (particularly in relation to the employed personnel) and its income structure can vary considerably according to the context. Nonetheless some studies, especially on

cultural economics and arts management, have highlighted some features that characterized the economics of performing arts organizations.

Cultural economists have pointed out that opera, and more generally the performing arts, suffers of an income gap problem, meaning a structural inability of these organisations to cover the expenditures with the revenues (Baumol and Bowen, 1965; Baumol, 1967; Brooks, 2000).

The main argument that is used to explain the existence of the income gap is the productivity lag, theorized by Baumol and Bowen in 1965 and well known by cultural economists as the Baumol's cost disease theory. Productivity, defined as output per work hour, is rather stable in the performing arts relatively to other sectors that can take advantage of technological improvements. Since in the performing arts, the output is the work of the performer itself (singer singing and musicians playing) it is impossible to increase productivity (to perform an operatic works there is a fixed number of artists involved for a fixed time). A stable productivity, added to the continuously increasing in wages level, results in an inexorably rise in labour cost per unit of output.

Income gap can be a source of big financial troubles, if the opera house is not able to find public and private support to cover that gap. However, the Baumol's cost disease can explain only partially the financial problems that many opera houses are facing nowadays. Inefficiencies, wastes, mismanagement, and political interferences have also played a relevant role in the financial crisis of these organizations.

In reality, there is room for technological improvements also in the performing arts (e.g. in the lighting systems, or in stage machinery), and other ways of economizing can be found. For instance, the management can decide to reduce the rehearsal time, or it can prefer to perform works that require smaller casts, or a single stage set, in order to reduce fixed costs. It can also operate on the variable costs, by deciding to save budget on the artistic cast (e.g. preferring younger and less famous artists). The management can also look at the demand side, in order to increase the revenues, by preferring conventional and classic works that are generally more likely to encounter the preferences of the audience (investments in marketing can also been seen in this perspective).

The risk of this kind of choices, however, is to incur an “artistic deficit” (Heilbrun, 2011).

Another solution is to increase the tickets prices. However there is not consensus on cultural economics about the rigidity of the demand with respect to price and income in the performing arts (Towse, 2010), and understanding the nature of demand for the performing arts is not easy. Moreover there are some political and social resistances to ticket prices increases, especially in a sector like the performing arts that seeks to become more “democratic” and to lose its elitist facade.

The other solution is to find external support to cover the income gap. Indeed, the Baumol’s cost disease served as a justification for public support to the performing arts, even though opponents of governments intervention argued that market mechanisms (and thus tickets price raise) should be preferred. However, as statistics show, public funding for culture are decreasing in many countries, and the recent financial crisis is making more difficult to reach private investors.

Many opera houses worldwide are thus looking at all these alternatives to solve their financial problems.

THE PUBLIC INTERVENTION IN THE OPERA.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the public sector represents one of the major actors in the governance, administration, and funding of many opera houses, at least in Europe.

Cultural economics explains governments intervention on the performing arts by making use of arguments coming from neoclassical economics, such as the concept of market failure, the public value of cultural products and their positive externalities. The Baumol’s cost disease has also been used to justify public intervention to the arts.

But if we look in particular to the longer tradition that opera has in European countries such as France, Italy and Germany, we see that governments’ interventions have had also a political rationale: cultural institutions were

important venues for political activities, and the grandeur of opera houses and operatic works were used ceremonially by the state, not much differently from how they were used by the Italian aristocracy in the XVIII century, or by the French bourgeois in the XIX (Bereson, 2002). In France culture, and in particular the high culture, is associated with the concept of nationhood since the ancient regime, while in Germany and Italy the first half of the 20th century was the period in which the role of the state became stronger, parallel to the ascend of totalitarian regimes, also in the cultural domain (Auvinen, 2000).

After the second world war, public intervention to the arts had increased significantly. The second postwar was the golden age of the keynesian welfare state doctrine which developed around the world around three main regimes: the liberal regime of the Anglo-Saxon countries, the corporatist welfare states of the continental Europe, and the social-democratic regimes typical of the Scandinavian countries (Esping-Andersen, 1990). From the 60s, with the recognition of culture as a field of public policy, welfare state regimes adopted cultural policies (each according to its historical legacy of public support to the arts) focusing in particular on the issue of equality, access, and democratization of the arts (Zimmer and Toepler, 1999).

The increased governments' involvement in the arts had a number of consequences for opera: it started to be considered as a public good, and as a cultural heritage to protect and spread. This emphasized the social orientation of arts organizations, with its focus on education, outreach, access, pluralism, and participation. The social orientation was added to the more traditional aesthetic view, that supports innovation and advocates for autonomy of the arts (DiMaggio, 1983 and 1987).

With the crisis of the welfare states, that followed the crisis of the Fordist accumulation system in the 70s, the adoption of neo-liberal agenda has been the hegemonic strategy, even if with different strategies in each welfare regime (Jessop, 1999). Neoliberalism, with its call for less public intervention and for a market-based social allocation structure, has informed reforms of the public sector around the world since the late 70s, starting from UK, US, Australia and New Zealand and then spreading in most of the OECD countries. These

reforms were based on the concept of New Public Management (NPM), which outlines a new paradigm of governance for public administrations. Reforms inspired by NPM are primarily concerned with values of efficiency and parsimony, and they share provisions aimed at reaching budgetary restraint, accountability, performance auditing, separation of politics and administration, devolution of authority, flexibility and freedom to manage, customers orientation, privatization, and competition (Hood, 1991). The reasons underlying the NPM reforms of public administrations can be found in a general mistrust on bureaucracy, and in the perceived inability of public administration to perform well and to adapt to novel circumstances on one hand, and in the apparent superior management of the private sector on the other (Aucoin, 1990; Hood, 1991 and 1995; Lynn, 1998; Gruening, 2001; Thomas and Davies, 2005).

Consequently, governments intervention in the cultural field has changed. A study commissioned by the European Parliament on the financing systems of arts and culture, highlighted that, even if governments still remain the largest supporters of arts, public funds are decreasing and increased attention is given to private sources of support. In addition, specific recommendations to governments were given in order to stimulate the market and third sector support to the arts (Kamler et al., 2006). Arts organizations themselves were directly touched by NPM reforms. As we have seen, in Europe, many arts organizations are public owned institutions, and are thus directly touched by discussions on public management. Non-profit arts organizations are also touched by NPM principles since their goal is public in their inner character (producing, endorsing, and preserving culture). Moreover most of the arts organizations, both non-profit and profit oriented, are deeply dependent on public subsidies, and thus any policy change impacting public funding agencies (regarding for instance funding criteria, or accountability requirements) are likely to affect also the management of arts organizations (DiMaggio, 1983; Towse, 2001).

Arts organizations, together with all public owned institutions, have thus been asked to take managerial reforms to transform structural rigidities into managerial flexibility (Sicca and Zan, 2005; Tajtakova, 2006), to improve

transparency and accountability on the use of public resources, to increase efficiency and avoid wastes, and to become more flexible by adopting management tools and labour contracts typical of those in use in the private sector (Lindqvist, 2012).

A managerial orientation, focusing on efficiency and flexibility, was thus added to the traditional aesthetic view of the “art for art’s sake”, and to the social orientation typical of the public sector.

Some of the managerial reforms occurred in opera houses were the results of voluntary and discretionary choices of the management, some other are enforced by government bodies. The Italian case that will be analyzed in the next chapter provides an example of the latter mechanism.

THE ITALIAN OPERA SECTOR: A FALL FROM GRACE

“When the conductor Riccardo Muti walked away from Rome’s Teatro dell’Opera the other day, citing a lack of “serenity”, one could scarcely blame him. Beset by financial cutbacks, strikes, deficits, alleged corruption, booing and more, it can often seem that Italy’s opera-world experiences more melodrama off stage than on – despite the country being the birthplace of the art form and home to many of its greatest composers over the centuries, from Monteverdi to Puccini.”
J. Duchon for *The Independent*, 23rd Sept. 2014

Italy is the opera’s motherland and the country which provided the world with some of the most famous and still performed operatic works. It has always been an expensive and financially problematic business, but it is still alive after more than four century, thanks initially to the support of the aristocracy, and later to the support of the state.

Here I provide a short description of the business of opera in Italy, with a special focus on the XX century history, and on the recent reforms. I conclude this chapter with the description of the current financial and economic situation of the Italian opera system, highlighting the critical aspects.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ITALIAN OPERA PRODUCTION UNTIL THE XIX CENTURY

Opera represents one of the most important artistic products of the Italian Renaissance. Its origin dates back to the end of the XVI and beginning of XVII century in Florence. In the early period, opera performances were organized in private palaces of royal or aristocratic families, as a mean to show off the

family's power and prestige. Stage sets and costumes were usually luxurious to reflect the grandeur of the family. Shows were thus offered to an elite, for the amusement of the family and of its closest entourage. In the Baroque era, the organization of opera production had a great development: in the second half of the XVII century it assumed an entrepreneurial form based on the role of the *impresario*. Operatic works were then performed in theaters, and opened to a wider audience (that can afford the price of the ticket), and the opera became a commercial product. Still the role of the aristocracy was relevant, as it was the main target of the *impresario*. Aristocrats were stable customers who "live" the theater as part of their social life, and whose financial resources allowed the *impresario* to run his business (Piperno, 1987). The role of the *impresario* and the history of the Italian opera production system are well described in Pestelli and Bianconi (1987) and in Rosselli (1984). Here the focus is on the XX century, from when the public sector replaced the role of the aristocracy and became the main actor in funding, controlling and managing opera houses, up to the recent reforms aimed at increased opera houses' entrepreneurial and managerial capacities.

THE XX CENTURY: STATE'S INTERVENTION AND THE CRISIS OF THE SECTOR

After the Italian Unification (1861) the opera went through a period of crisis: many theaters were forced to close for some years due to financial problems. Opera was moving away from the aristocratic production, and the concept of art as a public good started to be spread. At the end of the XIX and beginning of XX century opera production started to be supported by the public sector. The transformation of the most important performing arts institutions in public entities started in 1921 with La Scala Opera House in Milan and diffused in the mid-30s to other 11 opera houses of other cities (especially after decree 438/1936). Since then, the public intervention was intended to serve two main purposes: to protect the organizations from external forces that could threaten their artistic autonomy; and to ensure continuity in their activity by providing

financial stability (Sicca and Zan, 2005). Local governments were directly involved in the management of the opera houses and their most relevant source of funding. However, the national government, controlled by the fascist party and by the strong figure of Mussolini, also played an important role in controlling the opera houses by nominating the chief executive and approving the season's programs. Central governments were often called to contribute with additional funds to solve the financial deficits of the opera houses. It is not excluded that the interest of the fascist government in the cultural field (and in particular in the high culture such as opera) involved also political aspects (see Bereson, 2002, for a more detailed analysis on the use of opera houses for political goals).

The overall system of the 11 public entities was characterized by increasing costs and mounting deficits. A number of legislative interventions were adopted to provide opera houses with the funds they need, but they were scattered and not linked to a comprehensive and organic framework defining the funding system.

The first important legislative intervention aimed at organizing the complex system of opera production was made in 1967 with Law 800 which gave to the state strong vigilance powers. With law 800/1967 the state recognizes opera as a preeminent national interest, and takes the responsibility for developing and promoting the sector. This meant also a bigger financial effort to support the 13 opera houses recognized by the law. The law, thus, outlined a funding system, and defined a national fund to be distributed mainly on the basis of personnel costs.

What has followed law 800 in reality was a strong political influence in the governance of opera houses, which came along with the strengthening of unions' power (whose representatives seat on the governing board), thus limiting *de facto* the autonomy of the organization. Opera houses didn't solve the financial and efficiency problems, on the contrary in those years artistic costs and personnel level increased uncontrolled, while augmenting the financial dependency to public funds, often distributed ad-hoc to solve specific financial problems (Armao, 2008). The state was frequently asked to intervene with additional funds to cover the financial gaps that opera houses so easily

produced. Public funds accounted for almost 90% of the total budget in that period.

A first intervention was made by changing the financing system (law 163 in 1985), with the aim of reaching a more effective and rational allocation of public funds. The idea was to create a national fund for the performing arts to be distributed on a three-year base so that to ensure financial stability and to support long term planning. However, since the level of the national fund was to be decided yearly with a national law, with considerable changes of amounts from one year to another, neither the financial security and stability nor long term planning envisaged by the reform were achieved.

The funding system, based on historical expenditures and particularly on personnel costs, tended to maintain stable the allocation of the resources over the years, and allowed moral hazard behaviors (opera houses tended to maximize the level of public funds, rather than the production) and adverse selection (the funding system wasn't able to award artistic quality and innovative productions) (Ernani and Iovino, 1993: 42).

This situation went on uncontrolled for many years, institutionalizing a system in which the state eventually paid all the inefficiencies and financial disasters opera houses would make; where politics and unions' representatives seated on the governing boards (with all the black shadows that this practice brings in terms of clientelism and corruption); where new personnel could be hired with no limits; where the artistic productions were few and very expensive. Basically, a system in which opera houses will never be allowed to die.

THE PRIVATIZATION PROCESS AND THE OTHER REFORMS OF THE 90S

For long time a new legislative framework, able to make the management of the opera houses more efficient and rational, was awaited. Law 800 did not contain any organic reform of the organizations of opera houses able to give them a proper management system, autonomous from political interferences, and stable conditions for long term planning (Brunetti, 2000; Brunetti and Ferrarese,

2007). Ernani and Iovino (1993) accused national politics of being the cause of organizational and financial problems faced by opera houses, because of its lack of will and courage to set up a comprehensive legislative intervention able to radically change the sector.

The long awaited reform process took place in the mid-90s, which was a particular period for Italian politics characterized by the uncovering of numerous episodes of corruption and misuse of public resources in many sectors. Together with the spread of neoliberal ideas and the adoption of NPM reforms worldwide (as shown in the previous chapter), Italy was thus experiencing an additional need for a general “cleaning-up” of the whole public sector (Panozzo, 2000). In those years, privatization processes involved public entities operating in different sectors, including culture.

Two legislative interventions, one in 1996 (Decree 367) and one in 1998 (Decree 134) transformed the 14 Italian opera houses into private non-profit foundations, and introduced some managerial criteria and tools typical of the private for profit sector. With the privatization process, the principles of entrepreneurship and efficiency, and the commitment to balanced budgets, became part of the constitutive charters of the new foundations. The governing bodies became smaller and private investors were given the possibility to appoint their representatives. Accounting and labour rules changed to mirror those in force in the private sector.

In 1999, another law (law 239) defined new criteria for the allocation of the public fund for the performing arts, in order to overcome the old distribution of resources (mainly based on past contributions) and to reward efficiency, productivity, and quality (Sicca and Zan, 2005; Balestra and Malaguti, 2006; Brunetti and Ferrarese, 2007).

The main objectives of the overall reform were: to increase the contribution of private capital; to introduce a more effective, flexible and less bureaucratic governance structure; to ensure financial security to support long-term planning; and, in general, to strengthen the business culture among opera’s administrators.

In particular, the presence of private investors was not only seen as a way to increase the financial resources without weighting on public finance, but also as

a way to support a private-style administrative system thanks to the participation of the representatives of private investors in the governing boards. The engagement of private investors was supposed to contribute in the modernization of the organizations, making opera houses less bureaucratic and less conditioned by corporatism and political influences.

The underlying political approach of the reforms was that of a State which still maintains its responsibility in cultural policy (the pre-eminent national interest given to lyric foundations by law 800/1967 was still present), but that, at the same time, seeks to give more flexibility and autonomy to opera houses through a sort of public-private partnership in the administration of the opera houses (Sicca and Zan, 2005).

However, the reform failed in its most prominent objective: the engagement of private investors. Law 367/1996 stipulated a three-year period to complete the transformation in foundations, but only the Milan's opera house "La Scala" was able to attract enough private investors and to set up a mix board, comprehensive of both public and private representatives. The remaining 13 opera houses didn't have the local economic context, the prestigious name, and, maybe, the competencies of the Milan's opera house to reach the same result, and were thus far away from the approval of the constitutive charters that would have ratified their transformation into private foundations when the second legislative intervention entered into force in 1998. Law 134/1998 (declared as unconstitutional and replaced substantially unchanged with law 345 in 2000) enforced the transformation of the opera houses "ex-lege". The idea was that investments in opera houses would be more appealing for private actors if the transformation into foundations was already concluded. But the involvement of the private sector has been very limited (the other exception together with the Milan's opera house has been the Verona's foundation) and confined to organizations such as bank foundations and chambers of commerce. The privatization ex-lege was just a formal operation, since the governance, waiting for private investors to show up, was still on the hands of administrators appointed by local, regional and national governments (Armao, 2008).

A discussion on the impact of these reform is provided by Sicca and Zan (2005). Wisely enough, they didn't focus on objective analysis on whether the reform has worked or not. Rather they focus on the use (or abuse) of management rhetoric in the reform texts and in the related debates, coming to the conclusion that the reform actually produced a situation that has very little to do with management, and a lot with the "rhetoric of management". Their textual analysis of the laws and policy documents, associated with a micro level evaluation based on a case study, contributed to highlight some problematic aspects of the reform. They observed a too passive role given to the governing board, which could have provided opera houses with some managerial background, and a too high indulgence towards labour issues, leaving substantially unaltered the old contracts. They observed administrators struggle with objectives and responsibilities that were not congruent with the available resources, because the reform didn't take into consideration the differences existing between Italian opera house (in terms of size, economic context, etc). Moreover, their analysis on the funding system revealed a negative correlation between quality and incentive mechanisms, due to a very small relevance of the qualitative and productivity criteria with respect to criteria based on previous contributions and personnel costs. In addition, funds are often delayed and unstable, to the detriment of the advocated long term program. Rather than a private-style managerialization of public institutions, they conclude, the reform subjected privatized organizations with the shortcoming of the public system (Sicca and Zan, 2005).

In the following period, a number of legislative interventions were adopted with the aim of reducing structural costs in particular concerning personnel expenditures (Decree 64 in 2010, established limits and prohibitions for additional hiring, but allowed opera house to stipulate flexible labour contracts), and to provide additional financial support to foundations in serious crisis.

THE LAST ATTEMPT: THE 2013 REFORM.

The last relevant legislative intervention, in 2013 (Law 112/2013), motivated by the “the urgency to intervene on the serious economic and financial conditions of the opera foundations” determines specific provisions aimed to restore opera houses to an healthy condition. The decree introduced the obligation of balanced budget, gave more power to the chief executive with respect to the board of governors, and redefined the criteria for the allocation of the national funds for the performing arts. According to this last point, the weight of the historical criteria (based on past contributions, personnel and production costs) decreased from 65% in 2007 to 50%, while a new criteria (accounting for 25% of the total fund) was attached to the ability to attract resources from the private sector and from other public entities. The remaining 25% is distributed according to productivity, performance and quality criteria.

Maybe the most influential provision of the reform was the possibility given to the lyric foundations in serious crisis to obtain a special loan on the basis of a recovery plan. In order to obtain the special financial support foreseen by the law, the special plans must contain, among other, strategies to reduce labour costs and the staffing level, to redefine the debt structure, and to reach a balanced budget and a sustainable financial structure in a three-year period, with the prohibition to incur additional debts. The recovery plans, which must be approved by the ministry of culture, are examined by an ad-hoc appointed special commissioner, who is also responsible for the supervision and control of the entire process defined by the law. The foundations which apply for such financial support will be subjected to a periodic monitoring to assess the implementation of the recovery plans. Differently from the previous fragmented interventions which allocated extra funds to deal with emergency situations, this provision is linked to a concrete effort, defined by the recovery plans, and to the threat of compulsory liquidation for those organizations which will not achieve a structurally balanced budget and a financial sustainability by the end of the three-year period. Thanks to this mechanism some of the Italian opera houses began radical transformation processes with some dramatic effects in terms of increase conflicts between the management and the unions that received great

echoes in the national press (see for instance the recent events happened at the Rome Opera House). In total, eight out of the fourteen opera houses have adopted special recovery plans to get additional financial support.

THE ITALIAN OPERA SECTOR: CURRENT SITUATION

In Italy, currently, there are 14 opera foundations recognized by the law.

The governance structure of the foundations is defined by Law 112/2013, which came into force the first January 2015 with the updating of the foundations' charters according to the new provisions. All the charters foresee the following bodies:

- The president of the foundation is the mayor of the city in which the theater is located, who is the legal representative
- The advisory board, whose members are the president and members nominated by the public founders and private associates (who contribute for at least 5% of the public funds). The board has a maximum of 7 members, the majority of which has to be appointed by public founders. Board's members are personally responsible for the achievement of balanced budget.
- The chief executive is appointed by the Ministry of Culture, on the basis of the board's recommendation. The chief executive might be assisted by an artistic director and a managing director.
- The board of auditors, made of three members appointed respectively by the national court of auditor, the ministry of culture, and the ministry of finance.

In the following table some information on the 14 foundations regarding size, production, and financial results are provided (2013 data). Eight of them (marked with a star in the following table) applied for the additional financial support foreseen by the last reform.

	personnel (Full Time Equivalent)	size (main hall)	number of performances	FUS points	Net Income
Teatro Comunale di Bologna*	277	1034	123	788	-2.752.150
Teatro Lirico di Cagliari	301	1628	160	736,75	29.511
Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino*	428	1800	165	968,5	-9.303.147
Teatro Carlo Felice di Genova*	275	2000	135	640,5	-5.814.066
Teatro alla Scala di Milano	905	2800	203	1608,75	60.192
Teatro San Carlo di Napoli*	375	2260	174	959	235.179
Teatro Massimo di Palermo*	365	1358	165	1426,5	332.388
Teatro dell'Opera di Roma*	686	1600	198	1400	-12.905.143
Teatro Regio di Torino	364	1582	133	1168,5	5.406
Teatro Giuseppe Verdi di Trieste*	246	1300	116	829,5	4.847.173
Teatro La Fenice di Venezia	324	1000	190	1466,5	20.610
Arena di Verona	529	14.000	152	533,88	395.169
Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia	283	2800	158	578	338.757
Petruzzelli e Teatri di Bari*	177	1482	63	456,5	-1.956.840
Total			2135		-26.466.961

Table 1 List of Italian Lyric Foundations and some data (source: Court of Auditor, 2015; foundations' webpages)

As depicted from the table, the picture of the Italian opera production is quite heterogeneous. The size of the organizations, in terms of employed personnel, ranges from 177 full time equivalent employees of Foundation Petruzzelli e Teatri di Bari, to the 905 of the Teatro alla Scala di Milano. The capacity of opera houses' main hall varies from 1000 seats at La Fenice in Venice, to the 2.800 of La Scala in Milan and the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, while the outdoor venue of the Arena di Verona can contain about 14.000 spectators. Even if the majority of the activities take place in the main halls (whose size influences the size of the audience), it must be noticed that some foundations also have a secondary hall or an outdoor venue, and that they organize national and international tours. The production level also varies a lot across the country, with the two extremes again in Bari (63 performances) and in Milan (203). The number of performances as they are provided in the table, however, do not take into consideration the level of complexity and the quality of each production.

The national funds for the performing arts (FUS) have defined an indicator in which each production is given a score (the “FUS points”) according to the type of production (opera, ballet, concert) and the number of artists involved, giving an indicator of production weighted by the complexity. According to the Court of Auditors, Italian foundations are still deeply influenced by the traditional “stagione” production system (with the exception of the Arena di Verona which operates as a festival during summer months, and the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia which is specialized in concerts).

The financial performances of the foundations are monitored by the national court of auditor, which is responsible for the financial audit of public administrations, publicly owned companies and those organizations, such as the opera foundations, that manage public resources and influence state’s budget. The court of auditor publish a yearly report in which the financial statements of the 14 opera foundations are analyzed. In addition, the 8 opera houses that applied for the special recovery funds established with decree 91 in 2013, are monitored by a special commissioner appointed by the Ministry of Culture, who is in charge for reporting about the implementation of the recovery plans.

The last report of the court of auditor, approved on April 2015, analyzed the financial statements of the foundations referring to the year 2013. The analysis confirms an overall problematic situation of the entire sector (already declared in the previous reports) such that the court started questioning about the ability of the national opera system to support the existence of 14 foundations.

Concerning the economic results in terms of net income, as shown in table 1, five foundations display negative results that, taken together, exceed the total positive income achieved by the other nine foundations, resulting in an overall deficit of 26.5 million euros.

Here I present the aggregate values of the 14 foundations in the form of a unique financial report.

<i>Income Statement</i>	2013			2012
	mln €	%	Δ	mln €
Operating revenues	506,5		-1,0%	511,4
Earned Revenues	147,1	29%	6,6%	138,0
Public grants	294,8	58%	-5,6%	312,2
Private grants	46,6	9%	-6,8%	50,0
Other revenues	18,0	4%	60,5%	11,2
Operating costs	535,2		1,9%	525,4
Personnel costs	324,1	61%	4,9%	308,9
Other operating costs	211,1	39%	-2,5%	216,5
Operating Income	-28,7		-105%	-14,0
Other revenues and costs	2,3			-6,6
Net income	-26,5		-28%	-20,7

Table 2 Aggregated Income Statement (elaboration from: Italian Court of Auditor, 2015)

Overall, the 14 foundations, produced in 2013 a deficit of 26.5mln euros, worsening the already negative result of 2012. The negative result is due both by the decreasing in public and private grants (-5.6% and -6.8% respectively) and by the increasing of operating costs (+1,9%). The higher level of operating costs are due, in particular, by the increase of personnel costs (+4,9%) which represent more than 60% of the total. The increase of earned revenues (+6.6%) is positive but not sufficient to cover the deficit, since it still represent only the 28% of the total revenues and absorbs only the 27% of operating costs. From a further look at the revenues structure we can notice that public grants represent the biggest share (58% of total revenues).

The high level of debt (relatively to the net assets) and the erosion of net assets, as results from the analysis of the balance sheets, are alarming signals of the structural condition of the overall system. In particular, it must be noticed that the value of the net assets relies for a considerable part on the value attached to the right to use the theaters, given to each foundation by the local government (which maintain the ownership of the premises). The value attached to that right, however, represents restricted capital. In certain case, the

total amount of net assets is lower than the value attached to the concession, creating a situation of deficit in available assets. This was the case for 8 out of 14 foundations in 2013, which caused an overall deficit in available assets of 52,5 million euro. The situation is worsened by the continuous accumulation of negative incomes.

Balance Sheet

	2013 mln €	Δ	2012 mln €		2013 mln €	Δ	2012 mln €
Total Assets	1.082,8	-1%	1.098,9	Total Liabilities	658,5	0%	658,9
				<i>of which:</i>			
				Payables	390,5	11%	353,0
				Net assets	424,3	-4%	440,0
				<i>of which:</i>			
Available net assets	-52,5		-36,4				
				Total liabilities + net assets	1.082,8		1.098,9

Table 3 Aggregated Balance Sheet (elaboration from: Italian Court of Auditor, 2015)

Aggregate values do not take into consideration the wide heterogeneity of the national sector, which has already been briefly described before (with the description of table 1). In particular it must be highlighted that the Teatro Alla Scala in Milan, the Arena in Verona, and the Accademia Nazionale Santa Cecilia, which outperform all the other foundations in many indicators, represents exceptional cases, rather than an objective benchmark. Teatro Alla Scala in Milan, because of its prestige, tradition, size and economic context, has a particular ability in attracting private grants and sponsorships, as well as in achieving high level of tickets revenues. Arena di Verona can count on an unique venue which can contain up to 14.000 spectators, and on a festival production. Accademia Santa Cecilia is specialized in concerts, and does not offer opera performances.

Nonetheless, as specified by the court of auditors, the analysis of aggregate values is helpful in describing an overall picture of the general situation of the

sector, and some common features typical of the Italian opera foundations. In particular, the Court of Auditors highlights the following critical points:

- The structural financial problem associated with the erosion of available net assets and the increased level of debts.
- The strong dependency on public grants, which demonstrates a inadequate ability to self-financing (public grants account form more than 50% of total revenues in all the foundations with the same repetitive exceptions of of La Scala, Arena di Verona, and Santa Cecilia). Public grants come mainly from the central government, and the court judges the contribution given by local administrations too low in comparison with the power they exercise in the governance structure.
- Public grants are often discontinuous and payments are usually made with notable delay. This obliges foundations to incur major debts in order to deal with missed grants and liquidity problems.
- Despite the legislative interventions of the last decades, the participation of private capitals and grants is still marginal.
- The high level of structural costs, in particular concerning the personnel. Production costs are not efficiently distributed on the number of performances. The court suggests to adopt a mix the stagione system of production with the repertory model, in order to take advantage of the economies of scale offered by the latter.

LA FENICE OPERA HOUSE

*16th of May, 2014. From the third floor, a colleague and friend working at the communication office, drop by and said "happy birthday! Today we are 222 years old". Inevitably I started thinking how many people have worked here, just like me, and how many famous artists, from Verdi to Maria Callas passed through the same rooms in which I was working. The theater is so beautiful, and its history full of prestigious names, that it is impossible not to breath it when you step in.
(from my diary)*

La Fenice opera house was founded in 1792. The theatre staged the world premieres of numerous operas, including Rossini's Tancredi, Sigismondo and Semiramide, Bellini's I Capuleti e i Montecchi and Beatrice di Tenda, Donizetti's Belisario, Pia de' Tolomei, and Maria de Rudenz, and Verdi's Ernani, Attila, Rigoletto, La traviata and Simon Boccanegra.

The theater was destroyed twice for a fire, one in 1836 and one in 1996. Many people that I met were already working there in 1996, and confessed to have cried when they saw the news on television. Fortunately the fire happened during the night and no one was injured, and no one lost their job since the activities went on in a temporary venue. It took almost nine years before the reconstruction works were finished and the opera house re-consigned to its employees and to the city.

In this chapter I will describe the formal organization, as it comes out from the formal documents (foundation's charter, organizational charts, financial statements). However, the pride and the veneration for the theater is something you will not find in any organizational chart, even if it is a diffuse feeling inside the organization. All these feelings are part of Fenice. But formally it is as follows.

GOVERNANCE

According to the foundation's charter, approved in July 2014 by the advisory board and ratified by the ministry of culture in September 2014, the founders of La Fenice Opera House are the State, the Veneto Region, and the Municipality of Venice.

The institutional mission of the foundation is to diffuse the culture of opera, music, and ballet through the production of live performances and it operates according to the principles of entrepreneurship and efficiency (art. 3)

The president, who is the mayor of the city, is the legal representative of the foundation, and the chair of the advisory board. The president suggests the name of the vice-president, to be approved by the advisory board.

The advisory board is made up of 3 members, in addition to the president, appointed by the three founders (State, Region, Municipality). The foundation's charter foresees two additional members who should be nominated by the assembly of private partners in case their contribution to the foundation's capital reaches the 8% of the total capital provided by public bodies. The advisory board must guarantee the compliance of the balanced budget obligation. It approves the budget plan, the financial statement, the season's programs, and all the organizational documents (regarding the functioning of the organizations and the labour agreements). It suggests a person for the role of chief executive to the ministry of culture.

The chief executive, appointed by the ministry of culture, is in charge for the management of the organization. The charter states he/she must have relevant management knowledge and experience in the cultural sector. He manages and coordinates in autonomy the activities and the day-to-day operations of the foundation, defines the annual budget and, together with the artistic director, the artistic program (to be approved by the advisory board). The chief executive has his support office and avails himself of the collaboration of the artistic director and of the principal conductor, the former especially regarding the artistic programming, the latter for the professional achievements and artistic preparation of the orchestra.

The board of auditors has three members appointed by the national court of auditor (the president), by the ministry of culture, and by the ministry of finance.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The organizational structure is articulated into five departments: artistic department, production and technical organization, marketing and communication, finance and control, and personnel department. The first two departments represent the core of the production activity, while the last three carry out support and control tasks.

The artistic department is headed by the artistic director, appointed by the chief executive and his closest collaborator. Together, the artistic director and the chief executive, define the artistic programs. He is responsible for all the activities related to the artistic secretary, musical services, casting, and the coordination of the maestros (rehearsal pianists, stage masters, prompters, light masters) and of the “artistic masses”, i.e. orchestra and choir.

The production and technical organization department is responsible for the planning, the stage coordination, and the production of the scenic design. The scenic design department presides the technical area, which is composed of four groups: electricians and light technicians, stage technicians and carpenters, props clerks, sound and video technicians, and tailors and cobblers. Other support activities include marketing and communication, sales and ticket office, education, historical archive, and general affairs office.

Control functions are carried out by the finance and control and by the human resource departments.

In 2013 the stable structure counted 324 employees, of which 5 are the directors, and 45 are clerical employees distributed in the five departments. The artistic departments is the largest one, employing the whole artistic area (188 orchestra and chorus members and 5 maestros), while the production and technical organization is the second largest department, which is responsible for the organization of 82 technicians (2013 data). The theater also employs temporary workers and signs on-call job contracts.

The labour relation is governed by the National Collective Labour Agreement and by an additional Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

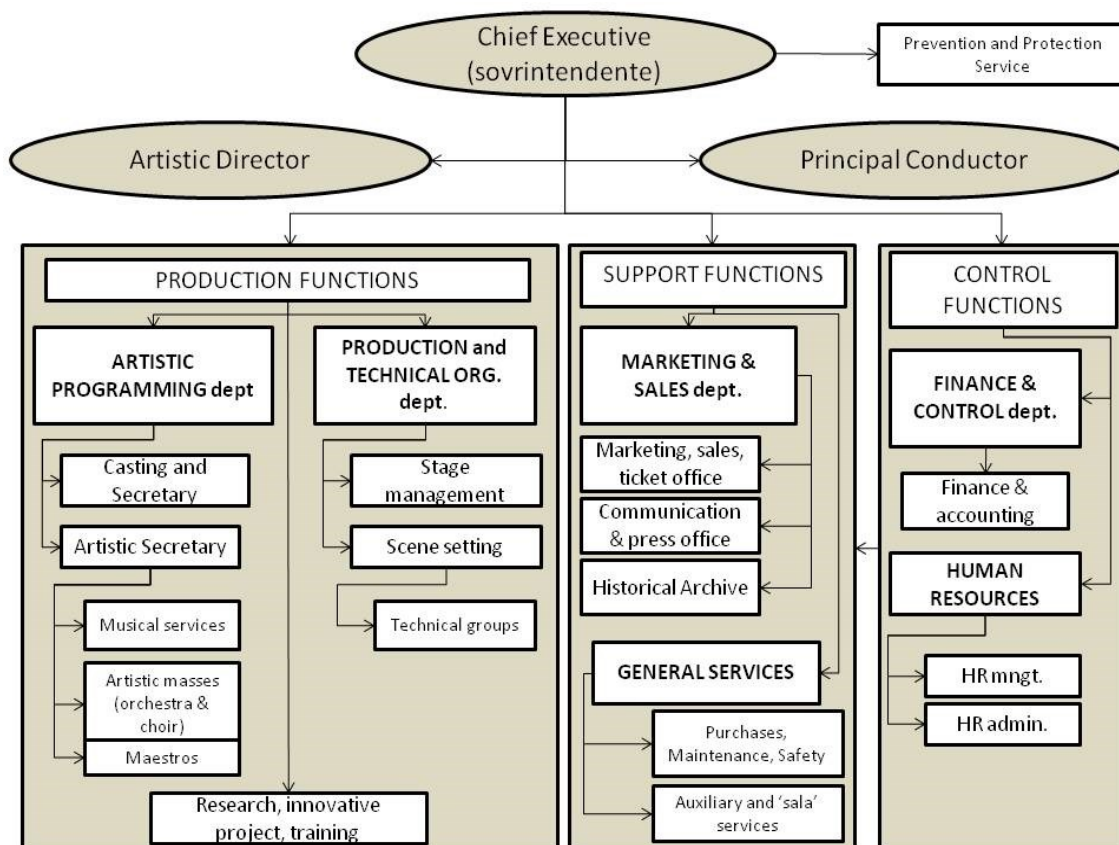


Figure 1 – organizational chart

THE SEASON’S PROGRAM AND THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

The core cultural products offered by the organization are opera pieces. In addition to the opera program, the foundation organizes symphonic concerts (which are organized in the symphonic program), and few ballets. The audience is composed by local and international customers. The spectacles are mainly performed in the main theater’s hall, and, for smaller productions and concerts, in a secondary theater, or, for small concerts, in the theater’s concert rooms. The opera house also organizes tournée abroad (Japan in 2005 and 2013,

China in 2009, Abu Dhabi in 2009 and 2010) and some events to other organizations' premises (mainly theaters and historical buildings) in the city, and in the region. Collateral products consist in operas for the schools, conferences, and educational events related to the programmed shows. The theater also hosts external productions and events, and organizes some special events (e.g. new year concert, carnival party, literary contests, etc).

The definition of the artistic program is the most important phase of the strategic planning. The process that leads to the definition of the seasonal program starts with a draft proposed by the artistic director to the chief executive. The program is proposed to the advisory boards for approval. The artistic director starts thinking about the program and making contacts with the main orchestra conductors and singers almost two years before the season starts. This early phase usually concerns only the season opening operas and other few big projects. Alongside the one or two big projects, other titles are defined in order to create an equilibrate season program, with an overall artistic unity and coherently fitting with the theater's own history and tradition. A good artistically balanced program mixes tradition and innovation, including both classics and modern or contemporary operas. In addition the artistic program should respect financial sustainability and technical feasibility criteria.

As the definition of the artistic program goes on, all the departments are involved in the budgeting process and in the technical feasibility check, until a calendar is presented and a budget is associated to each title. The calendar, that assigns the date for each performance, takes into account the constraints of the production phase (work shifts, holidays, rooms availabilities etc.), the artistic needs (rehearsal schedule), and reflects the trend of presences in the city (in relation with the touristic seasons) trying to match repertory offers with the tourist peaks. The budget reflects the strategic and artistic choice made for each particular opera (e.g. the contracting of young rather than famous artists, the rent of the scene components rather than their construction, and so on), and it is assigned to each department and cost items.

At the end of this process the program shows a mix of new productions (independent or co-productions), revivals of repertory pieces, and guest

productions. Among the new productions there could be new interpretations of already presented operas, and local, national or world premieres.

Once the program is defined in all its parts, the artistic direction proceeds by contracting the selected artists: the creative team and additional orchestra and choir members (if needed). The creative team, defined for each opera, is made of the soloist singers, led by the director and the conductor whose interpretations of the script and music “create” the opera, and of the staging team (set, costume and light designers). Rehearsal pianists, prompters, minor singers and walk-ons are also hired on a project base, even if they are usually involved in more different operas and collaborate in a semi-continuous way with the opera house. If needed, additional musical instruments, materials or services are rented or purchased.

With the artistic program approved, also the production department starts with its activities: the work shifts of the technical groups are preliminary scheduled month per month, and are then defined on a daily base; the props and the materials for the fabrication of costumes and scenes are ordered, under the direction and the sketches of the directors and the staging designers; and carpenters and tailors start to fabric (if the production requires and internal production).

The core of the production phase takes place in the rehearsal rooms, as described in chapter 2, starting two or three weeks in advance depending on the experience accumulated by the artists and on the complexity of the piece.

Collateral activities, such as the preparation of education materials and communication activities, follow, while control functions ensure the budget compliance.

FINANCIAL AND PRODUCTIVITY PERFORMANCE

The analysis of the financial and productivity performances is based on the financial and productivity reports of the period 2005-2013. Previous financial statements are not taken into consideration because from 1996 to 2004, the

opera house was operating in a temporary structure, due to reconstruction works going on in the historical building (destroyed by a fire in 1996).

During the 2005-2013 period there has been two important changes in the top management: the change of the artistic director in January in 2007 and the change of the chief executive, occurred in December 2010, after nine years in which the previous chief executive had been reconfirmed three times.

The financial statements have shown small but positive incomes from 2011 (18.000€ in 2011, 12.000 in 2012, and 21.000 in 2013) (Figure 2).

Still the deficits accumulated in previous years are encumbering for 57% of the available net assets, with an amount of almost 9.000.000€ (2013 data).

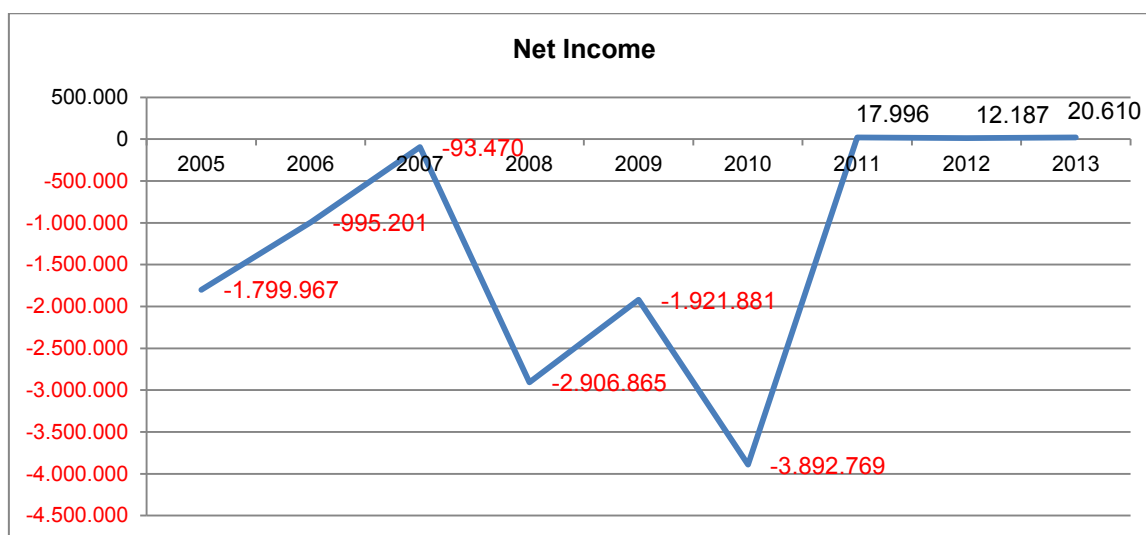


Figure 2 Net Income, 2005-2013 (source: financial statements)

The positive results obtained in the last years can be seen in the light of the increase in production activity, occurred during the 2005-2013 period and especially after the year 2010 (Figure 3). The total number of opera representations for season has increased from 51 in 2005 up to 124 in 2015 (+143%).

The increasing number of spectacles has led to an increase both in sales revenues, i.e. tickets and season tickets (+172% for the 2005-2013 period.), and in direct production costs, especially regarding the artists' fees (+18% during the same period). But, as shown in Figure 4, ticket revenues, and

variable artistic costs, growth at different rates, showing, from 2010, a positive margin.

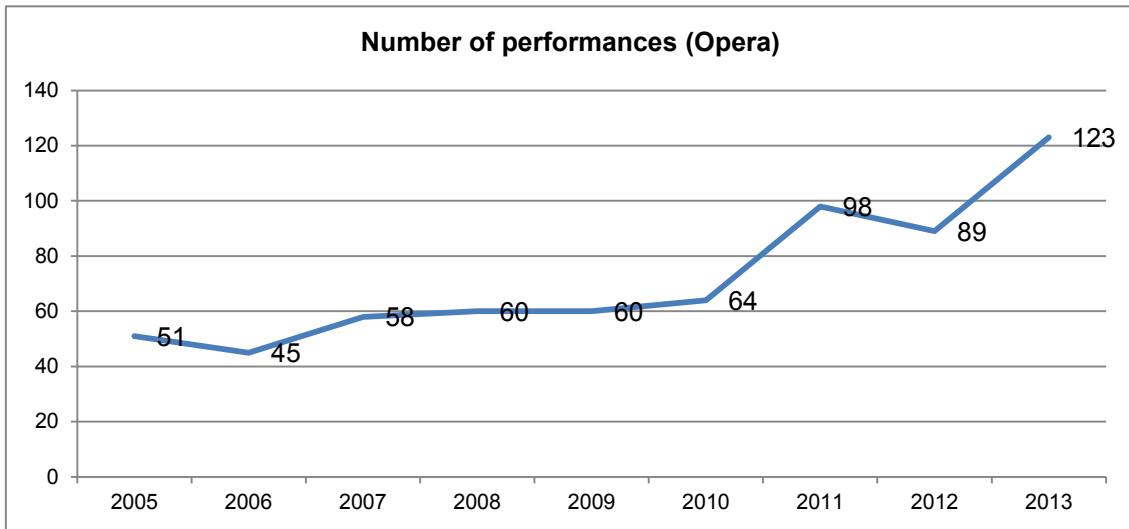


Figure 3: Number of performances, 2005-2013 (source: financial statements)

Among the costs, personnel counts for 57% of total production costs (2013 data) and it is mainly represented by long term employee, and thus it is considered a fixed cost, hardly reducible. During the 2005-2013 period, despite an increase in production by 141% in terms of number of spectacles, the personnel costs have increased of only 4%. It is worth mentioning that the

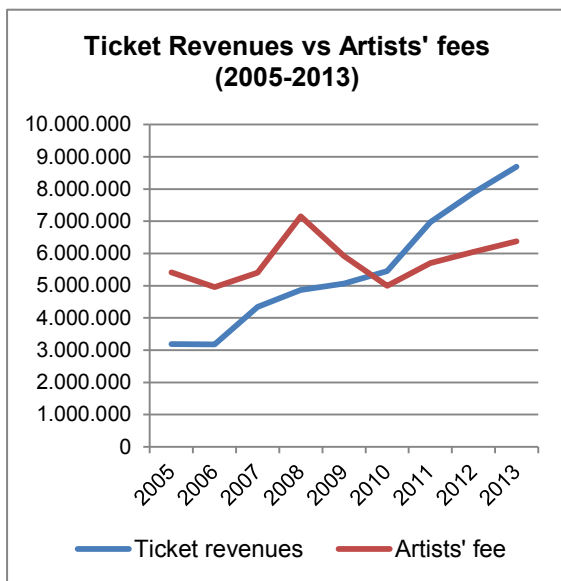


Figure 4: Ticket revenues and artistic fees, 2005-2013 (source: financial statements)

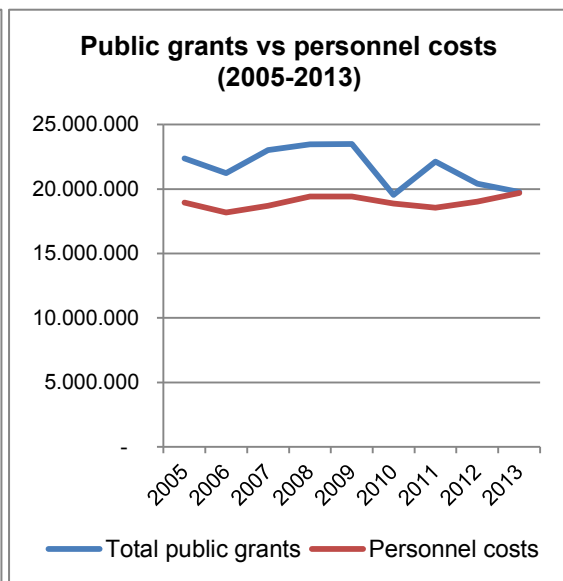


Figure 5: Public grants and personnel costs, 2005-2013 (source: financial statements)

personnel costs are entirely covered by the sum of public funds (Figure 5).

The system that has been outlined is one in which ticket sales cover the main variable cost item (artists' fees), while public grants cover the main fixed cost item (personnel costs).

Contrary to the trend of ticket revenues, public funds have decreased by 12% from 2005 to 2013. Due to this ongoing trend, the revenues structure has been modified as showed in the following graph. In 2005 public funds represented the 68% of total revenues and sales revenues represented only the 10%; in 2013 the weight of public funds was 56% while sales revenues counted for the 25% of the total revenues. The theater was also able to increase the relevance of other sources of revenues (mainly generated by rentals of spaces for private events) from 3% up to 8%, and private funds from 7% to 9% of total revenues in the same period (the exceptional weight of the other sales revenues in 2005, 11%, is ascribed to the tournée in Japan. In 2006 the same item decreases down to its more normal level of 5%, in 2007 it counts for the 4%, and from 2008 until 2013 for the 3% of the total revenues).

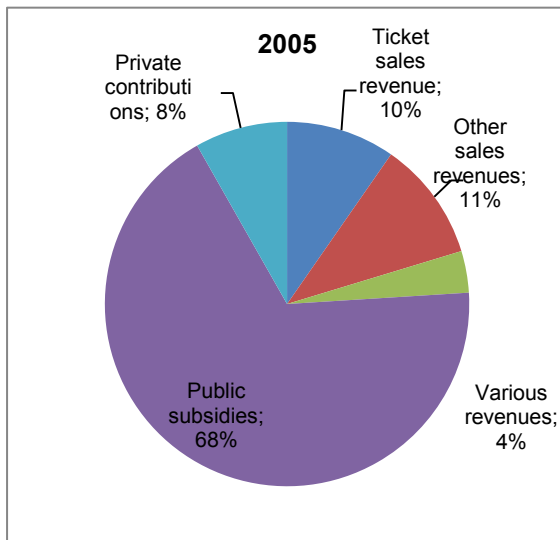


Figure 7: Revenues structure, 2005 (source: financial statement)

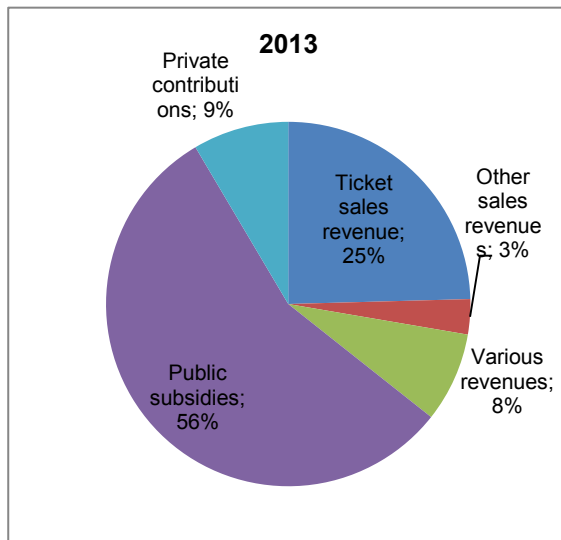


Figure 6: Revenues structure, 2013 (source: financial statement)

THE OPERA HOUSE MEETS MANAGEMENT

*“Libiamo, libiamo ne’lieti calici
Let us drink from the goblets of joy
che la bellezza infiora.
adorned with beauty,
E la fuggevol ora s’inebria a voluttà.
and the fleeting hour shall be adorned with pleasure.
Libiamo ne’dolci fremiti
Let us drink to the secret raptures
che suscita l’amore,
which love excites,
poiché quell’occhio al core onnipotente va.
for this eye reigns supreme in my heart...
Libiamo, amore fra i calici
Let us drink, for with wine
più caldi baci avrà.
love will enjoy yet more passionate kisses.
(Libiamo ne’ lieti calici, from La Traviata, music by G. Verdi,
text by F.M. Piave, 1853. Translation by A.G. Ponce)*

In this chapter I follow the path undertaken by the administration, intertwining narratives coming from the field, with data and results depicted from financial and activity reports. What is described here can be named as the “official version” of the managerial turn that the opera house has undertaken, as it results from the interviews with the key people who wanted and implemented the new strategy, and from official documents. In this regard, it represents the new corporate image that the opera house wants to spread to its stakeholders (especially to investors), through public events and mass media. It highlights the good results attained, and the achievement of a virtuous circle that allows to meet both financial and artistic goals. In a nutshell, this is how the “successful case of La Fenice” is narrated.

THE STORY OF A CHANGE: FROM THE 1ST LA TRAVIATA, TO THE 100TH

The strategic shift started from the artistic director, appointed in 2007, with the first evident changes proposed in the 2009 season, the first program that can be entirely ascribed to him.

Year 2009 was the first in which La Traviata was replicated twelve times and proposed in early September, one of the most touristic periods of the year. La Traviata was a 2004 production, it represented a huge investment at that time, since it was created for the inauguration of the opera house that had been destroyed by a fire 8 years before. Since then it has been presented once in 2007 for eight reruns, but only in 2009 it has been matched with a prominent conductor and replicated for so many times (from 2005 the maximum number of reruns had been only eight).

“La Traviata was a 2004 production. After that it has been proposed only once in 2007. At that time I was the artistic director at La Scala, but I had already started thinking about my job here. I knew La Fenice had a very good La Traviata, because the director who designed it is one of the best living directors in the world. So I contacted a very good conductor, maybe one of the best Verdi’s interpreter, and I convinced him to join La Fenice. Luckily, his most appreciated singer for the role of Violetta was available. When I arrived here, one of the first things I was asked to do was to think about a new production of La Traviata, because the existing one was not much appreciated by the audience when it was performed the first time (it was too modern). I beg them to wait, and to give me the chance to do it with a great conductor, as it has never had one before. And then all could see a great La Traviata with a great conductor...” (artistic director)

“all started some years ago, when we scheduled numerous performances of La Traviata in September. All said we were crazy. But then all the shows were sold out. And we started realizing that our La Traviata, in September, works!” (artistic secretary)

In 2010, given the success in terms of ticket sales for La Traviata in 2009, the same opera was replicated during the same period for nine times, and eventually became an annual date.

La Traviata signals the beginning of La Fenice's investments in repertoire productions, even though at the time La Fenice produced it, the management didn't think of it as a such long investment .

In 2010 the new production of Rigoletto was intended to add another brick in the Verdi's repertory. Rigoletto was proposed also for the 2011 and 2012 seasons. Don Giovanni was another 2010 new production and represented the first investment aimed at building a Mozart's repertory. It was performed twelve times in May, another very touristic month.

For the 2011 season Don Giovanni was retaken between September and October for another 13 times, immediately before another Mozart's Opera Le Nozze Di Figaro, a new production and the second brick of the theater Mozart's repertory. The two operas shared the same director and conductor. The 2011 season marked also the first investment for the realization of the Puccini's repertory, with La Bohème, presented twelve times during Carnival period (another touristic appointment for the city). As already said, Verdi's La Traviata and Rigoletto were also presented, (respectively 10 e 4 times) and the third pillar of the Verdi's repertory, Il Trovatore, was presented in a new production in December.

The season 2011 reached a number of 98 spectacles, with an increase of more than 50% with respect to the previous year (64 spectacles in 2010) and the number of season titles increase from nine in 2010 to twelve in 2011 (+33%).

In 2012 Così Fan Tutte was added to the Mozart's repertory and signed by the same conductor and director of the other two Mozart's pieces already presented.

Seventeen titles were proposed for the 2012-2013 season, for a total of 118 spectacles (+33% with respect to the 89 spectacles of the previous year). A double opening ceremony saw two new productions alternating on stage, celebrating the bicentenary of Verdi (*Otello*) and Wagner (*Tristan und Isolde*)'s births, both directed by the same conductor. The Verdi's *Otello* entered in the Verdi's repertory together with *I Masnadieri*. In May the Mozart repertory, made of *Don Giovanni*, *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, and *Così Fan Tutte*, was all performed in alternating days for a total of 19 plays in four weeks. With the new *Madama Butterfly* the Puccini's repertory was enriched with its second piece. In September, as usual, *La Traviata* was on stage, this time for fourteen times.

With the 2013-2014 season *La Traviata* becomes a double appointment with the Opera: 10 reruns during Carnival (alternating with *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) and 10 reruns in September. The mid-season (May) was characterized by the presentation (in alternating days) of the Puccini's repertory, enhanced with a third new piece, *Tosca*, with a total of 27 spectacles in 6 weeks.

The last season presented, 2014-2015, has been inaugurated with two Verdi's pieces: the traditional *La Traviata* and the new (and not much famous) *Simon Boccanegra*. This season shows 35 reruns of *La Traviata* presented in four periods with four different conductors, and celebrates the 100th performance since 2004. A new *Die Zauberflöte* enriches the Mozart's repertory, and two Bellini's operas (*Capuleti e Montecchi* and *Norma*) creates a new composer repertory. Seventeen titles have been presented for 124 spectacles in total.

"If you want to increase the number of performances, you must offer some revivals, because you cannot make 20 new productions every year! But in order to offer revivals of repertory pieces, you should have them! And they must be titles that are as attractive for the audience, as *La Traviata*. It is not a matter of how many productions you have in the repertory, but how many productions you have that fill the theater. And La Fenice had only one classic: *La Traviata* (and they wanted me to abandon it!!). We added *Rigoletto* and *Trovatore*. Then we started with Mozart's trilogy... we made all Puccini's

works... These were the productions to be made, from a strategic point of view! Before, everything was organized as it was a big, single event. I, always in agreement with the chief executive, tried to give La Fenice some productions in view of a different commercial strategy, made also of revivals. From year to year, then, we try to differentiate with other productions” (artistic director).

All the last seven seasons that has been here briefly sketched, included also other titles: new productions, national and world premieres, guest productions and other revivals of repertory pieces, each of them with different weights on the total budget. The description given is aimed to highlight the innovations brought in the artistic programming, rather than summarize the overall programs. The full season programs are available in the Appendix

A NEW STRATEGY: BETWEEN STAGIONE AND REPERTORY

The artistic strategy became a hybrid form, mixing the traditional Italian stagione approach with the repertory strategy typical of the German system. During some periods of the year (the most touristic) the programs tend to privilege repertory pieces. For the rest of the year, the program consisted on new and original productions, in line with the more traditional seasonal approach.

As we can see from Figure 8, in the 2014-2015 season the half of the titles were revivals of repertory pieces, while 10 years before the entire program was made of new productions. The number of new productions has not changed a lot during the last decade. The revivals were added to a traditional stagione program, increasing the variety of the offer and the number of performances.

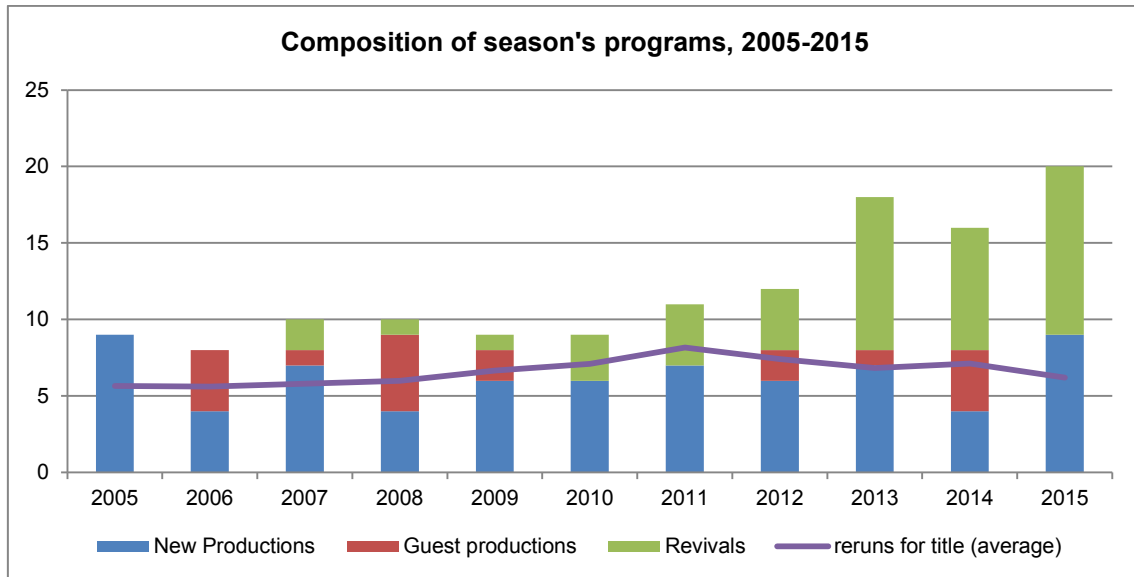


Figure 8: Season's programs (2005-2015) by type of production (source: season's programs)

The adoption of a semi-repertory strategy pushed for a reasoned selection of the new productions which could be used to enrich the theater's repertory. Repertories are built around the names of famous composers with some of their most famous operas, that could attract customers from all over the world and could ensure sold-out dates for long periods. Some of them, as *La Traviata*, can be easily performed every year and still guarantee sold-out shows; others can be profitably replicated only within a longer distance, in order to be attractive also for the local public.

Figure 9 shows the most revived titles and their year of production. It is clear that the most recent productions are made with the new strategy already in mind, since the large majority of the listed titles has been made between 2010 and 2014.

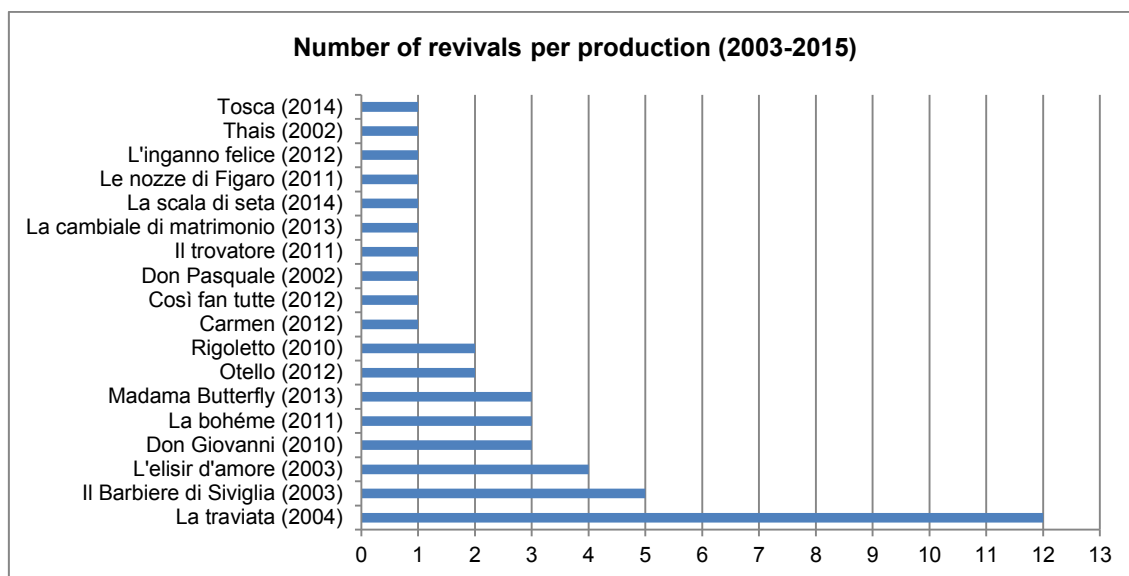


Figure 9: Number of revivals per production, 2003-2005 (source: season's programs)

If we compare the list of Figure 9 with the list of the 10 most represented titles in the world for the 2013-2014 season (Table 4), we will notice that La Fenice's repertory choice privileges the big classics: the 10 world most performed operas (with the exception of *Die Zauberflöte*, which is a 2015 new production and will become part of the repertory soon) have already been revived at least once in the last decade at La Fenice.

	Composer	Title
1	it (#1) Verdi (#1)	La traviata (659)
2	fr (#1) Bizet (#1)	Carmen (548)
3	it (#2) Puccini (#1)	La bohème (522)
4	it (#3) Puccini (#2)	Tosca (479)
5	at (#1) Mozart (#1)	Die Zauberflöte (474)
6	it (#4) Puccini (#3)	Madama Butterfly (462)
7	it (#5) Rossini (#1)	Il barbiere di Siviglia (453)
8	it (#6) Verdi (#2)	Rigoletto (445)
9	at (#2) Mozart (#2)	Le nozze di Figaro (420)
10	at (#3) Mozart (#3)	Don Giovanni (391)

Table 4: List of most performed opera, 2013-2014 (source: operabase.com)

To remain loyal to the local audience and to the innovative tradition of the theater, new original titles are presented each year (that could be performed in

the future but don't have the same appeal of repertory pieces). Some of them represent heavy investments, especially for the season opening operas, while some others pieces can be produced in collaboration with local institutions, such as the university and the school of fine arts, and engage young singers and artists, with a great saving of resources.

AGAINST THE BAUMOL'S COST DISEASE: HOW TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

The willingness to have the theater open as many days as possible has stimulated the development of new technical abilities. The first attempt of alternating two operas on stage in the same period was made in 2010: between September and October, *La Traviata* and *Rigoletto* were performed in alternating days. This implied that two more assembling and disassembling work shifts for each production had to be scheduled in order to change the stage set, without hiring new personnel. With the 2012 season the theater stabilized the alternating operas system: six more assembling and disassembling work shifts were required in May (*La Bohème* and Bellini's *La Sonnambula*) and in July (Bizet's *Carmen* and Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*), while eleven more were required in September for the Verdi's operas (thirteen *La Traviata* and eight *Rigoletto*). The 2014-2015 seasons will see alternating operas almost always (except during the summer months). All this concomitant productions shared also the rehearsal period, which implies further assembling and disassembling of the stage set, but unfortunately there are not data available to give the exact number.

This was possible thanks to a new work-schedule, as described by the chief of stage technicians:

Me: "the production has increased, but the staff is still at the same level. Are you working extra hours?"

Chief of stage technicians: "We are not working more, we are working better! We changed the work shifts. Before, our work time

was divided into two parts during the day, and there was only two work shifts per day (one 8-12, 14-18; and one 14-18, 20-24). Now we work mainly with a 7-hour work shift, and there are three shifts per day (from 8 to 15, from 13 to 20, and from 17 to 24), so we can cover the whole day. The work is much better planned. We work smartly. We know in advance when we have technical and light rehearsals and we don't lose time. And the guys are happy, because they always have half day free, and are more keen to run more during the working hours."

In addition to the new work organization, the opera house defines new standards for the stage set.

"It has been a big change, especially regarding the stage sets. Before a stage set was conceived for a single show, it remained installed from the beginning to the end, only then it was disassembled to leave the space for the following show and its set. Stage sets were not conceived to be in touch with each other. Now the sets are built so that they can co-exist in the same space, and thus more productions can be performed during the same period" (chief of stage technicians).

The number of spectacles has increased from 64 in 2010 to 124 for the last season (+94%). On average, the theater offer a spectacle every 3 days but, during the most productive periods, can offer up to 6 shows per week.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, according to the Baumol's cost disease theory (Baumol and Bowen, 1965; Baumol 1967), the performing arts, as a labour intense sector, have limited room for technological improvements and is thus a sector with stable productivity. With the progressive increase of wage levels, thus, the performing arts are doomed to an inexorable rise in labour cost per unit of output.

La Fenice shows that a better labour management and different production choices, can indeed increase the productivity level. The Baumol's cost disease theory has been conceived in the hypothesis of a production at full capacity. However, in the cultural sector, where the workforce is the main resource, and especially in organizations with a centennial history, possibilities for improvements (not only technological) exist, and a better management is useful to find and exploit them.

In the following graph, I computed the labour cost per performance (which I consider as the unit of output). The drop in the value, and thus the increase of productivity, is clear.

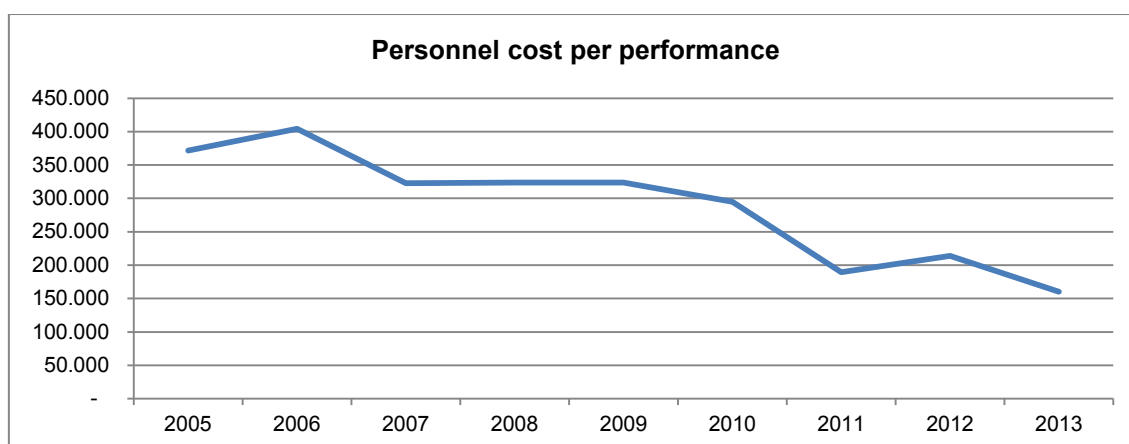


Figure 10: Personnel cost per performance, 2005-2013 (source: financial statements and season's programs)

COST ANALYSIS FOR AN ENLIGHTENED MANAGEMENT

Another important improvement concerns cost analysis and control mechanisms, and the information system provided to the management that enable a more informed decision making process.

The person who developed the cost management system, is a former musician. He played the clarinet at La Scala and then at La Fenice, where he arrived 20 years ago and where he had a successful artistic career as primo clarinetist. Then, he was offered the opportunity to be engaged in a different job, and he

grasped it as a good occasion to have an impact on the management of the opera house.

“I arrived in this office in November 2012, I was given the draft of the following season’s program and I was asked to tell the management how much it could cost. I wrote a report and the management found it interesting, then they decided to set up a systematic control of such kind. That is how it all started. I came up with it from nothing. At the beginning it was complicated, but then things became running smoother and smoother, and now it works almost automatically! This system now is only two years old but it has already given good results.” (Responsible of the cost management system)

He showed me an electronic spreadsheet containing the artistic costs of the current season and he explained me how it was built.

For each production, he first defines the size of the orchestra, according to the score and to the conductor’s preference. Then, he divides the orchestra in permanent employees and extra musicians, who should be contracted to meet the specific requirements of the production (e.g. an unusual instruments, or a number of instruments exceeding those internally available). For the employees, he computes the working days in which they are involved in the rehearsals and in the performances, and he multiplies it for the average daily cost. He finally adds the additional remunerations foresees by the contracts (e.g. the tokens for each performances, for playing a different instrument, for appearing on stage, ...). For the extra musicians he computed the cost of the contract, which can cover more days than those actually worked because of the 1 or 2-day break period between consecutive performances. If an extra musician is involved in more parallel productions, the cost of the contract is distributed among them proportionally to the days worked for each. Finally, he add the rental costs of instruments, if required.

The process is the same for the chorus and the maestros.

It comes out that the most expensive productions are those that require a large number of extra musicians and the presence of unusual instruments, as those referring to the baroque era.

The same system is in place for the production department. A budget for extra workers is assigned to each chief of the technical groups who, autonomously, decide when to allocate it. In the technical departments, extra workers usually work on different productions, and thus the contracts are most likely signed for the periods in which there are more productions to be prepared. A specific budget is computed, based on internal knowledge and on artistic directives, for the construction or purchase of stage materials.

The reporting system is based on another spreadsheet file containing the comparisons between provisional budget and actual costs, which he compiles monthly with the information obtained by each department.

With this information, the directors can take decisions regarding each production with the acknowledgment of their impacts on the overall budget at his disposal.

The idea and the process is surprisingly simple. Given a good knowledge of the opera production, in terms of the requirements of each production and of the constraints posed by the labour contracts, a good knowledge of electronic spreadsheet is sufficient to provide the management with relevant information.

This is how the chief executive evaluate the recently implemented cost management system.

“We have the most powerful cost management system of all the Italian opera houses! I have monthly information on the situation and the trend. This is important, because in order to take decisions I need to have prompt and accurate information. We decomposed the budget into smaller components, so that now each activity or office has its own budget. If someone overspends, at least I know it immediately and I don't have bad surprises at the end of the year.”
(chief executive).

THE COMMERCIAL SIDE OF THE OPERA

During the last years, with the strong support of the marketing department, La Fenice has adopted a new commercial strategy in order to attract some groups of the potential audience that, until some years ago, were ignored. In particular, in one of the most touristic city in the world, La Fenice started to look at tourists as potential customers.

The creation of a new audience started with the offer of the big Italian classics, such as *La Traviata*, and, given the success of such events in terms of tickets sold, La Fenice engaged in audience development initiatives in collaborations with the associations of the tourism industry (hotel, camping, etc), and tour operators.

At the same time, the marketing office improved the online ticket office (through which almost half of the tickets are sold), and adopted additional communication tools able to reach international fans and, thus, to increase the potential audience. In particular, the marketing office is taking advantage of the potentiality offered by social networks and digital media. La Fenice went “social” in 2012, with the appointment of the new director. In 2012 it opened Facebook and Twitter accounts, a Youtube channel, and, begun to work on a project for the development of a web-radio. As the director told me “these are not innovations. I didn’t invent anything. I just used something that already exist to make possible for more people to know us”. A guy is in charge for all these “new” activities, and I had the opportunity to talk several times with him, and to see him working, especially on the project of the web-radio. He was previously employed at the education office, and has a strong passion for classical music, in particular for Wagner’s works, matured during his studies on musicology. On the web-radio project he was granted with high level of autonomy since the beginning. He set up a group of 2-3 freelancers with competencies in sound and recording system, and in journalism. In autonomy, they decide the topic and the contents of each program and the people to interview, mainly according to their own personal preferences. Flexibility, autonomy, creativity and smartness, are the keywords of their working style. After having spent some time with them, I

wrote on my notes “it seems like creatives have moved from the stage to the offices”.

The efforts of the commercial strategy seem to have achieved good results. A study commissioned by the Venice’s Chamber of Commerce and based on a survey made between December 2012 and June 2013, showed that the audience was made of around 2.100 subscribers to the opera and concert seasons, for a total of estimated presences of 24.500, and of 116.503 presences of not subscribers, of which only 27% were Italian (the rest were mainly French, German, British, and North-Americans). The 85% of not-subscribers are tourists who are accommodated in hotels and residences, of which, almost three quarter affirms to go regularly to theaters during their visits. La Fenice, thus, was able to attract a specific audience made of “cultural tourists”, for whom it represents the main reason for their permanence in Venice for almost 50% of the cases (Camera di Commercio di Venezia, 2013).

A study made by the specialized magazine “Classic Voice” computed the number of tickets sold for each Italian opera house with a focus on opera performances (thus excluding ballets, concerts, and other events), for the 2008-2013 period. La Fenice ranked as the second opera house with the highest increment of opera audience (96.000 spectators in 2013, +31,5% with respect to 2008 data), while the overall opera system suffered of a general 6,8% decrease of opera audience during the same period (Balestrazzi, 2013), confirming, thus, the outstanding performance of La Fenice in the Italian context.

THE OPERA SPEAKS “ARTISTIC MANAGERIALESE”

Gherardi and Jacobsson (2000) coined the word “managerialese” to define the language that makes use of managerial ideas and vocabulary. The spread and dominance of managerialese in any administrative system, with particular reference to the Italian public sector, pushes them to define it as “the Latin of our times”.

At La Fenice, managerialese is the language used to communicate with the external environment, and in particular with potential investors and partners.

The chief executive often recalls, in public occasions, the fact that La Fenice is a cultural enterprise, and, when he does it, he always stresses the word “enterprise”. He wants La Fenice to obtain such status among its stakeholder. In a public event, he said:

“We want to realize a model in which the opera house becomes a business. As a business, the opera house must produce. Only in this way we can make our profit, which is the value with provide to the city and to the society” (Chief executive, interview dated 10/05/2013, available on La Fenice website)

In particular, the management seems to love playing with words. The result is a language made of double-meaning slogans and sentences that can be read in different ways.

The Italian word “impresa” serves divinely such purpose. Impresa means both enterprise (or business), and challenge (like the ones in which the heroes engage). During the 2014 meeting with the season ticket holders, the chief executive projected a slide presentation entitled “L’impresa di un teatro-azienda”, that can be translated “the business/challenge of a theater-enterprise”.

The recent 2015 campaign to incentive the engagement of private business and entrepreneur in the opera house’s activities, has a slogan that also contains the word impresa: “la bell’impresa”, literally “the beautiful enterprise”. The play, here, is in the combination of words traditionally attached with artistic or aesthetic sense, with business vocabulary

More recently, La Fenice contributes to the “national week for business culture” promoted by the Italian federation of industry, with a performance entitled “L’impresa va in scena”, in English “the business goes on stage”. The event put business and culture together, in the form of “the art of business”. It has the

intent to foster the idea that, as written on the promotional flyer, “business is culture.”

The use of managerialese can be seen as a strategy to renovate the organization’s imagine inside the world of business. Moreover, its use in a more creative way, a variant that we can call “artistic managerialese”, is part of the communication strategy that intends to talk with traditional business (seeking new partners and investors) by speaking their own language, and, at the same time, wants to highlight the value added of the arts field, i.e. the beauty and the creativity, which can attract traditional businesses to collaborate with the cultural field.

BETTER MANAGEMENT, BETTER ARTS: THE VIRTUOUS CIRCLE

The description of La Fenice model, in the official version, minimizes the conflicts between artistic and financial goals. On the contrary, artistic and financial requirements seem to intertwines into a virtuous circle in which the more the organization replicates repertory operas, the more resources can be obtained that can be invested in other more original operas.

The semi-repertory strategy provides the organization with positive margins, since it has positive effects both on the revenue side (increasing revenues from tickets) and on the cost side, thanks to economies of scale and experience, and to the exploitation of the investments made on the stage set, costumes and props. Moreover, thanks to a more efficient use of the workforce, as the most relevant resource, productivity can be increased keeping the stable organizational structure unmodified, and in particular without incurring additional personnel costs. Getting higher scores in productivity indicators also leads to an advantage with respect to the other opera houses in the competition for the national funds for performing arts.

The artistic quality of the programs is preserved thanks to the resources released by the revivals of repertory pieces, that are invested for new productions for frequent customers and for some new or original titles.

It looks like a win-win solution, a rational and replicable strategy, as described by the chief executive:

“Why have we developed a replicable model? Because we are normal! There is nothing extraordinary in what we did. We looked at our resources, in particular to our workforce (orchestra, choir, technicians, and administratives), and we developed our productive model on it. [...] Why don't the others [opera houses] do the same?”
(chief executive).

It was not a matter of chance or the result of a day-dreamer's intuitions, rather these are the effects of rational decisions based on a deep knowledge of the sector, as underlined by the artistic director who admitted “ I had studied a lot the German system [...] and I have started to study this hybrid model during my previous job as artistic director”.

To complete the virtuous circle, all the support departments work accordingly: an improved cost control system able to provide the management with more complete and prompt information; a commercial strategy more oriented towards social media and online sales to increase the potential audience; a more carefully designed work planning able to deal with the increase complexity due to the higher production level.

LA FENICE'S NEW ARTS MANAGEMENT: A SYNTHESIS.

The change in the theater's strategy reflects the adoption of some of the managerial principles that can be detected in the wider discourse of New Public Management (NPM), from which I have drawn to define the features of this example of new arts management. These principles are: adoption of market oriented strategies, lessening the dependency on public funds, increasing efficiency level, implementation of budgeting and control systems, cutting costs

and avoiding wastes, implementation of businesslike commercial activities flexibility.

Adoption of market-oriented strategies. Traditionally the opera house, like other similar organizations in Italy, addressed its products to a local audience (city or region inhabitants). The adoption of an hybrid strategy, that invests both in seasonal and in repertory operas, has allowed the theater to enlarge its reference market by uncovering latent targets of customers (essentially tourists).

Lessing the dependency on public funds. Despite public funds still represent the greatest share of the total revenues, their relative weight has decreased from the peak of 71% in 2009 down to 56% in 2013. The main goal of the top management was to obtain an amount of public funds sufficient to cover the fixed costs of the stable structure (permanent staff in particular), while using tickets revenues and private funds to cover the variable production cost items (artistic cachets in particular). In this way the decreasing availability of public funds would not hamper the high production level reached.

Increasing efficiency levels. The organization has been able to increase the production activities (in terms of number of spectacles) of 100% from 2009 to 2013 despite the permanent staff has been maintained at the same level, suggesting a more efficient use of the workforce. Increasing the efficiency of existing resources was the objective of intensifying the artistic season and introducing alternating operas in the artistic program, without hiring new technicians and without forecasting extra work hours.

Implementation of budgeting and control systems. The management has developed a better and more accurate budgeting and reporting system. Despite its rudimental form, it is able to provide the top management with prompt information about variations between actual and budgetary values. The implementation of such system required an *enhanced awareness of the cost structure* of each department, as it can be detected by the adoption of business terminology like “variable” or “direct”, and “fixed” or “indirect” costs with respect to the production activity, or by the recourse to “capitalized costs” and “depreciation” when referring to investment in repertory scene.

Cutting costs and avoiding wastes. With respect to the general costs, concrete efforts to reduce costs (e.g. for transports and services consumptions) have been made, thanks to an increased organization-wide responsibility towards cost cutting and waste avoidance. Some productions are made with low-cost budgets, taking advantage of collaborations with the local university and school of fine art, and engaging young artists. This allows to increase the number of spectacles with few resources.

Implementation of business-like commercial activities. The marketing, communication and sales department has improved its activities, from content marketing (on social networks, YouTube, and web radio), to the strengthening of online purchasing system, and to the increasing of theater's spaces rental for private events.

Flexibility. While the permanent staff has been rather stable during the last years, there has been an increased recourse to temporary and on-call contracts and to freelance professionals. This has been the case for artistic maestros and for many workers of the technical departments (the so-called *serali*).

BEHIND THE SCENES OF NEW ARTS MANAGEMENT

*“Find me and follow me through corridors
refectories and files
you must follow, leave this academic factory
you will find me in the matinée
the dark of the matinée
the dark of the matinée is mine
yes, it is mine”
(Franz Ferdinand, Dark of the matinée)*

I have often recalled the parallelism between arts management and the reforms of the public sector inspired by the literature on New Public Management (NPM). I have stated that both arts management and NPM recommend organizations to increase efficiency and productivity and to become more flexible, by adopting managerial tools and strategies. I also added that the two fields often intertwine since many arts organizations are publicly owned or deeply dependent on government’s decisions in terms of funding and governance (Lindqvist, 2012).

Arts management seems to share with new public management the claim of universality, neutrality, and rationality. The win-win solutions that managerial logics seems to provide to public and arts organizations, as described in the previous chapter, is based on such claims.

Until now I have described what I call the “official version” of La Fenice story, that pictures a virtuous circle in which the managerial and the artistic logics intertwine to the advantage of both financial and artistic performances.

The official version was derived from official documents and from the narratives of the people who theorized and implemented the managerial turn.

In this chapter I will bring you “behind the scene” of arts management, with the intent of giving voice to the “unofficial version”.

“THIS IS NOT PUBLIC MANAGEMENT!”

Similarly to many examples of NPM reforms in the public sector, the adoption of managerial approaches in opera houses has been pushed by the legislator through normative and universal provisions.

However, the reform process of the legislative system seems to be irrelevant (if not counter-productive) for the achievement of La Fenice’s success. If the recently adopted provisions had achieved the intended positive impact, we would have expected all the 14 national lyric foundations to converge towards similar results. Since, as showed in chapter 3, this is not the case, the reader might reasonably question the replicability and universality assumptions of such reforms.

Panozzo (2000) highlights how NPM reforms, by imposing management and managerial instruments “by decree”, actually deny the inherent autonomous character of management systems. Indeed, the formal and precise language adopted by legal norms seems in contrasts with the versatile and instable managerial one (Panozzo, 2000). Similarly, Zan (2006) and Zan and Sicca (2005) highlights how the NPM applied to the cultural sector, has much to do with managerial rhetoric than with management itself; and Diefenbach (2009) claimed that NPM reforms, with their provisions like contract specification, quality control, inspection, audit, and review, tend to replace the bureaucracy system they were meant to fight with new forms of bureaucracy.

When I asked managers to comment on the government intervention in the management of the opera houses I got twofold answers. If on one hand government’s calls for a more efficient and rational management is welcomed, the interventions made are perceived as not helpful to achieve such goals.

“Since law 800 [1967] the idea of culture as a national heritage has disappeared. Everything has become a cost to be controlled. Instead

the State should think about how to develop this public good” (artistic director).

“Actually, no reforms have been done in the last years. The last reform we had, was law 800 [1967]. What has followed can be labeled as a legislative schizophrenia. There have been some attempts to change the system, but they were actually meant to remedy to what the State should have done but it didn't: controls.”
(chief executive)

Moreover, the manifested inefficiencies of the public administrations, including previous opera house public management, contribute to a skeptical approach to any public intervention in the management of the opera house.

“Maybe I am wrong, but I think it was not entirely wrong being a publicly owned organization, the problem was being an Italian publicly owned organization [...] there have been episodes of clientelism, an irrational excess of expenditures especially on personnel...” (Production director)

To be blamed are: bad administrators, political influences, bureaucracy, and a political system that pretended to had not seen all the wastes produced by opera houses. Other positions tend to accuse: the excessive number of people employed, lack of transparency and meritocracy in recruiting system, and the rigidity of contractual rules and, again, a political system that pretended to had not seen.

The state, now, is paradoxically perceived as the enemy: the inefficient entity who is not able to provide opera houses with a better legislative framework, who is not able to cope with novel exigencies faced by cultural organizations, who complicates rather than simplifies things by means of fragmented and complicated rules, and who has intentionally overlooked serious cases of mismanagement for too long time for political convenience.

THE HUMAN FACTOR

Rather than “by decree”, managerialism has entered the opera house thanks to people, even though very few of them have a managerial background.

The five heads of departments and the chief executive are all males, and mainly from the same city in which the opera house operates (except for the artistic director and the communication and marketing manager). The chief executive, appointed in 2010, has a background in humanities, and has been working for the same theater since the early 80s in the communication and marketing department, of which he became director in 2001. Due to his long tenure in the theater, he can boast about knowing personally all the employees. The heads of the core functions (the Artistic and the Production and Technical Organization departments) both have long experience in the cultural sector, and no managerial background. The artistic director is a former musician and musicologist and has worked as artistic director for different cultural institutions, including the prestigious La Scala in Milan. The head of the production department, despite his master in law, is a director of prose and opera pieces and his first experience in the organization started in 1986 as assistant director. Only the heads of the control functions, Finance and the Human Resource departments, came from business schools and have pursued their career in the private sector before joining the organization, respectively in 2006 and in 2011. The Communication and Marketing director is the last arrived (in 2012). He is a journalist and has a long work experience in directing press offices in different public administrations.

The finance director, during an informal meeting, told me that he doesn't believe in the replicability of La Fenice's model, which, in his opinion, was possible only because the chief executive had worked there for 30 years and he knew everyone. The same belief is expressed by the director of the production department, who added that in case of changes in the top management (he referred to the chief executive and himself, those that have stayed longer in the organization), conflicts could arise: “C. [the chief executive] is one of us. The guys are more prone to help him rather than a newcomer. I really don't know what would happen if he and I would leave”. The chief executive himself,

modestly, answered my question about replicability by saying: “It is not me who has to answer, other people should. What I can say is that people are important”. More or less explicit examples of self-declared personal merit for some aspects of the managerial change has been expressed by the artistic director (for the change in the production strategy), the marketing and communication director (for the improvements in commercial results), and the chief of stage technicians (for the new strategy of set production).

What seems to come up from these sentences is that not only the knowledge of the sector, but also the understanding of the specific organization is important. While managerial background appears less important.

People are essential not only in strategizing, but also in implementing the new strategies. Motivating the workforce, in order to have the new strategy accepted and implemented without conflicts, was another issue that was mentioned both by the artistic director and the director of the production department. Indeed, the changes brought in the organization have had the most immediate and evident consequences in the way people work. Efficiency means do better use of the existing resources, where the most relevant resource for the opera house is made of its employees, as declared by the chief executive: “the workforce is the true value of the theater” .

So, technicians had to accept the changes on their work-shifts, while the artistic groups (orchestra and choir) had to accept to play and sing *La Traviata* 40 times in one season. Employees in the offices, also, had to use their time to plan and support an increasing number of activities.

Motivation, thus, is important to have the support of the workforce. As the production director told me during an interview “the hardest part of my job is not to tell them [the technicians] what to do and when, but is to explain them why!”

A particular point is made concerning the musicians. The orchestra is a complex organization in the organization. Given the education musicians got in structures accused to train “soloists” rather than member of a group, orchestra members are more inclined to a sense of frustration than the technicians, where the team work is easily accepted. The Production director admitted that “it is hard for them to accept to play so many time *La Traviata*”.

In addition to the traditional monetary rewards, La Fenice can rely on the prestige that is attached to its name (as the marketing director told me: “if you read every day in the newspaper that this theater is wonderful, you feel pride to work here”), and on an established commitment, guaranteed by permanent contracts, that makes of the work environment a kind of “second family”.

VOICES OUT OF TUNE

View from outside, the opera house represents a symbol, a virtuous example of efficiency and good management, which can obtain positive results despite all the deficiencies characterizing the national opera system defined by the state. It provides the external world a rational and replicable win-win solution to the problems affecting the Italian opera system.

But, as I have outlined in the introduction, one of the peculiar features of cultural organizations is the coexistence of an artistic and a managerial logic that are conflicting.

The managerial logic, which often speaks through numbers, neutralize the conflicts by showing the increased amount of performances and the positive financial results. But behind the scenes, numbers count much less. Not all the productions counts as “one”, as this voice out of tune wanted to tell me:

“How should we count the productions? one Die Walküre is not equal to one Scala Di Seta, and one La Traviata of 50 thousands euros is not equal to one Traviata of 150 thousand euros, even if the tickets are equally sold” (someone from the artistic department).

Given the difficulty of objectively judging the artistic quality of a season program, and the awareness that financial principles have started to inform the artistic programming, internal debates about the potential conflict between artistic and financial logics are inevitable. The existence of these debates inside the organization, despite the dominant discourse about the virtuous circle that is

conveyed by managers both inside and outside the organization, was an evidence from the fieldwork.

The perceptible fear wavering in the corridors, is that the equilibrium between the artistic and the financial logics can move too much towards the second direction:

“We have reached a good compromise, but we should not forget that our product is essentially artistic” (someone from the artistic department).

When a managerial logic enters a cultural organization, stressing managerial principles and rationality, it risks to put artistic and cultural values on the background. Artistic logic is more oriented towards the view of culture as a public good, which is worth public support simply for “art’s sake”. The managerial logic, on the other hand, pushes towards a more market-oriented system, in order to increase revenues, and on rationalization and standardization of the production process, in order to decrease costs. It can be argued that state intervention should support artistic quality because of its public value, but governments, informed by the NPM, tends to link cultural policies and funds to indicators of efficiency, cost cutting, productivity, and ability to attract private funds, supporting, in practice, the managerial logic. In this situation, voices out of tune say:

“...today nobody cares about quality, everything is about numbers. First of all at the Ministry. This approach to culture is a vicious circle, where also the public arrives less prepared and consequently the demand for quality decreases.” (a stage maestro)

The stage maestro mentioned a “vicious circle” which strikingly emerge as opposite to the “official” description of the “virtuous circle”. In doing so, he added another element to the discussion which is strictly connected with cultural policies, i.e. the level of cultural education of the audience.

This, integrated with this other voice out of tune:

“People outside there will never understand how much an opera costs and why it is so expensive. People will not understand all these small details. Opera is simply out of the time...” (a stage manager)

suggests that even taxpayers will not support great investments in the arts, if cultural policies do not give them the instruments to benefit (and understand) the results of such investments. The value of the artistic product, thus, is vague, and, once again, cannot rely on cold computations, but it is rather a matter of each person’s own subjective definition of quality.

We will encounter other voices out of tune in the following chapters, lamenting the decrease of artistic quality and innovation caused by the new imperatives of productivity, efficiency, and profitability. Here it is enough to remark that the voices out of tune reported until now, clearly cast doubts on the neutrality claim of managerial provision.

THE NEED OF LEGITIMATION.

THE RHETORIC OF “ARTISTIC MANAGERIALESE”

The voices out of tune highlighted potential conflicts between the commercial or financial logic, and the artistic logic. Debates about conflicts between art and finance, or quality and quantity, seem not to be a rare thing both inside and outside the organization: managers seem already familiar with this kind of discussion, and they have prompt answers to give to justify their decisions.

A first way to legitimize managerial decision, is by using rational and objective arguments. The language that better fits this requirements is that of management.

I had the most evident example of management-speak (as called by Rombach and Zapata, 2010) or managerialese (as used by Gherardi and Jacobsson, 2008) during the interview with the chief executive, when he showed me a

printed version of the PowerPoint presentation showed during the annual meeting with subscribers in 2014 (as already reported in the previous chapter).

“When they [the subscribers] accuse me because I planned 40 reruns of *La Traviata* in one season, I show them this. [...] *La Traviata* is only one of the titles in the program, there are other 16 titles! How many theaters can offer 17 different titles in one season?” (chief executive).

The title of the presentation was “The business/challenge of a business-theater”. It consisted of ten slides showing tables and graphs about the financial results and the production activity.

The positive financial and productivity performances obtained in the last years are, thus, used to indicate the potential success that rational and efficient management can bring to cultural organization. The clear message is that *La Traviata* “pays” other operas, and without performing it there will not be enough resources to built-up other new productions.

Not only number and tables, or cause-effect formulas, but also music history stories narrated in managerial language were used to justify the change of strategy:

“I have deeply studied Opera History. Mozart, Verdi and other big composers, were all concerned about, not only political, but also financial limits. Don’t you think that Puccini would have loved to have the choir on stage during the second act? He couldn’t because the costumes would have cost too much! If Verdi and Puccini had such kind of concerns, who am I to disregard them?” (artistic director)

Another concept used to neglect the tensions between the art-world and the business-world is that of culture industry: “culture is an industry. Whether you like it or not”, told me the marketing and communication director, “it’s not me who said it, the Frankfurt’s school did!”. The idea underlying the concept of

culture industry is that without commerce there would not be art: “A product is not a product if I don’t sell it”, told me the artistic director.

In defense of culture as an industry, the artistic director used historical and musicology anecdotes.

“a thing that is often ignored is that until the first decades of the XX century music was the main Italian industry. In the same years in which Verdi was writing *Simon Boccanegra*, the Opera was an industry simply as Fiat would have become later [...] When Verdi wrote their music, he wanted to achieve the same success as Coca Cola [...] Great composers were also great entrepreneurs!” (artistic director).

The successfulness of La Fenice strategy is communicated to stakeholders and to the general public, by the organization itself (press conferences, meetings with subscribers), the press (local and national, specialized and generalist), and by other institutions (e.g. research centers, universities). As already pointed out, the chief executive and the heads of the core functions do not have a managerial background. Nonetheless they studied and implemented the new model. And, when questioned about the functioning of the model, they show graphs and tables, use cause-consequences relationships, make comparisons with other institutions, and fill their speeches with words like costs, resources, efficiency, productivity. Without mastering managerial theories, the arguments they use were the same used by NPM advocates. The strength of managerial language is that it allows comparability and gives a sense of rationality and objectivity, which helps in gaining legitimacy. The legitimation of managerialism at La Fenice is seek through a peculiar managerial language spoken by the managers and enriched with artistic, social, or philosophical reflections, according to each one’s role and field of expertise.

EXPLOITATION OF THE SOCIAL MISSION

Also the external situation counts. The increasing unemployment and the crisis of the Opera production in Italy is well known, especially among musicians who are much more in contact with peers in other institutions than the technicians. A point made by the Chief Executives is that this model allows people to work and frees the management from the need of terminating contracts.

“Why shouldn’t I do 40 reruns of *La Traviata*? Why should I fire people? Here people work!” (chief executive).

DiMaggio defined three ideological orientations that results in different attitudes towards organizational missions in arts organizations. These are: aesthetic mission, managerialism, and social orientation (1987). DiMaggio stated that both the managerial and the social orientation to the arts, conflict, to some degree, with the traditional artistic and aesthetic orientation (DiMaggio, 1987). However, the literature has focused mainly on the tensions between managerial aspects and artistic values, and less on the conflict between the social orientation and artistic values.

As we have seen, arts organizations (in particular those active in the performing arts and heritage) have a relevant public vocation for at least two reasons. First, for their mission, which is to produce, diffuse, and preserve culture. But, while “to produce” involves artistic action, “to diffuse” and “to preserve” have a more social character. Second, whether they are publicly owned or not, they are responsible for the management of public funds, especially in Europe. They should thus be accountable with respect to the values indicated by public policies supporting arts, which have both artistic and social rationales. The same argument is valid when the funders are non-profit organizations, such as charities and foundations which are oriented towards specific topics (e.g. the endorsement of minorities or ethnical groups).

Public support for the arts should protect arts from market pressures, in order to support both artistic and social goals. In the European Parliament report on the arts financing systems, it is stressed how some countries (such as Italy and Greece) have cultural heritage as the cultural policy priority, while others

(especially in the Nordic countries) focus more on inclusion and cultural diversity (Kamler et al., 2006).

However, artistic and social goals can be conflicting. It is not clear, in fact, how it is possible, given the same amount of resources, to foster artistic excellence and innovation and, at the same time, to increase access, participation, pluralism and diversity, and to invest in conservation and education activities.

On the other hand, managerial concerns can be in line with social goals. Education and activities to increase access, for examples, can be seen as audience development strategies and thus can serve both goals.

The dramatic social impacts that the current economic crisis is producing, especially in terms of high unemployment rates, and the increasing importance given to the impacts that the arts sector has on economic indicators such as the employment level, has created a tendency to identify the managerial logic with the social purpose of culture. Instrumental arguments are used to legitimize management culture, highlighting the positive impact it can bring to social aspects.

The critiques we have discussed in the introductory chapter, based on the intrinsic conflict between economic and artistic goals and on the dark side of managerialism, affirm that managerial practices are more in line with economic objectives and, thus, tend to decrease the artistic quality and the innovative features of arts organizations.

However, similar critiques based on social (rather than artistic) aspects are more difficult to support, because of the overlapping of some economic and social strategies. In fact, no one can really judge whether the education program offered by an opera house is a marketing strategy or a public service, or whether a revival of a 19th century repertory opera is a strategy to increase ticket revenues or a way to preserve and diffuse cultural heritage.

Since the critiques to managerialism can only be done in theoretical terms, given the impossibility to objectively measure both social and artistic output, it is here, in this shadowing space, that arts management looks for legitimization, by stressing its value for social ends.

Take for example these extracts from the interview with the artistic director of Fenice.

“We should not forget that we are paid by taxpayers, they are our shareholders. Our mission is to provide the humankind with the operas who has been written for the humankind. We are just a temple where this ritual is celebrated. But if we keep the temple closed, the ritual cannot happen.

[...] I don't like to use the term popular opera, i prefer to talk about classics. La Traviata is a classic as Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Being a classic does not only mean to have sold a lot, but to be a fundamental masterpiece of a culture. Our mission is to develop, diffuse and affirm our culture. When we worked with the stagione system, and we produced only 8 opera for a total of 40 performances, we were not building anything for the society.

[...] Since law 800 [1967] the idea of culture as a national heritage has disappeared. [...] The legislator's call for a better management is correct [...] but I think that the legislator should also think about the development of the public good [...] If all the opera houses adopted our strategy, this would meant that in one-year time more than 1 million Italians would go to the opera”

How can it be criticized? Indeed keeping the theater open, diffusing our cultural heritage, are all in line with the public vocation of the arts. It seems easier to justify a commercial strategy in these terms, than sustaining the weaker argument that a better management serves better art.

CONCLUSIONS

The change in the theater's strategy reflects the adoption of some of the managerial principles that can be detected in the wider discourse of NPM. The

field of arts management, indeed, share with NPM the same claims of universality, neutrality, and rationality.

However, some thought-provoking aspects emerged when official documents and formal interviews with managers were matched with observations and informal conversations, as described in this chapter. In particular, once I moved from what is shown on stage to what is whispered behind the scene, the three claims just reminded (universality, neutrality, and rationality) demonstrated their weaknesses.

First, the fact that the “new arts management” didn’t arrive at La Fenice thanks to legislative interventions, since they brought to different results - or to no-results - in different organizations, casts doubts on the universality of managerial provisions. Moreover, the fact that managers ask for more autonomy and look suspiciously at the government’s intervention in the management of the opera house, seems to suggest that a arts management should be based on more tailored approaches, which take into consideration the specific context. The human factor described above, represented a specific condition that made possible for La Fenice to succeed in the implementation of the managerial innovations, and that make of La Fenice a specifically contextualized case. The definition of tailored approaches, in addition, do not require professional managers with a background in management. La Fenice’s new arts management, thus, seems more like “common sense” rather than an administrative orthodoxy valid “for all seasons”, based on a functionalist understanding of management and on the myth of the “one fits all” solutions.

Second, this analysis supports the idea that managerialism is not neutral, rather it has specific ideological connotations (Boltansky and Chiapello, 2005; Deem and Brehony, 2005). Consequently, its alleged ability to create virtuous circles in which economic and artistic logics reinforce each other, is part of the same ideology, and, as such, can be exposed to critiques. The voices out of tune that I reported in this chapter, demonstrate how managerial discourses, and in particular the use of numbers, are able to represent only a small part of the complex reality. As a consequence, management discourses cannot be

judged as neutral, and the meanings it associates to words such as artistic quality, cannot be taken as absolute and objective meanings.

Third, managerialism entering nonprofit or public arts organizations will likely find an hostile environment, at least until it becomes the dominant logic. The rationality argument, that it is often opposed to the “passionate” feature of the arts, seems to be used in order to strengthen the power position of the managerial culture. However, the recourse to what I have called “artistic managerialese” and the instrumental use of the social purpose of the arts, is always made as a way to “defend” management from the critiques, as if managers attempt to convince the interlocutor about the goodness of their choices. This rhetorical practice appears to be in contrast with the functionalist approach to management studies and with the vision of management as a rational discipline, which would not require any rhetorical support (Zan, 2006).

Finally, the results of this research suggest a more critical reasoning about management of cultural organization. What happens when a managerial logic enters cultural organizations, where artistic values are traditionally put on the forefront? And, in particular, what happens when managerial innovations come from inside the organizations, by people who don't have any background in management or accounting? What is the role of management in that case, how it is used and what is the meaning attached to it? Is it just a rhetoric use, an exercise in style, a way to gain power and legitimacy, or are management principles “scientifically” applied in order to achieve better (both financial and artistic) performances? To try to find answers to these questions management scholars have to change their perspective from one that sees them as the source of universal managerial knowledge, to one that put them in the more humble position of observers of organizational practices.

In the rest of the thesis I will address some of these questions, but now I would like to conclude this chapter with some advices for arts managers who are going to implement a commercial strategy or to introduce managerial innovation.

Today is quite popular to read on the internet the list of “three things you should know/do/see before...”, and I would like to take a similar approach. Here there are my “three things you should know before implementing arts management”:

1. Despite the apparent universality and rationality of management rules, people and context are important. Do not expect the same strategy to be successfully implemented everywhere. Take “best practices” just as “local practices”.
2. Be aware the managerial innovations can create discordant opinion, both inside and outside your organization. This because, despite the apparent neutrality and efficacy of arts management, it is not possible to objectively evaluate its effect neither on your products or service quality, nor on more general matters such as equity, justice, and democracy.
3. Be prepared to justify your choice in front of the critiques. Making your point by insisting on the increased quality of the product or service is pointless, because of the reason explained before. You don't want to use weak weapons. Speak as a wise manager, who knows more than simply management.

“OH NO! *LA TRAVIATA*, AGAIN!” - OR: THE FRUSTRATION OF THE CREATIVE MASS

*Chi son? Sono un poeta.
Who am I? I am a poet.
Che cosa faccio? Scrivo.
What do I do? I write.
E come vivo? Vivo.
And how do I live? I live.
In povertà mia lieta
In my carefree poverty
scialo da gran signore
I squander rhymes
rime ed inni d'amore.
and love songs like a lord.
Per sogni e per chimere
When it comes to dreams and visions
e per castelli in aria,
and castles in the air,
l'anima ho milionaria.
I've the soul of a millionaire.
(*Che Gelida Manina*, Rodolfo's aria from *La Bohème*, music by G.Puccini, text by L. Illica and G. Giacosa, 1896. Translation by Peter J. Nasou)*

What happens when a managerial logic enters cultural organizations, in which artistic values and public service vocations are traditionally on the forefront? In particular my question here refers to the implications that this “dual” logic has on creative professionals working in cultural organizations.

Given the subject of the research is the work of creative professionals, the study proceeds by trying to define the “creatives” considering the existing literature and the context under analysis. Then I will focus on how the creative professionals perceive the complex play between artistic values and economic

logics, and how they react to the increasing adhesion to commercial and financial imperatives. I will then look more in detail at the role played by professional groups and interests in shaping the dimensions of conflicts between different logics.

THE CREATIVE MASS

The attention given to the concept of creative industry resulted in the fact that occupations such as writers, artists, musicians are now seen as “conventional career paths” (Banks and Hesmondhalg, 2009). These creative professionals have a vague “aura”. On one hand, the artistic activities they carry out are strongly associated with the romantic idea of “the artistic soul”. On the other hand, they are frequently defined as knowledge-based workers that can be engaged in various activities, often not related to art or culture. It is in this latter sense, and in particular after the bestseller book by Florida (2002) “The rise of creative class”, that the concept of “creative class” has gained popularity. The concept of creative professionals that one can find in Florida’s works (2002, 2003) and in many academic and policy studies, is applied to denote talented and highly educated people, who strive to achieve self-actualization and personal growth, and who want to freely express their talent autonomously and independently from any form of authoritarian control. In this sense, they appear highly individualistic and show high predisposition to self-employment and entrepreneurship. They are highly mobile, refusing static life and routine jobs. When employed by an organization, they are often engaged in self-organizing work arrangements which made them tagged with the label of “entreplooyee” (Pongratz and Voß, 2003; Mietzner and Kamprath, 2013). Florida’s work shifted the focus of analysis from creative industries towards creative individuals, stating that creative people power regional economic growth, as they held the creative capital, which, when clustered in a particular city or region, is the source of economic growth.

On the other hand, such vision of the creative labour as a promising form of non-alienating job, which allows self-expression and personal growth in a talent

driven and meritocratic labour system is seen as too utopian (Banks and O'Connor, 2009). Critical studies have focused on actual labour conditions in creative industries (Banks and Hesmondhalg, 2009; McGuigan, 2010; Gill and Pratt, 2008). These authors share a critique of the neoliberal capitalism system, and the related processes of subjectivation, individualization and reflexivity at work. Gill and Pratt described the creative class as the 'iconic representatives of the brave new world of work, in which risks and responsibilities must be borne solely by the individual' (2008:3). McGuigan (2010) emphasized the link between neoliberalism and the process of individualization, which, differently from the liberating concept of individualism, leaves people alone without representation and protection. What such studies suggest is that, behind the façade of creative labour, increasing precarious employment conditions are hidden, while trade union representation and collective bargaining is inexorably being deteriorated.

In order to see how the creative professionals themselves experience the need of a balance point between art and commerce in cultural organization, I needed to first answer to the question: who counts as "a creative professional"?

When I entered the field, I immediately focused my attention on the artists, who, I thought, could represent an example of the super-creative core described by Florida, and are unanimously (at least in the literature I have gone through) considered as creative.

Creative professionals, such as opera directors and conductors, set and costume designers, and soloist singers, are contracted for every single production and, thus, they deal only temporarily with the organization. They pursue their professional career independently from a single organization and they are highly mobile. These artists seem to match with the definition given by Florida in terms of mobility and autonomy, but they wouldn't help me in understanding the potential paradox faced by creatives as members of an organization. Thus I shifted my attention to the artists employed by the opera house, i.e. the musicians of the orchestra and the singers of the chorus.

The organizational chart I was provided by the personnel department (dated November 2004), clearly defines them as the "artistic complexes", which are

under the supervision of the artistic director for the organization of their work, and of the principal conductor or chorus director for the professional and artistic development. In everyday organizational language the artistic complexes are called "artistic masses", which is also the word that is national-wide used to define musicians and singers of Italian opera houses.

What happens if one changes the vocabulary and uses the term "creative mass" instead of "creative class"? While the concept of class can evoke conflicts and inequalities (the term creative class has been charged to be "both crude and politically repugnant" by Markusen et al., 2006), the use of the word mass or complex denotes an aggregate of parts or units that are interconnected but not meaningful by their own. Moreover, while the term "complex" signals an intricate and complicate association of parts, the most used word "mass" is much more a mere aggregation or collection of things that form one body with no definite shape. In Marxist studies, the term mass assumes an even more direct denigrating connotation (e.g. "religion is the opium for the masses").

The contrast between the concept of mass (or complex), actually in use in the Italian opera system, and that of class, used by Florida, seems to question the idea of creativity as an individual ability or talent to be expressed by autonomous and independent workers. As a matter of fact, in our case, it is the whole (the mass or the complex) the only relevant creative subject, and not the individuals that are part of it.

But the creative mass that I met is as distant from this common understanding of the creative class as it is from the definition of isolated and precarious individuals provided by critical scholars. Musicians and singers in the opera house have permanent job contracts, defined at national level through collective bargaining and integrated with additional provisions at organizational level. The contracts contain lots of clauses protecting them from long working hours, securing additional money for work trips and extra services, guaranteeing insurance and care for their musical instruments, and providing the clothes to be worn during the performances. Unions are present and relevant in the decision making process, even though less influential than they used to be in the recent past. They are nothing like independent, free-lance, or autonomous

talents working in insecure and precarious conditions. On the contrary, they are perceived to be much protected (some would say “spoilt”) by those privileged contractual provisions on which they firmly stick, negating to the management of the opera house any exception that can damage their interests.

All discourses focused on creative personnel, thus, seem to fail to grasp the essence of this category of highly educated artists, whose talent and professionalism is profusely recognized (in Italian orchestra musicians are called “professori d’orchestra, literally “orchestra professors”, the term that alludes to the knowledge they have acquired and the prestige awarded from the society) working together as part of a “mass” under the regulation provided by national and local labour agreements.

Looking at the artists was the easiest thing to do. But as the definitions of the creative professionals provided by the literature were so vague, and none of them specifically addressing the performing art, I felt the need to look beyond the obvious.

The concept of art as a form of collective action, introduced by Becker (1974), came to my aid. Looking at art as a collective action, Becker said, implies a recognition of a division of labour between artists and support personnel. Even though in some sectors the title of an artist is conferred by special institutions, such as academies, such title is generally not “natural” but the result of consensual definitions of the situation. Hence, which activities are believed to require the “special gift or sensibility of an artist” and how much artistic they should be to define the persons who carries out them as artists, cannot be defined a priori and is not stable in space and time.

Given the provisional nature and the contextually of definitions, I decided to forget about the labels and depend on the internal understanding of creativity, in order to see what are the consensual definitions present in that specific context. We have seen that opera distinguishes from the other performing arts because it is a combination of musical, dramatic, and visual aspects. The artistic output, thus, it is not just the result of the interpretation of the music: as there are musicians who interpret the music, so there are interpreters of visual and dramatic aspects.

This is how I met the technicians: “We are also artists! but with a more acute practical sense”, I have been told by one of them. I understood by watching them what they mean by “being an artist”.

I saw the operations of assembling the scene set (originally constructed by employed carpenters in the opera house’s workshop), and arranging new props and costumes. I was listening to the chief of the stage technicians who was proudly explaining and showing me how the set was built, and all the technical details that they had to take into account to build it.

“That platform has to rotate. It seems easy, but you must know that, at a certain point, there will be 70 people standing on it! (...)” (stage technician, on Don Giovanni production)

They receive the sketch from the set designer, and each design is a new challenge:

“The designer wanted those big windows to be opened during the performance, we had to put all the ropes under the scene, instead of maneuvering them from the top as we usually do, otherwise they would have been visible from the audience, and that is not good” (stage technician, on Simon Boccanegra production).

I have been told how they fixed a problem with a very complex scene set during a premiere - by lying under the stage and tying a knot on the broken rope, with the show going on undisturbed. “Only them could do it so efficiently (and silently), because they built it”, explain the artistic director, highlighting the importance of having the needed technical skills in-house.

I saw them (who do not talk any language but Italian) interacting with a German peer (who does not talk any language but German) deciding how to operate a stage set that was co-produced with a German opera house. They already knew how to do their job, despite the fact that the instructions were in a unknown language, and the set was already assembled when the German

collaborator arrived. I was there to help them with the translation, hoping that the German person knew some English. But he didn't, and I simply stayed there, useless, watching them discussing in some no-language and, to my surprise, understanding each other.

In the production department, thus, creativity refers to the ways in which one approaches the (sometimes visionary) instructions of the stage designer, the ways in which one matches technical functioning with beauty, or the ways in which one addresses any other problem that he/she daily meets.

In the main vocabulary used within the organization, a technical group is usually called "maestranza", that, in Italian language, can refer both to the groups of workers in industrial sector, and to corporations of arts. Maestranza comes from the Italian word "maestro", used also in English, with the meaning of "a master of any art".

Banks and Hesmondhalg (2009) recognized craft and workshop productions, and the specific skills required to perform such activities, as characteristics of labour in creative industry. On the other hand, technicians hardly match the definition of the creatives given by Florida and related literature. They are not highly educated, even though they have specialized knowledge (especially about materials and techniques) and handcraft skills. They are not highly mobile: they have been living in the same city for a long time, and the majority of them is permanently employed (a smaller part have a kind of contract that allow the chief to call them only when they are needed, and are therefore more precariously employed than the others). Many of them have also a long experience in the opera house and know perfectly how the machinery works. They don't seem to have a bohemian lifestyle, but in contrast to craftsmen or craftswomen working in the manufacturing industry, they are not only concerned with the functionality of the objects, but also with their beauty.

Technicians are grouped by occupational affiliation (carpenters, stage technicians, electricians, sound technicians, tailors). For each work shift there is a crew from each professional group. Taken individually, even though every creative input is essential (especially for last minute problem solving), each technician is always replaceable by one of his/her colleague. "The motto here is

that everyone is important, but no one is essential” says the manager responsible for the technicians.

Technicians and artists are different in many ways: education, skills and competences, but also ambitions and lifestyles. In addition, musicians have an institutionalized artistic profession (think about the role of music academia) while technicians don't have one.

What my observations suggest that I found particularly interesting, is the different attitude to team work, or, more generally, to the “mass”. According to the director of the production department, technicians have long since interiorized such dimension of their work, and the teams are rather unite. There could be conflicts between different technical groups, but they are usually minimized thanks to a division of tasks and a good planning (I saw conflicts between stage and lights technicians happen only when the work schedule of the day, made by the planning office, contained a mistake). However seldom conflicts climb the stairs to the directors' offices. The orchestra, on the other hand, “is made of 100 brains”, as the artistic secretary stressed. Individualization in the artistic mass is high, everyone seems to be more concern with the quality of his/her own performance, than to the total result, as the follow statement of a musician suggests: “When I play, I have only that occasion to give my best. If I make a mistake, I cannot come back”. An orchestra member explained me the life of a musician through a comparison with the life of an athlete who runs the 100 meters, saying that they both are lives made of sacrifice, dedication, and continuous challenges with oneself. I think it is not a case that the comparison is made with one of the most individualistic sport specialties.

Different attitudes to toward the mass, thus, result in different ways of experience the working life in the organization.

THE FRUSTRATION OF THE CREATIVE MASSES

Discourses concerning meritocracy, individuality, and self-actualization - terms often mentioned in the mainstream literature on creative class - seem to

emphasize individual desire to excel with respect to the mass. Especially in a democratic system where the idea that all human beings are creative is constantly repeated (in biographies of self-made men and stories of consecration and fame), it creates the expectation that, given equal opportunities, if one works hard and is fortunate enough, he/she will succeed to become part of the creative “class”.

From the critical perspective, this is how liberalism work in cultural industry: “The defrauded masses today cling to the myth of success still more than the successful. They, too, have their aspirations. They insist unwaveringly on the ideology by which they are enslaved” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972).

In the opera house, however, the normal position taken by artists is that being a part of the creative mass, rather than a leader or a soloist. Nonetheless, members of the artistic masses (especially musicians) have professionally been trained in highly individualizing institutions, such as the conservatories, which train both future famous soloists and competent mass members. During the training, which lasts 3 to 5 years and is equivalent to university degrees, the musicians spend most of their time doing individual studies. “I spent many years alone, just me and my instrument. After this training, you can imagine how difficult it could be to become part of an orchestra” says a musician.

Moreover, the fact that musicians are called with the name of the instruments they play (e.g. “the violin” instead of “the violinist”) can be read as a signal of how, in this environment, things become more important than people.

A first source of frustration shared by the artists seems thus to be related to the awareness of being only one of the “mass”, i.e. of not having achieved the desired self-actualization.

The autonomy of the permanent employed artists (orchestra and choir members) is limited by the artistic program defined by the board. Top-down programming is a method that limits the autonomy and hampers the creative impulse of the artists, who are asked to prepare only the titles presented in the annual program. The artists, facing the paradox of being executors rather than interpreters, lose enthusiasm in their work.

Me: What do you think about the next season? Will you guys have fun?

Musician 1: No way... almost forty La Traviata in one year. It will kill me!

Me: Come on, there must be something you like...

Musician 2: Well, in September there will be Maestro Chung as guest conductor, he is really a good one! He will bring some life here.

Musician 1: Yes, that is true. Nevertheless I played once the opera we are going to do with him, and it is so boring...

In this case, the frustration of the musicians comes from the fact of being subjected to the directives of the management. When the programming becomes increasingly informed by economic principles, as in the case of the opera house's change of strategy that has already been described, it risks to disregard the artistic interests and the potentiality of creation, making the subjugation to managers' decisions more oppressive. The commercial trend that artistic programs are taking (e.g. planning 35 reruns of La Traviata in one season), added to the awareness of being only one of the "mass" (who has to play 35 times per year the same music), contributes not only to the degradation of the professional category of musicians (who are becoming more executors than interpreters), but also to the individual frustration of being submitted to such commercial logic. The conflict between commerce and art is interiorized by creative professionals, taking the form of professional frustration.

From a managerial point of view, the resolution of the tension requires a "balancing act" (Lampel et al., 2000), or a synthesis between apparently conflicting logics (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989; DeFilippi et al., 2007). In the official version of the opera house's recent history, the conflicts between the financial/commercial and the artistic/cultural logics are minimized, or even denied. On the contrary, the virtuous circle linking the two is highlighted, as well as the rationality and replicability of the managerial strategy. The case is presented through the media to the public opinion as a case of the "virtuous house", but it has also been criticized for its becoming the "New Disneyland of the Opera" (The Economist, 24th March 2015), thus highlighting the different

approaches towards the paths undertaken by the management, each of them characterized by different shades of enthusiasm and/or nostalgia.

Internal resistance against the commercial logic is limited to personal outbursts regarding cultural policies and the direction they force cultural organizations to take.

In everyday chats with people working at the Opera House, I noticed that the instrumental approach applied to cultural policies was often accused of negatively impacting the artistic quality and the cultural level of the Opera production, in a way that has been called a vicious circle.

“Today nobody cares about quality, everything is about numbers. First of all at the Ministry. This approach to culture is a vicious circle, where also the audience arrives less prepared and consequently the demand for quality decreases.” (a stage maestro)

Such approach is similar to the Frankfurt School's critique of the commodification of art and culture in the cultural industry (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972).

But, it seems that in the contemporary cultural industry it is worthless to be trustful to the bourgeois ideal of keeping commerce and art separated. After all, artists have always been subject to financial, commercial and political concerns (by either patrons or the market):

I have deeply studied opera history. Mozart, Verdi and other big composers, were all concerned about, not only political, but also financial limits. Don't you think that Puccini would have loved to have the choir on stage during the second act? He wouldn't because the costumes would have cost too much! And Verdi... when Verdi wrote his music, he wanted to achieve the same success that Coca Cola has today. If Verdi and Puccini had such economic and commercial interests, who am I to disregard them? [artistic director]

As the quotation above reminds us, the dual logic is not only a managerial issue. Individuals (artists in particular) face a similar tension, being guided by artistic values on one hand, and by utilitarian and economic reasoning on the other (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007).

In the opera house, nevertheless, a nostalgia towards the “art for art’s sake” principle can be detected. Fond memories of how the great Italian production used to be in the past, the investments in new productions, and in particular and demanding pieces, regardless their commercial appeal, are part of the work experiences of many artists (and support personnel too).

On the other hand, the commercial logic has been spread and has penetrated all the organization, including the artistic department, traditionally more inclined towards artistic values (it is worth to remind here that the idea of increasing and investing in the repertoire has come from the Artistic Director). Also orchestra and choir artists acknowledged the positive results that the new strategy has produced and recognized the value of having a balanced budget that allows them to play and to be paid a salary. Still, there seems to be some bitterness and resignation in the artistic groups, as if the requirement of guaranteeing a balanced-budget represents an inevitable constraint that unfortunately has to be respected.

“If it means that we will be paid our salaries, well... that’s fine. But it’s sad to drop your pants for economic reasons.” [a ‘cello’]

“For me, playing this music is like having a Ferrari and cannot drive fast.” [a ‘double bass’]

The frequently heard sentence “until I am paid my salary” when discussing of managerial choices that are perceived to have little artistic value but a big commercial potential, is a self-explanatory example of the typical way to address these tensions both at individual and at “mass” (in this case used to refer to the Union) levels.

Yet the new way of working found also some supporters in the artistic mass. According to some of them, the new strategy is more efficient and allows the theater to pursue its duty as producer of culture for society. Those who complain against it, it is argued, have been spoilt by years of public administration and by the unions, and, do not want to work differently because they are afraid of losing some privileges.

“Do you know that next year we will be able to provide a show every 3 days? It is a good step in the right direction, we can do even more! In the past it wasn't like that, people didn't want troubles, they just worked the less they could” [a chorus singer]

Handling the frustration of the artists, on whom the quality and success of the production depend, is thus important from the managerial point of view. During the interviews managers acknowledged the importance of that topic, and they seemed to care about giving the artists the due gratification, not only monetary and contractual, but also professional and artistic. I noticed some practices in the organization that seem to serve specifically that purpose.

First, members of the chorus can participate to the auditions for the role of secondary soloist characters of any production, and, usually, such parts are given to them. This implies not only additional money, but also a more challenging and exciting activity, carried out independently from the rest of the mass. And, of course, the name written on the poster.

Second, a large part of the orchestra is engaged in the activities of another symphonic orchestra, which is formally separated from the opera house, even though the members are the same, it has the same name of the opera house, a similar logo, and it plays in the same auditorium. It is formally an association, managed by the musicians themselves, who are part of the board of directors. They themselves chose the concerts, the composers and the conductors. The opera house supports such activity by providing the auditorium and the other rooms, the technical, marketing and sale personnel needed, but also contacts and other forms of support.

Finally, among the factors that impact on the moral of the artists, the musical conductor (for the orchestra) and the chorus director (for the chorus) are often mentioned as the most important. The chorus director, widely appreciated in the organization, is a stable position, and its incumbent has a strong relationship with the chorus. To the contrary, only little affinity is created between the orchestra and the principal (stable) conductor. However, guest orchestra conductors come and go constantly, and, as some of them are widely esteemed by the orchestra members, the choice of contracting a director rather than another, and of having frequent agreements with the most appreciated ones, is also informed by such kind of considerations.

Apparently, no similar considerations exist for the technical groups and support personnel, and, consequently, no specific measures are taken to fulfil their individual and professional aspirations.

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL GROUPS

In studies on the organizational structure of opera houses in Italy (Brunetti, 2000; Cori, 2004, Brunetti and Ferrarese, 2007; Mariani, 2008), conflicting labour relationships and power positions among different professional groups are often reported. These observations are used as explanations of the difficulties encountered along the process of managerial reform of Italian opera houses. The authors say that the application of managerial principles and tools in such highly bureaucratized context was obstructed because of the exercise of organizational power by the artistic and technical groups of professionals, whose privilege positions are due to historical reasons.

In the case presented here, the change was possible. Most likely, the transition from the old way of working to the new one was not easy, and the present system is obviously the result of compromises and negotiations between various interest groups, in which the unions play an important role. But now that the system is tested and working, what is the role of professional groups? What do they claim and why?

If it can be believed that the increased productivity was possible thanks to a more efficient and rational use of the workforce, my observations suggest that in everyday practices artistic exigencies often clash with budget and productivity constraints. With the aim of increasing productivity and efficiency levels, in fact, the management has shortened the time available for both artistic and technical rehearsals. How much of this reduction was made possible by eliminating inefficiency, and how much it was made at the expenses of artistic quality, cannot be assessed objectively.

Moreover, the increasing need for flexibility often clashes with the “old” bureaucratic way of working, which is still present in some formal rules and procedures (that are meant to ensure budget compliance but are scarcely flexible). This makes the organization more rigid and less able to cope with the artistic needs coming from the directors, conductors, set and costumes designers, and less likely to find solutions to last-minute requirements. This, of course, is more problematic when the productivity level reach its peak and several concomitant productions must be managed.

The shortening of rehearsal time (required for efficiency and productivity’s sake), the decreasing of available resources (due to cost-cutting and saving policies), and the rigidity of some practices (required by the bureaucratic structure), have all been accused to be the cause of technical accidents, mistakes and, in turn, of poor artistic performances.

In these cases the conflicts between the financial/commercial/managerial logic and the artistic/cultural logic are empathized and blamed to be the true cause of accidents or mistakes.

“During the premiere a piece of the set scene didn’t work. The director was so annoyed that he refused to go on stage for the final applause. But these are things that happen when there is less time for rehearsing. Everything is shortened, things overlap, and the quality decreases.” (a stage technician)].

“Before, we used to say “buona la prima” (literally: “the premiere is good”, an expression used for a debut or a premiere when everything works and the result is a success). Now we should rather say “buona la terza” (literally :“the third one is good)” (a stage maestro).

“For this production they have rehearsed in the rehearsal room until yesterday and today is the first time the soloists meet the orchestra for the dress rehearsal. Tomorrow we are going live on the national radio, and we have only today to arrange the technical instruments and test the quality of the sound. In the past we used to work on it for days. Given the situation, I hope no one will ever have the nerve to complain if something doesn’t work” (a sound technician).

It is interesting to note how this more intense way of working results in a redefinition of what is creative and artistic and what is not. As reported in the previous section, technicians claim also to be artists, just with a more acute practical sense. These claims contribute to the redefinition of the art-commerce conflict, by including in the artistic prerogatives also professional interests of the technical groups.

“They [the artistic masses] claim to be artists. But here also the last of the technicians is an artist” (a stage technician).

“The artists go and whimper to the art director, and he always accommodates them. Nobody cares about technicians and their needs, which are needs of the opera.” (a stage technician)

Asking for more flexibility, efficiency, and productivity creates tensions between professional groups, and a tendency to use specific competencies as a source of bargaining power by stating that such competencies have an artistic value. A similar explanation was offered by Becker (1974) who stated that “when specialized professional groups take over the performances of the necessary

activities, their members tend to develop specialized, aesthetic, financial and career interests” (Becker, 1974: 769). However, Becker contrasted such particular interest with the higher artistic objectives of the author of the piece of art.

Examples of such contrasts have been provided by Glynn (2000) in her study of the strike at the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. In her analysis she focused on the identity claims made under organizational crisis by different professional groups. She saw those as a rhetorical activity aimed at define the core capabilities and distinctive resources of the organization. Glynn identified two conflicting identities: artistry and utility, and stated that the identification with one or another is made through professional affiliation: artists and administrators. Hence, artists claim that the core capability lies in artistic talent, while administrators counterclaim is that the most important capability is related to the ability of reaching financial and economic sustainability.

In the opera house I studied all the claims were made for “the art’s sake” both from the artistic and from the technical groups. It seems that when resources are scarce and the artistic quality is believed to be undermined, different professional groups claim their decisive importance for the success of the artistic production (or, similarly, they present the contribution of other groups as less important relative to theirs) in order to increase their power and get more resources. In this way every professional group has interest to claim its artistic relevance, and the essentiality of its contribution, so that if some costs have to be cut, it shouldn’t be done at the expense of that group. The idea is that, as the economic logics is believed to crowd out the artistic logic, the legitimation of certain groups is rooted in their ability to persuade that their competences are necessary to safeguard the endangered artistic logic.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the tendency of the last twenty years to minimize the tensions between conflicting logics in cultural policies (as reported by Garnham, 2006; Banks and

O'Connor, 2009; Oakley, 2009), the paradox faced by cultural organizations in dealing with both economic and artistic imperatives is still a present concern.

According to Poole and Van de Ven (1989), recognizing and dealing with conflicts and tensions is important to build more encompassing management and organizational theories. This is especially valid in cultural organizations because, as suggested by Banks and O'Connor (2009), such tensions represent the distinctive feature of such industry with respect to other (more or less) creative sectors, and it must be considered as such.

The case analyzed in this study reveals how the dualism typical of cultural organization is translated into official discourses, into stories of professional lives, and into everyday practices. Here are some concluding remarks.

First, any definition of who and what is creative (or artistic) must be contextualized, and cannot be taken for granted, as such definitions are consensual, and related to specific situations (see also Becker, 1974 and 1978). Second, inside the organization a nostalgia towards the "art for the art's sake" principle (which takes form of discourses about the "vicious circle") can be detected, not only and not necessarily among the artists. Yet the new way of working found also some supporters, both among artists and administrators. Hence, the identification with artistic or commercial logics is not necessarily related to the professional affiliation.

Third, tensions between artistic and utilitarian logics can also be found in the personal life of professionals, especially the artists. They are influenced both by the individualism typical of the romantic artist (reinforced by the educational path they undertake), and by discourses about creativity, meritocracy, and self-actualization. Hence, being a member of an orchestra or chorus subjected to the directives of the management can become a source of frustration. Such frustrations can also have consequences for the whole organization, and must thus been recognized (not denied) and, if possible, minimized. Moreover when a commercial logic enters cultural organizations, the tensions experienced by professionals become more severe. Being increasingly subjugated to the commercial logics can reinforce the feeling of frustration of the artists.

Finally, opera houses have to face interests coming from different professional groups, which tend to use specific competencies as a source of bargaining power. When the artistic logic is believed to be threatened by an increasing adhesion to commercial imperatives, all professional groups have interest in claiming their importance in terms of artistic contribution to the success of the artistic production, in order to increase their power and get more resources. In this way everyone can potentially claim to be an artist, and persuade about the essentiality of his artistic contribution. This has additional consequences on the process of identity construction and confirms the unstable and contextual feature of definitions of creativity and artistry.

STRUGGLING WITH MEANINGS: INNOVATION IN THE PERFORMING ARTS

*"There is a danger in all this of La Fenice becoming an operatic Disneyland."
(The Economist, March 24th 2015)*

WHAT IS ARTISTIC INNOVATION?

Talks about innovation in the performing arts are not new: innovation and experimentation are believed to be inherent features of the performing arts. Cultural organizations have been defined as "permanently innovative organizations" (De Filippi et al., 2007:513), that differs from organizations in other sectors in that they have an "inherent pressure to innovate", they "are expected to create", and in which "creativity and innovative novelty are central values" (Castaner, 2014: 266-267). An inherent and permanently innovative organization is the one that continuously create (thus differentiating from organizations that release innovations *una tantum*), and that make of the creative process the core of its activities (and not just a related task carried out in separated R&D departments).

The peculiarity of the live performing arts is that every event is unique and unrepeatable, since it is limited to the time and the space in which the performance takes place. Every performing arts production is innovative in some degree; at the extreme level, one could say that every performance presents some characters of novelty, with respect to the previous one. On the

other hand, some would argue that revivals (works already presented in the organization's self-past) cannot be considered innovative, but also the innovative value of new production and new works can be contested as long as they re-propose existing styles and conventions (Castaner and Campos, 2002; Castaner, 2014).

This makes artistic innovation a controversial concept, highly dependent on the chosen referent object and, eventually, on the subjective and context-based meaning attached to it.

In this chapter, I will first review the literature on artistic innovation in the performing arts, in particular on the conformity of repertoires, underling the features and the limitation of such approach. I will then present the meaning of artistic innovation as detected from the case under examination, and I propose a definition for it. I will then shift the perspective and look at innovation through a managerial, rather than artistic, lens, and I will highlight the tensions between the concept of managerial innovation and that of artistic innovation, and the paradoxes that emerge from it.

TENDENCY TO CONFORMITY IN PERFORMING ARTS REPERTOIRES

As we will see shortly, in the literature, both in sociology and in economics, artistic innovation is usually related to the degree of nonconformity of an organization's artistic repertoire with respect to those of other organizations operating in a given context. In this respect, an innovative performing art organization is the one that is willing to undertake riskier productions by staging new, unconventional, original, less-known, and less-performed pieces (DiMaggio and Stenberg, 1985).

It is with respect to this definition of innovation that many scholars have highlighted an "artistic deficit" (Heilbrun, 2011) in opera production, related to evidences of increased conformity of performing art repertoires worldwide. The first evidences of the tendency to conformity in opera production appeared with Martorella's study in 1977 on the artistic production of American opera

companies between 1966 and 1975, which revealed a standardization of the repertoire around compositions of the 19th century (Martorella, 1977). Later in time, in 2001, Heilbrun showed how diversity in repertoire of American opera companies has decreased in the 1990s, through an increasing reliance on the most popular productions, and a decreasing proportion of 20th century works in the repertoires with respect to the previous decade (Heilbrun, 2001). The same tendency to conformity has been detected in similar fields such as in symphony orchestras (Gilmore, 1993; Glynn, 2002), and theaters (DiMaggio and Stenberg, 1985; O'Hagan and Neligan, 2005). Notable, a study referring to the previous period – 1842-1969 – shows a continuous decline in conformity of the repertoires of major US symphony orchestra, and an increasing number of performances of new composers' pieces, suggesting that the tendency to conformity started in the 70s (Dowd et al., 2002). According to Sgourev (2012), the opera field, as any other industry, follows an industry cycle which, at a certain point, reaches a stage of maturity. In mature industry, innovation shifts from product to process innovation. Thus, the conformity of the repertoires which signals the conservativeness of the opera sector, is a result of the ageing of the art form (Sgourev, 2012).

In the literature, scholars have tried to find explanations for such tendency toward conformity, both empirically and theoretically. The first relevant study has been made by DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) who developed a conformity index that later has been used as dependent variable in several other empirical studies. The main determinants of repertoire compositions in the performing arts studied in the literature are: the characteristics of the demand, the degree of dependency on the market, and some organizational factors.

Concerning the characteristics of the demand, it is a widely diffuse practice to assume that art customers look for both novelty and familiarity, and have thus a conservative attitude with respect to radical innovations (DiMaggio, 1977; Lampel et al., 2000, Oakley, 2009; Peltoniemi, 2015). In such context, performing arts organizations tend to recombine existing elements and styles without breaking existing conventions, making of the reinterpretations of already tested works the products that better seem to suit the market structure, and,

thus, explaining the relevant presence of repertoire performances in the programs.

However, the level of conservativeness of the demand seems to depend on the local context, and can be mitigated or aggravated by some characteristics of the urban population, such as size, median education, income per capita, occupations. Some of these indicators have been found positively related with nonconformity in programming decisions, leading to the conclusion that people living in big city-centers, and well-educated, wealthier, and upper-class arts consumers are more prone to see less popular operatic works (DiMaggio and Stenberg, 1985; Pierce, 2000 and O'Hagan and Neligan, 2005).

In systems that relies on the market (like in the Anglo-Saxon countries), art products should meet consumers' preferences, because they are financially dependent on the results of the box office (Martorella, 1977). In support of more risky productions, governments can intervene by partially protecting cultural organizations from market pressures, reducing the dependency on the market and, thus, on customers' preferences. Subsidized arts organizations are believed to be more free to experiment without worrying too much about the profitability of their innovations. Public funding (local or national) are usually considered as a measure for public support (Pierce, 2000; O'Hagan and Neligan, 2005; Pompe et al., 2011), even if the hypothesized positive relation with nonconformity of artistic programs is not completely corroborated by econometric analysis. This maybe because such studies focus on Anglo-Saxon countries (USA and UK), in which, as we have seen, direct public intervention in the arts is marginal with respect to, for instance, continental Europe.

Some organizational-level variables are also used in empirical studies to detect the degree of flexibility and the risk propensity of performing arts organizations. They are the age and tenure of the CEO (Sgourev, 2012), the seating capacity (DiMaggio and Stenberg, 1985; O'Hagan and Neligan, 2005), the budget size (DiMaggio and Stenberg, 1985; Pierce, 2000). In particular, the background of the general manager is usually taken into consideration to measure the relative power of managerial over artistic logics (what DiMaggio and Stenberg called "organizational climate"), suggesting that arts managers with managerial

background are less prone to stage risky productions than those with artistic background.

ARTISTIC INNOVATION AS NONCONFORMITY?

Despite the interesting results that show how the opera field is becoming increasingly conservative (and I will come back to the issue of conformity later), I believe that the definition of artistic innovation as nonconformity of the artistic programs has little to do with artistic innovation in culture organizations, even if this definition has not been contested in the literature (the only exception is in Castaner and Campos, 2002; and in Castaner, 2014). The suspect is that it has been widely adopted for the ease of measurement and comparability, and for the richness of data available (especially in the USA). Moreover, the empirical approaches adopted by most studies are not enough to grasp the concept of innovation in performing arts organizations: some measures taken as explanatory variables are too weak, and results are often inconsistent.

In order to explain why I think non-conformity of repertoires have little to do with artistic innovation, and why econometrics approaches are too limited, I start with the example of La Fenice opera house.

In the last 10 years at La Fenice, there has been only a couple of new works (one in 2007 and one in 2008), but they are often recalled in the interviews with managers. However, the fact that managers recall the existence of a couple of new works, makes of them a kind of token used to prove their ability as innovators, but they are not enough to justify an image of an inherently and permanent innovative organization. On the other hand, what is probably more evident, is that there has been an increased recourse to revivals of big classics, of which *La Traviata* became the epitome. Revivals of repertoire pieces now accounts for half the season's program, while in 2005 the opera house offered only new productions. Since the repertoire is based on the most popular operatic works of the 19th century, the conformity of La Fenice's program to those of the other opera houses worldwide has increased. The immediate perception is that La Fenice has decreased its innovative propensity. La Fenice

has, thus, to answer to accuses of the conformity of its repertoire, that mounted after the turn toward a semi-repertory strategy undertaken by the management in the last years.

However, the increased conformity of the programs has to be read in the light of the increased number of titles included in each season's program, which is almost doubled in the 2014-2015 season (17 titles) with respect to the 2004-2005 season (9 titles). In 2015 La Fenice produced the same number of new productions it made in 2005, but it added 11 repertory pieces. Among the new productions, in 2005 as well as in 2015, one is ranked on the top 5 (La Traviata in 2005, Die Zauberflote in 2015) and one in the top 50 (Parsifal in 2005 and Norma in 2015) lists of the world most performed operas, while the other new productions were interpretations of operas that do not appear in the rank.

This means that the opera house has been able to add to the usual offer of new productions, a number of revivals that caused an increase in productivity but also in conformity. However, the ability of presenting new interpretations of more and less original titles, in absolute numbers, has remained unchanged.

Moreover, if La Fenice will show in the near future a revival of its Simon Boccanegra (as the artistic director told me it will), which is not ranked among the first 50 most performed opera, it will be a decision that can decrease the level of conformity with respect to the opera houses worldwide, but it will not be innovative with respect to La Fenice self-past.

This example teaches us that it is not necessarily true that what is new or original is also innovative, and vice versa.

Before judging on the innovativeness of a cultural organization, one should answer to at least three questions: what is innovated (the object), relative to what (the referent), and in which aspects (that define the adjective that precede the word innovation: in our case "artistic")?

The concept of conformity, and its usage to denote a lack of artistic innovation in performing arts organizations, shows some limitations in all these aspects.

First, it refers to the composition of the season's programs, and thus on titles, and not to the single production and its artistic aspects (in opera they are visual, dramatic and musical). Opera houses differ from museums, whose main task is

to exhibit artworks, because they not only exhibit, but also perform (and sometimes finance) artworks, and, thus their innovative activity cannot be evaluated only on what is displayed in the artistic programs.

Second, the referent is a population of similar organizations, nationally or globally, but it does not consider the specific context of the organization, its history and its artistic vocation.

Third, it focuses on aspects that are not intrinsically artistic, but more concerned with notions of popularity and of commerciality that, on such literature, are assumed to be the opposite of artistry. The artistic contents of the artwork are not considered.

A MEANING OF ARTISTIC INNOVATION: INNOVATIVE INTERPRETATION

But if artistic innovation in the performing arts cannot be limited to the non-conformity of the repertoires, what is it? From the interviews made with the management of La Fenice, I identified what is the meaning associated with artistic innovation inside the organization, that is self-explained by the following quotation of the director of the production department:

“We live in a world that lies at the borders of archeology. Almost all the repertoire is made of works of the 19th century. When in 1904 Puccini presented *Madama Butterfly*, the audience didn't know what it was going to see. They could applaud or hiss; understand or not. Today we work with operas that in 90% of the cases people know, and they are part of our cultural heritage. In this situation we are called to understand if there is something that we can innovate in the interpretation, to make the opera suitable for our times. In this sector, innovation cannot be anything else than this.”

Hence, at La Fenice, artistic innovation lies in the interpretation of existing works, and “it cannot be anything else than this”.

New productions (new interpretations of existing works) can be very popular titles of the 19th century, those ranked on the list of most performed operas worldwide; less familiar works, such as minor operas of famous composers or works of less known composers; works of the 20th century; or works of the baroque era. The choice can make the season's program more or less conservative and conform to those of other opera houses, but the innovative features that can be brought to each production, no matter how much famous and known, have to be found on the interpretation rather than on the title. Thus, presenting a revival of a quite rare work can make an organization innovative in the sense that it does not conform its season to the national or international repertoire (as in the case of a revival of the Simon Boccanegra), but it does not involve any innovative interpretation, since it has already been performed. Conversely, a new interpretation of a big classic can be highly innovative in terms of techniques involved or in the musical interpretation, but it may make the program more conform to those of similar organizations.

It is quite evident that innovation as nonconformity and innovation as interpretation are two different – and, to a certain extent, contradictory – concepts. Only two extremes can make the two concepts of innovation closer. One is the case of revivals of big classics, which are non-innovative in both senses (nor in originality, nor in the interpretation), the other is the case of new commissions, which are at the same time original and based on new operatic texts and music.

The innovative feature of novel interpretations is nevertheless contested in the literature. According to Becker (1974) artistic innovations occurs when institutionalized artistic conventions are broken. But new productions, as Lampel et al. (2000) argued, consist in the recombinations of existing elements and styles, made with the aim of meet both the audience's need of familiarity and novelty, which differentiate but do not break existing conventions. Thus, they argued, new productions can be better regarded as a form of product differentiation rather than a form of market innovation. Another aspect that make the innovative feature of new production doubtful, is that interpretation is basically concerned with aspects of virtuosity and technical abilities of the

interpreters (conductors, directors, soloists, and orchestra and chorus' members), and with lighting and stage craft technologies (Martorella, 1977; Gilmore, 1993; Glynn, 2002), but, as Martorella stated, "this innovations are not innovations in opera as a music form".

However, all these authors, seem to evaluate only radical and disruptive innovations, such as the introduction of a radical new genre, and to disregard completely other forms of gradual and incremental innovation, which, I believe, are more suitable in industries that are mature and stable, and, at the same time, depicted as inherently and permanently innovative.

I argue that an innovation is artistic only if it involves one or more of the three artistic aspects that compose an operatic work, which, according to Auvinen (2001) are dramatic, musical, and visual contents. While it is clear that new works can be innovative in all the three aspects, working on the interpretation of an existing operatic pieces, means to work on a given dramatic text (the libretto) and musical sheet, which, in this case, cannot be the objects of the innovation. Nonetheless, while dramatic and music contents are given, the interpreter (in this case the director, and the stage, light, costume designers who work under his/her supervision) has the possibility to innovate the visual content of the pieces.

The director of the production and planning department (which is also a stage director), told me:

"La Fenice has in its DNA a true interest for dramatic experimentation, and it is very oriented towards innovative and non-traditional directions, even for big classics. [...] Opera can still be an innovation factory. For instance I love working with young designers, coming from the academy of fine arts. I love stimulating their creativity and I am always impressed by the originality and freshness that they can bring to old works."

An example of dramatic and visual experimentation, to which I personally assist, was the production of *Lou Salomé*. For its production, the hall of the opera

house was rearranged so that the scene took place at the floor level, and the audience seated all around it on circular rows of seats. If the conventions say that the opera should be performed on stage, this is certainly an innovation that broke them. Another example is the profound collaborative relationship that La Fenice has with Damiano Michieletto, which is a director known in the opera field for his provocative interpretations of opera works, that often caused the aversion of the most conservative audience. In particular he is able to set classical pieces of the 19th century in modern and unusual context, and his stage direction often shows the soloists engaged in actions and situations that refers to current hot themes (e.g. sex, power, and money). Some critics stated that he really “breaks conventions” (whatever they are).

Another evidence that interpretations are considered innovative, lies in the narratives of the employees involved in such works. From their words emerge a description that seems to match the ideal creative environment: full of uncertainty, challenges, troubles and a big source of pride and of chances to achieve personal fulfilment. People in the organization are highly motivated and stimulated when something new has to be done, as in this story referring to a new commission made in 2002:

“I was call by the artistic director, he told me “I tell you just one thing: this opera has to be done. Then it is up to you”. It was about a new commission. I really like new commissions because they allow you to be in direct relation with the composer. But there had been very difficult moments, full of discussions, everything was uncertain. Eventually the opera was performed, and it also won an important national award. That was the most important achievement for me, I was really proud” (Artistic secretary)

With new productions, in general, everyone seems to be more enthusiastic, also at a lower hierarchical level:

“Great! next season there will finally be an opera in which M [the chief of the stage design department, her boss] is appointed as the main stage designer. It is going to be funny, because everything is new and will be up to us” (secretary, stage design office).

“what I like of this job is that every day is different ... there is always a new challenge, something to come up with” (chief of technical department)

Hence, interpretation of existing works are exiting for the personnel at all level. Also musicians like to perform old pieces, if they can challenge their potential and can be proud of the result. Moreover, in the music side of the organization, the innovative character of interpretations is also defended. It is a form of gradual, incremental innovation, which lies more on the form than in the content (which is given in the music sheet). As the artistic director told me: “Innovation is research. And interpretative research leads to innovation. There is always development in music”. The innovators of the music aspects of repertoire operas are the conductors. The artistic director said “If you give the same ingredients to five different chefs, you will get five different courses. The same is with orchestra conductors. They can chose the tempo, the accents,” . Similarly, a musician of the orchestra said: “it is like reading a poetry, the words are the same, but you can read it in several ways. The conductor gives you his idea of how to read the music. You must interpret what you read!”.

I understand the critiques that question the innovativeness of new productions. Indeed, the examples reported above demonstrate that it is not easy to evaluate the extent to which the artistic content of an opera is innovative, and how much it is able to break existing conventions, especially if they are not radical as in the case of the music interpretation. La Fenice’s production of *Lou Salomé*, indeed, was not the first one in the world to adopt such peculiar stage arrangement (Castaner and Campos, 2002, reported a similar feature adopted by an independent theater in Spain in the 1970s), but it was innovative for me, for Venice, and, I think, for almost all the audience. Similarly, *Michieletto* is not the

first director to have revolutionized big classics, but maybe it was the first to have worked on one particular piece or to have added a specific theme to the dramatic content.

In the absence of a market that can assess the value of an innovation (don't forget that we are in a sector in which innovations don't pay at the box-office), can we find alternative ways to assess it?

A possible indicator of innovativeness is the budget involved in each production. At La Fenice the budget is usually bigger for those works that are performed during the season's opening night, and for those that can be performed again in the future, and can thus ensure a payback at the box office. As a consequence, the most nonconforming titles, are usually provided with smaller budget and less time for rehearsal, which might make a result that is quite predictable (e.g. very in line with the description of the libretto). On the other hand, we can see an interpretation of La Tosca or of Die Zauberflote of inspirational and prominent directors, that can be very groundbreaking. However I believe that the size of the budget is a feeble indicator. As the quotation reported above suggests, operas that are usually referred as "low-cost", such as those which involve young designers (e.g. students or early graduated from the academia of fine arts) can bring more freshness and lead to very original interpretations.

One can rely on the evaluations given by the critics, but then everyone is free to make his own judgment, especially because cultural goods are, by definition, experiential goods. Besides, it should not be forgotten that critics are also part of the institutionalized artistic field that set the conventions that innovations are meant to break (Wijnberg and Gemser, 2000).

Thus the value of an artistic innovation is inevitably subjective, based on each one own experience, knowledge, and sensibility, and I am not here trying to overcome this fact.

In addition, artistic conventions are difficult to list and define, and the process that leads to their destruction can be radical but, more often and especially in the opera, is gradual (what in management literature is considered an incremental innovation) and thus difficult to detect in the short term. The director of the production department, explained me the gradual innovation brought by

stage direction – an artistic discipline that developed in dramatic plays – in the opera field with these words:

“you should consider the fact that in the opera, the recognition of the role of stage direction and of visual aspects is rather new, since Visconti in the 60s. Before that, the stage direction was more a “mise en place” rather than a “mise en scene”. The stage was like a big aquarium, where the singers stood and sang, nothing else happened”

Innovations are gradual and incremental also in the music aspects: the artistic director once told me “the way of singing of the last century, is no longer suitable today”, highlighting the fact that the ways of delivering and performing music are inexorably – even if not perceptibly in the short term – evolving.

If we want to find radical innovations in the opera, we should probably look somewhere else: opera houses are not, and are not meant to be, the forge of the avant-garde, at least in the current institutional setting. Thus, if we want to consider performing arts organizations as permanently and inherently innovative, innovation, using La Fenice’s director quoted above, cannot be anything else than interpretation.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF MANAGERIALISM IN THE ARTISTIC FIELD AND THE CONCEPT OF MANAGERIAL INNOVATION

Another branch of literature, mainly active in the sociology of the arts and of organizations, have analyzed the phenomenon of conformity through the lens of institutional theory. These studies highlight how the artistic context, as the place in which artistic norms are agreed, sacralized, and institutionalized, influences artistic programming decisions, and, thus, plays a role in the innovative propensity of arts organization (Becker, 1974; DiMaggio and Stenberg, 1985; Gilmore, 1993; Glynn, 2002). For instance, Wijnberg and Gemser (2000)

explained how the rise of impressionism in the visual arts industry was possible through a change in the selection system, which shifted from a system dominated by peers (and thus more concern with values of tradition and continuity), to a system dominated by experts (which tend to attach more value to innovativeness).

In the performing arts, the preference given to repertory performances demonstrate the adherence of the organizations to the established artistic form of the institutionalized “canon”. In this sense, repertoire differs from the avant-garde in that the latter explicitly intend to challenge existing norms (Gilmore, 1993). As a consequence, the tendency towards conformity in the repertoires of performing arts organizations, denotes an high level of institutionalization of the field.

Empirical literature has focused the institutional analysis mainly at organizational level. However, the degree to which an art organization adheres to the institutionalized norms is not easily measurable, and this probably explains the scarcity of empirical studies on this topic. The few ones, usually, tend to associate companies with smaller halls and smaller budgets – believed to be more autonomous and flexible – with low degrees of institutionalization, and, thus, with an higher probability to undertake risky productions (DiMaggio and Stenberg, 1985; O’Hagan and Neligan, 2005). The only theoretically founded attempt has been made by DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) who measured the level of bureaucratization (as the percentage of expenditures going towards administration), and the extent to which the organization adheres to the norms of the field, which they identified in the: cultivation of a large subscription audience; achievement of a substantial rate of earned income; differentiation of the administrative structure. The authors, however, found that all these measures were weak.

The fact is that, given the rules of the field, organizations tends to resemble each other (the concept of “isomorphism” well known in organization studies), and when the rules change (as for the case of selection system in the visual arts industry) organizations begin a process of transformation, which can be slower or faster, in order to seek new legitimacy. Hence, I believe, it is worthy to

look at the phenomenon of conformity of repertoires at the field level, instead that focusing on organizational variables.

Opera houses are institutions that lie at the center of the artistic field. As institutionalized organizations, they operates according to rules that are legitimated by the field (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

In the culture industry, there are two sets of institutional rules: one regarding the artistic creation, the other concerning how the art organization is structured and managed. This is clearly evident in the way La Fenice works. I could easily detect two different ways of working: one in the offices, the other in the rehearsal rooms. La Fenice opera house is a rigid, formal organization, which operates through administrative routines. The artistic process takes place within precise borders (in terms of time, space, and human and financial resources) that the bureaucratic organization put in place. Inside these borders, however, artists operate in autonomy and “create” the opera that has been decided by the management through a top-down decision making process. Hierarchy, control, standardization of routines, division of labour, formal and rigid rules, seem to be the keywords of the overarching organizational structure; while autonomy, flexibility, freedom of expression, and collaboration, characterize the organization of the creative process.

As we have already seen, external pressures, coming mainly from the public sector, are pushing opera houses to become more efficient, more private oriented, to increase the amount of earned revenues and to attract more private investors. Italian opera houses have traditionally organized their production according to the stagione system – characterized by a sequential staging of new or guest productions – which was a legitimated system in the national opera field. But this system is being delegitimized by the same institutions that operates in the field. The analysis of the current economic and financial situation of the Italian opera system (commented on chapter 3), for example, made the National Court of Auditors to state that “an increased recourse to the repertoire would certainly contribute to reach better economic performances” (Corte dei Conti, 2015), clearly pushing toward a change in the production system. In the same report, the National Court of Auditors, focusing on the

analysis of the indicators of efficiency, productivity and earned income, made a specific mention to the significant results obtained by La Fenice thanks to its efforts to increase the production level through a semi-repertory strategy. In addition, the funding criteria adopted by the national fund for the performing arts do not mention the words “innovation”, “innovative”, and “creative” in the quality indicators, while, on the other hand, they include indicators aiming at measuring managerial improvements, and in particular on the ability to attract financial resources from the market and private sector.

Conventions of the field are thus changing, but not directly in the artistic aspects. Conventions are changing on a managerial dimensions. In this changing institutional context, performing arts organization are thus required to be innovative managerially, rather than artistically, in order to gain the legitimacy and thus to guarantee their survival.

Along with artistic innovation, Bakhshi and Throsby (2009) identified other three categories of innovation in the cultural sector: innovations in audience reach, innovations in value creation, and innovations in business management and governance.

It is mainly in these three last respect that La Fenice has demonstrated to be radically innovative (at least in the Italian context). The new programming strategy, the new production system, and the different organization of the labour force – already discussed – are all innovations in business management. They are able to break existing conventions, and can likely contribute to the affirmation of new legitimized rules. Innovative are also the initiatives aimed at creating partnership with private entrepreneurs (e.g. the “la bell’impresa” initiative), which are meant to create value in stakeholders and partners; and the communication strategies adopted by the marketing department with the goal of increasing and differentiating the audience (the use of social networks, the broadcast of performances on the internet, radio and television, and the development of a webradio). Moreover, these are also the innovations that create tensions, since they are often believed to be detrimental for the artistic quality. The creation of tensions might indicate that an equilibrium is being disrupted, that is actually what radical innovations usually do.

I argue that managerial innovations are in part responsible not only for the conformity and standardization of the repertoires, but also for the identification, within performing arts organizations, of artistic innovation with interpretative innovation for the following reasons.

First, managers often share the desire to control production costs and activities, and thus prefer more familiar repertory – with more predictable costs and standard routines – that are less commercially risky, i.e. that will not push away the core audience (DiMaggio, 1977; Gilmore, 1993; Sgourev, 2013). Under this perspective, the adoption of conservatory repertoires becomes a managerial strategy.

Second, from a managerial point of view, cultural products are not subjected to obsolescence. Thus, the accumulation of new operas does not substitute the classic repertoire, posing a constrain in the pursuit of product innovation (Oakley, 2009; Sgourev, 2013), which explains why innovations are predominantly limited to interpretation of past works.

Finally, another interesting explanation of the dominance of repertory performances over new and original works, and of the relevance of interpretative innovation is provided by Gilmore (1993), who asserted that the interests of performers can be in line with those of managers. According to his analysis, artistic interests are different for composers (who have interest in composing new works) with respect to performers (who are more concern with the technical abilities and the virtuosity of the interpretation). With new works, the new work itself is the object of the critics, and thus the composer is at the center of attention; with past works the interpretation is the main focus, and thus performers have a major role. The fact that in this respect performers' interests are in line with managerial interests, make the repertoire dominant (Gilmore, 1993). To support this idea, it should be reminded that opera houses in Italy do not directly hire “creators”, such as composers, and librettisti (they seldom hire a principal director), while they hire “interpreters”, namely musicians and chorus members, and usually (but not always) a principal conductor (in opera houses which adopt a repertory production system, soloist singers are also part of the permanent workforce, still they are interpreters and not creators). Hence, the

interests of the “creators” are not represented in the organization, and they have a feeble voice even in the broader artistic field level.

In conclusion, I believe that the trend toward conformity can be better understood by looking not at the artistic level, but at the managerial one. The conformity argument comes always with a more or less explicit accuse of lack of innovation, but I believe this accuses are biased because they are almost never accompanied by questions on what artistic innovation is, and whether it can exist within an high level of conformity in repertoires. I henceforth argue that conformity is not the lack of artistic innovation: it is the essence of managerial innovation.

Re-reading La Fenice’s story with a focus on innovation, we can synthetize it as follows: when La Fenice was operating under the stagione production system, the season programs were characterized almost exclusively by new productions. Given the innovative feature attached to interpretations of past works, such programs were considered artistically innovative. On the other hand, with the (managerial) innovation adopted by the organization (i.e. a mixed stagione-repitory production system), La Fenice introduced to its programs the revivals of big classics and increased the conformity of its repertoire to those of the other opera houses. We face a paradox in which the traditional managerial approach was artistically innovative, while, under a managerial perspective, replication is innovative. We can call this paradox – replication is innovation – with the oxymoron “conservative innovation”.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The literature on the conformity of repertoire has served as the basis for accuses of lack of artistic innovation in the performing arts. The strength of the conformity index is the ease of computation, and it, indeed, has shown some interesting results concerning the standardization of repertoires of opera houses and symphonic orchestras around few composers of the 19th century. However, the ease of computation, together with the richness of data, has contributed to an increased recourse to statistic and econometric analysis each one interested

in few particular determinants, to the detriment of a deeper understanding of the concept of innovation in the culture industry. In particular, these studies are almost never accompanied by questions on what “artistic” innovation means in the performing arts.

Starting from the idea that innovation is artistic if it involves the artistic aspects of the product (in opera production they are: musical, dramatic, and visual), and drawing from my observations and interviews conducted at La Fenice, I have argued that an incremental innovation in visual and musical aspects is possible in the interpretations of existing operatic works, even in a context characterized by an high conformity level among the repertoires. I have also argued that interpretative innovation is the only kind of innovation that, nowadays, makes possible to consider the opera field as a permanent and inherent innovative culture industry, since it represents the everyday core activity of the organization. Thus, the concept of artistic innovation in the performing arts should be seen as an evolving concept, that has gradually taken the meaning of innovative interpretation. In this respect, I think it would be more appropriate to state that nowadays artistic innovation is “different” – and not minor or lesser – than in the 19th century.

Finally, I pointed out that innovations in cultural organizations can also take the form of managerial and commercial innovations, especially in contexts in which the institutional setting is pushing towards managerialism, as in the Italian system of opera production. I thus argue that the evidence of increased conformity in the programming of performing arts, could be better understood as the adoption of managerial innovations, rather than as a lack of artistic innovation (which continues to take place in the creative interpretative process). With managerial innovations favoring conformity of repertoires, and artistic innovations focusing on interpretation, we are now facing the paradox of what we can call a “conservative innovation”.

As a provocative and conclusive remark, I might say that all written above would be completely different if we freed ourselves of the assumption that the performing arts are a permanent and inherent innovative industry, which, sometimes, appears more as a condemn rather than a positive feature. In

alternative, we could look at opera houses as a sort of history museum, whose objective is to show what history and historical works can still tell us today. In this sense, modern interpretations of past works can be considered as an outstanding creative and innovative way to serve this goal. This suggestion, which would imply the acknowledgment of opera as a “closed chapter”, is clearly provocative, but I hope it can stimulate critical reflections on the meaning of innovation in the cultural sector and, in particular, in its evolving and context-based character.

CONCLUSIONS

“Sì, devo dire che ha proprio ragione il signore,
“Yes, I must say the gentleman is totally right,
c'è una crisi tremenda che investe l'intero settore;
There is a serious crisis investing the whole sector;
è che il pubblico vuole si parli più semplicemente,
the audience wants to be talked more easily,
così chiari e precisi e banali da non dire niente.
So much clear, precise, and banal, so that nothing is said.
Per capire la storia non serve un discorso più grande:
To understand the story, you don't need a bigger discourse:
signorina cultura si spogli e dia qui le mutande”
Miss Culture, undress and leave here your underwear”
(Francesco Guccini, *Dovevo fare del cinema*)

La Fenice's story that I narrated does not cast doubts on the positive results obtained by the new managerial style, but, precisely because it represents a successful case, it serves as a paradigmatic example that enable us to better understand the functioning and the ideological stand of the contemporary artistic field.

The question here is not whether La Fenice story is or is not a successful case of arts management. The question is: why it is considered as such, here and now?

The concept of success is formulated in accordance to the shared beliefs and norms that dominate the social order in a given time and space. These beliefs and norms define what is considered successful and what it is not. However, being a successful case does not imply the immunity to critiques. Critiques to the dominant social order, by addressing its beliefs and norms, criticize the dominant meaning of success too. Only by looking at the whole picture, i.e. both dominant and critical voices, we can understand better the arts field and collocate in it the existing discourses of art, management, and art management. The last two chapters already touched two important topics that I will try here to collocate in a broader framework, these are the contrasts between alienation and self-actualization, and between standardization and innovation, which are

part of the more general issue on the tensions between art and management that encompasses the whole thesis.

ARTS MANAGEMENT, PART II: FROM ARTS MANAGEMENT TO THE ART OF MANAGEMENT...

MANAGEMENT DISCOURSES AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

We have seen in the introduction how a branch of arts management studies has increasingly focused on the tensions between artistic and managerial logics in arts organizations and acknowledges such dualism as their distinctive feature, urging managerial culture to take a more modest and less authoritarian approach in entering such delicate sector. However, in the description of the long Italian reform process of the opera production system, we have seen normative provisions and direct recommendations – coming from policy makers, funding bodies, and auditors – pushing toward the incorporation of managerial principles, and following methods and contents typical of the New Public Management doctrine (with its claims of universality, rationality and neutrality).

This contradiction made me questioning about the role played by management discourse in modern societies, in particular in the light of the increasing demand for emotional and aesthetic contents. Has management discourse actually developed since the era of rational management theories, according to the emergence of new production models and consumption styles? And has the arts industry been immune to such developments?

A deep discussion on the role of managerial thinking in capitalistic societies is provided by Boltanski and Chiapello in “The new spirit of capitalism” (2005; first version in French “Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme”, 1999). Boltansky and Chiapello look at management discourse as the main instrument through which the dominant capitalist ideology has been legitimized and incorporated in modern societies. Management, in their view, serves to provide both justification

and prescription for capitalism. The capitalist order, however, changes with time as a response to the critiques it faces.

Boltansky and Chiapello distinguish two kinds of critiques to capitalism: the social critique and the artistic critique. The social critique accuses capitalist systems to be a source of poverty and inequality (it is on this ground that theories of exploitation have developed), and to have contributed to the erosion of social bonds and collective solidarity by fostering opportunism and the egoism of private's interests. The artistic critique accuses capitalism, and in particular the standardization and commodification processes that it incorporates, to be a source of disenchantment and inauthenticity in the kind of existence associated with it, which denotes a general loss of meanings, and to be a source of oppression inasmuch as it is opposed to the freedom, autonomy and creativity of human beings which are subjugated by the dominance of the market and by the subordination typical of wage-labour (Boltansky and Chiapello, 2005: 37-38). The two critiques can be conflicting, for instance in their attitude towards individualism, which is criticized by the social critique for the decrease of solidarity it causes, and espoused by the artistic critique that underscore the need for a liberation of individuals from capitalist oppression.

Consequently, as the critiques contribute to shape a new capitalist order, management discourses must change accordingly in order to continue providing the justifications to the "new" capitalistic order.

In their analysis on the evolution of management discourse from the 1960s to the 1990s, Boltansky and Chiapello focused in the changes of topics mainly addressed by management studies. So, while in the 1960s management discourses developed around the need to motivate managers (cadres), through measures such as target management and management by objective, characterized by strong rational thinking and oriented towards the maximization of efficiency, in the 1990s the focus shifted towards the motivation of employees, and managerial innovations were introduced with the aim of fighting the old bureaucratic organizations which were based on hierarchy and control. In the 1990s keywords and meanings changed with respect to the previous period. New themes developed around the need of more flexibility and

continuous innovation, introducing concepts such as network, trust, vision, leadership, teamwork, creativity, and commitment.

THE CREATIVE INDUSTRY: THE NEW SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

When Boltansky and Chiapello were writing “The new spirit of capitalism”, in the late 1990s (the first publication in French is dated 1999), the new spirit of capitalism was indeed taking a written form in several policy documents under the label of “creative industry”.

The concept of creative industry origins in UK policies in the mid-to-late 1990s, in which it was defined as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Creative Industry Task Force, 1998). The industries included were advertising, architecture, arts and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing software, television and radio. Other countries, notably Australia, New Zealand and Scandinavian countries, and international agencies such as the United Nations (UNCTAD, the UN’s trade and development body), following the UK’s example, took up the same notion of creative industry.

Few years after, the urbanologist Richard Florida, published his bestseller “The Rise of the Creative Class”, in which Florida argues that creative people are the key resource to power regional and economic growth, and thus advises policy makers to take adequate measures (specified in the three Ts of Technology, Talent and Tolerance) to attract them in their cities. Florida defined people of the creative class as those “who add economic value through their creativity” (Florida, 2002: 68). It is a broad definition that includes a wide range of high-skilled and knowledge-based workers, from artists to scientists, including also the workers of knowledge-intensive industries, legal and health care professionals and business management.

Basically, the creative industry is the new word used to address what was until then defined the “knowledge economy”, while creativity is gradually replacing the notion of innovation.

Even if Boltansky and Chiapello didn't mention the creative industry in their attempt to define the new spirit of capitalism, since it was a concept under development at the time of their writing, some authors, such as Gill and Pratt (2008), and Ekman (2014), have more recently addressed the creative industries as the new moment of capitalism. Indeed, in the “projective city” described by Boltansky and Chiapello as the new dominant “normative fulcrum” that justify the new spirit of capitalism, we can find the same vocabulary applied to the concept of the “creative city”, such as: networks, flexibility, autonomy and, of course, creativity.

With the mounting interest in the creative industry, the new capitalist order finds legitimation in new management discourses, who outlines technical and normative models for the functioning of the world of creative enterprises.

Having a look at management studies on the “creative” industries, we could see how management discourse has indeed take the form described by Boltansky and Chiapello: the figure of the hierarchical boss is substituted by that of the catalyst, visionary, and creative leader; the old control mechanisms are abandoned to leave space to forms of self-control based on strong employees' motivation and commitment achieved through the development of shared organizations' visions; the work is organized in teams and based on projects, in which everyone should be able to develop themselves, increase their employability, and find a personal fulfilment (Boltansky and Chiapello, 2005).

THE ARTIFICIATION OF MANAGEMENT

Managing creative personnel and creative processes becomes, thus, essential capabilities for creative businesses to innovate and succeed in a competitive context (De Filippi et al., 2007). As managing creativity becomes the mantra of the new capitalistic system, arts management – already familiar with the complexity of arts organizations, in particular in terms of conflicts between the needs of management and artistic exigencies – becomes a relevant source of

knowledge. In general, Evard and Colbert (2000) defines four areas in which arts management can contribute to general management studies: strategic management (especially on project and innovation management); human resource management (regarding topics such as dual management; leadership for creative works; dealing with intermittent workers); finance and accounting (on the evaluation of immaterial assets); marketing and consumer behavior (for the commerce of non-utilitarian commodities and experiential goods). Some management studies have started looking at arts organizations in order to better understand how they manage the creative people and processes that lie at the core of their activities. For instance, management studies on creative businesses often describe how managers foster innovation by setting peculiar working spaces (Martens, 2011), by hiring artists as leaders or project managers (Child, 2012; Adler, 2006), by setting up heterogeneous teams (Perretti and Negro, 2007), by engaging with external communities of expertise (Cohendet and Simon, 2007), or by developing a precise corporate culture (Kunda, 2009). Some studies have very evoking titles containing art-business metaphors, such as the books “Jamming: art and discipline in business creativity” by John Kao (1996) on the similarities between jazz and management, and “artful making: what managers need to know about how artists work” by Austin and Devin (2003) on the parallelism between knowledge management and theatrical plays direction; or the paper “managing musically: how acoustic space informs management practice”, by Bathurs and Williams (2013).

Management, in the creative industry, is, thus, creative itself. Some authors have called this tendency the “artification” of businesses (Naukkarinen, 2012; Naukkarinen and Saito, 2012).

... AND FROM THE ARTS OF MANAGEMENT, TO THE MANAGERIALIZATION OF THE ARTS

THE ARTS SECTOR IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRY

As clearly stated by the British Council's Creative Economic Unit, the development of the creative industry concept was an attempt to change the terms of the debate about the value of arts and culture:

"While the arts were supported to some degree or other by most governments, they tended to be seen as marginal to economic life and dependent on public subsidy. Advocates of the creative industries idea believed that this was too narrow a view – the totality of economic activity stemming from creativity and culture, including their commercial forms, needed to be considered to understand their true contribution. This activity included not just the traditional art forms, such as theatre, music and film, but service businesses such as advertising (which sell their creative skills mostly to other businesses), manufacturing processes that feed into cultural production, and the retail of creative goods. It was argued that the industries with their roots in culture and creativity were an important and growing source of jobs and wealth creation" (British Council, 2010: 15)

What is important here to point out is that, as clearly state by the British Council, the emergence of the concept of creative industry marked a turned point for the arts sector.

First, the arts sector is now evaluated as an industry, hence in economic measures (Major and Connell, 2006). On one hand, this has contributed to give the arts sector and the artists a more legitimate and serious role in society (Garnham, 2005; Banks and Hesmondhalg, 2009), but it forced to re-imagine the art sector in terms of its expected contributions to economic growth and occupation.

Second, creative industry policies are based on the idea that creative industry, with its cultural roots, covers both economic growth and social good. This means not only that the art sector will be evaluated also on social indicators, but also that commerce and arts are not perceived as conflicting values (Banks and O'Connor, 2009).

Third, the industry-wide focus on creativity, replace the prior emphasis on artistic excellence, and on the art for art's sake, that were peculiar of arts policies (Dewey, 2004; Garnham, 2005).

Fourth, with creativity as the unifying trait, boundaries between diverse cultural sectors are becoming more blurred, by putting together commercial and applied arts with fine arts and heritage (Dewey, 2004; Towse, 2010). Organizations operating under different rationalities (art, market, public sector) and with different structures (nonprofit and profit oriented), are unified under the same label, and the distinctiveness of arts organization is lost in the big mixed group (Lampel et al., 2007).

These shifts in the arts and policy systems have a strong impact on arts management: with the focus on the industrial aspects and the clear economic expectations put on arts organizations, management principles become unquestionably part of the process of artistic creation (Major and Connell, 2006), and the blurred boundaries between art and commerce, legitimize arts organizations to engage on commercial strategies. Hence cultural administration is enriched with new skills, such as those related with sponsorships and marketing (McNicholas, 2004).

THE MANAGERIALIZATION OF THE ARTS

While creative profit-oriented businesses were looking with curiosity to arts organizations to see how they manage creativity, nonprofit and public arts organizations started looking at private businesses to find managerial tools that could help them in reaching financial and economic goals. Thus, parallel to the artification process ongoing in the creative industry, we can detect a managerialization process affecting arts organizations. The case study analyzed in this thesis is, indeed, a case of managerialization of opera.

In the previous chapters, we have seen how the managerialization of La Fenice has undoubtedly been good for the financial and economic health of the opera house, which could guarantee the survival of the organization, the continuous offer of a cultural production, and the maintenance of its workforce.

However, the management discourse that is entering arts organizations seems more in line with that described by Boltansky and Chiapello as typical of the 1960s, and thus related to a spirit of capitalism based on the idea of an

accumulation regime which, thanks to its rationality, serves both the goals of economic growth and social progress.

Indeed, we can make a parallelism between La Fenice strategy and the mass production typical of the Fordist mode of regulation, inasmuch as it puts emphasis on efficiency and economies of scale, it adopts of a “rational”, rather than “passionate”, management, and it is organized around a hierarchical bureaucracy that is perceived to be able to respond to the need of security through the provision of meritocratic and long term careers.

The managerialization of the arts, reinforces the view of art as a “managerially underdeveloped area that would benefit from the import of management knowledge and techniques” (Evard and Colbert, 2000). Management, in this context, looks like the “prince charming” that could save the “sleeping beauty” from the threat of financial ruin.

TWO SPIRITS OF CAPITALISM?

We have seen how managerialism and public reforms have pushed towards the adoption of a strategy that is commercial in its basic principle, and how this strategy consisted in favoring the presentation of a classic repertoire through an increased number of revivals of few operas. I have discussed the implications of the new strategy on the concept of artistic innovation adopted by opera house and on its innovative character. I have also highlighted how, in implementing a conservative strategy, the organization has to deal with the frustration of its most creative resource, i.e. the employees. It is not clear whether this process will eventually weaken the creative potential of such organizations, the same creative potential that have made arts organizations interesting from the managerial point of view to the business sector.

What do we have, in practice? On one hand we have creative businesses, such as Google, who make the news for their peculiar recruitment systems¹, their quirky work spaces², and their human resource practices³, on the other we have

¹ <http://thehustle.co/the-secret-google-interview-that-landed-me-a-job>

² <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/apr/04/how-to-get-ahead-at-work-10-tips-from-googles-head-of-hr>

arts organizations that make the news because they are accused to take the form of a “Disneyland of Opera”⁴.

The idea that seems to arise from this situation, is that it is irrational, in the managerial wave that is investing the cultural sector, to see arts organizations behaving as “creative businesses”. But, isn’t it a countersense to advocate for more arts managers with managerial background, while successful private businesses are hiring artists as managers and project leaders? Why performing arts organizations who invest in risky productions, who engage in long and unpredictable rehearsals processes and who collaborate with alive and unknown composers, are not considered in management studies in the same way as creative businesses are when they engage, for instance, in the construction new prototypes?

Now that private profit seeking businesses have learnt from the arts that the “art of management” is irrational, that it is based on improvisation and scarce planning, that it relies on uncontrollable, unpredictable, unstandardized processes, and that it should deal with autonomous and free individuals, now that they have recognized the tensions between creativity and control, what can they teach arts organization? Why are arts organizations taking the “rational” management model of the 1960s? Is it acceptable?

THE REVIVAL OF THE ARTISTIC CRITIQUE

As Boltansky and Chiapello stated, management discourse of the 1990s incorporated some of the critiques addressed to the Fordist capitalism system. In particular, by valuing autonomy, creativity, diversity, and personal fulfillment, the new spirit of capitalism, (that I associate with the emergence of the creative industry) responded to the artistic critiques of alienation, disenchantment, and commodification by incorporating demand of authenticity and freedom. However, according to the same authors, it set aside the social critique, in particular on the issues of egoism, inequalities, and security. At this point of

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/apr/04/how-to-get-ahead-at-work-10-tips-from-googles-head-of-hr>

⁴ <http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2015/03/opera-venice>

their analysis, Boltansky and Chiapello ended the book by envisaging a revival of the social critique, in particular on the topic of exclusion, where the excluded are the “disaffiliated”, i.e. the immobile, rigid, and unadaptable people that do not succeed in creating networks. The egoism that is fostered in a uncertain and flexible world, and the permanent anxiety of being excluded, will thus stimulate the emergence of a new social critique.

As a matter of facts, critiques to the creative industry have already taken the form of a revived social critique that Boltansky and Chiapello foresaw, in particular in terms of exploitation and individualization of the creative workforce, which is becoming more and more precarious and without representation and protection (Banks and Hesmondhalg, 2009; McGuigan, 2010; Gill and Pratt, 2008).

However, while the artification process have incorporated some of the artistic critiques and set aside the social critique, the managerialization process of the art sector did exactly the opposite.

Reflecting on La Fenice’s case, I think no one would associate the artists hired by the opera house with a kind of exploitation of the labour force. On the contrary, they can aim at a long term career, and can rely on the protection of the unions at local and national level. In addition, the organization of artists in “artistic masses” implies the incorporation of the social critique to individualism, and it provides an answer to the accuses of egoism and opportunism that have invested the capitalist system in the 60s. Moreover, the offer of classic repertoire pieces to a large audience, is consistent with the demand of equality and democracy that are also part of the social critique.

On the other hand, the rationality of managerial innovations, and the coldness of financial calculus, are criticized today (as described in chapter 6) as they were in the late 60s and in the 70s by the proponents of the artistic critique. The frustration of the creative class discussed in chapter 7, represents a new source of indignation that mirrors that of alienation typical of the artistic critique of the late 60s. Similarly, the accuses of conformity and lack of innovation reported in chapter 8, are related to the critiques to the commodification, the disenchantment, and the loss of authenticity in capitalist societies.

Ironically, the artistic critique of the 1968 movements, that was supported mainly by intellectuals and artists, have gained room in the most profitable sectors of the creative industry, but was not able to enter in the “pure” art sector from which it arose.

This also explains the persistent relevance of philosophical classics such as the critiques to the culture industry proposed by the Frankfurt school, and the engagement of artists in the debates on arts and management. The members of the Frankfurt school Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, in their seminal work “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (1972) criticize the process of commodification of art, its transposition to the consumption and amusement sphere, and the standardization and reproduction of sameness that is investing the cultural sector, all trends that are apparently justified by technical rationality, which they define as “the rationality of domination”. Concerning the engagement of artists in the debate, a peculiar example is provided by dialogue between the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and the visual artist Hans Haacke, published in a book titled “Free Exchange” (1995). Bourdieu and Haacke touches several themes, among which the naturalization of corporate sponsorship, that is judged as harmful since it diminishes the autonomy of art producers and pushes them to be submissive to commercial demand. Haacke in particular, sees arts managers primarily as technocrats. He demonstrates to be aware of the fact that “no organization, certainly not a complex society like ours, can survive without managers”, but he added “I am also aware that the goal of management is to assure a smooth operation, rather than reflection and critique. These are contradictory responsibilities” (pg. 68-69). When I read these writings (in response to Chong’s suggestions made in 1997 and 2000) I was surprised to see how they still match some of the grumblings I heard during my fieldwork.

What the analysis of La Fenice’s case seems to suggest us, thus, is that in the managerialized arts sector, a revival of the artistic critique is possible. However, I cannot foresee the direction that the art sector will take, and I cannot know whether and to what extent it will incorporate some of the artistic critique at the expense of some of the conquests made by the social critique. Nonetheless I

think that we have to resist to the temptation of merging the arts sector with the concept of creative industry, as policy makers do. We should also expand our horizon and look at what sociology and philosophy can add in order to reach a deeper understanding of the same field that we, as arts management scholars, want to serve. Only by doing so we can recognize the peculiarity of the processes that the art sector is undertaking, and what the critiques are actually trying to highlight.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY APPROACH.

The predominant sociological paradigm that have informed management studies is that of positivism. Positivism is based on a vision of the social world that exists as given, “out there” (realistic ontology). The knowledge produced under this approach is assumed to be able to mirror the objective world, and to identify regularities and causal relationships between structural elements (positivistic epistemology). Human activities and behaviors can be thus determined by examining the structural properties of the context (determinism). Accordingly, positivistic approach has been put much emphasis on empiricism and on nomothetic methodologies (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, Morgan, 1980). Such approach have brought to construct models of management that are abstract and general, capable of be applied to any process. As Townley (2002) stated, the abstract management is “disembedded, meaning that it is abstracted from a context and presented as an homogeneous and universal management model for any organization; it is ubiquitous in that it can be applied in any time and place and activity setting; and it is a portable technical skill, divorced from specialized experience and knowledge about particular subjects” (Townley, 2002: 550).

Differently, this study is taking an interpretive approach. According to Gephart “interpretive research uncovers, describes, and theoretically interprets actual meanings that people use in real settings. It examines how particular meanings become shared, dominant, and/or contested in situations in which alternative meanings and understandings are present and possible” (Gephart, 2004: 457). Interpretivism sees the social world as the construction of individuals’ mind, made of names, concepts and labels that are used to describe and make sense

of the external world (nominalist ontology). Accordingly, it becomes impossible to reach an objective knowledge that is disembedded from the frame of reference of the individuals (anti-positivism epistemology), and the assumptions about human nature are voluntaristic, rather than deterministic (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Morgan, 1980). Adopting an interpretive approach in management studies make the researcher seeing organizations as “continuously constructed, sustained, and changed by actors’ definitions of the situation” (Astly and Van de Ven, 1983: 249). The kind of knowledge interpretivism produces can be linked with Pettigrew’s definition of contextualism (Pettigrew, 1985). Contextualists are focused on the interpretation of an unique event (alive in its present) under a specific contexts. The aim is not to offer generalized statements about empirical regularities (such kind of knowledge doesn’t allow generalization, and contextualists are not interesting in offering it), but to make some definite claims about the present event. Consequently, the methodologies used focus on recover and understand situated meanings and divergences.

GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY

In the positivist tradition, some theories on the performing arts can be found in cultural economics and arts management (e.g. the Baumol’s cost-disease theory, pricing theories and repertory decisions theories). Theories based on New Public Management (NPM) were also applied to the cultural sector (and the performing arts in particular).

But all these theories come from a positivist tradition, and are too abstract to give a detailed account of the topic under investigation. Interpretive theories differs from positivist theories which objects are explanation and prediction. Interpretive theories “allow for indeterminacy rather than seek causality and give priority to showing patterns and connections rather than to linear reasoning” (Charmaz, 2006: 126). Since my goal is to give an interpretation of the studied phenomenon, emphasizing understanding rather than explanation, I needed a methodology that could incorporate the complexity of the organizational context

rather than ignore or simplify it. Charmaz stated that grounded theory offers a guide to interpretive theorizing (where for theorizing he meant the practice of “engaging the world and of constructing abstract understandings about and within in; Charmaz, 2006: 128).

Grounded theory was introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) who defined it as “the discovery of theory from data”. They suggested that the discovery of theory from data was more useful than testing or verifying existing theories. Grounded theory is thus presented as a methodology for analyzing qualitative data to construct theories “grounded” in the data themselves. Guided by grounded theory principles, I have conducted a field study in the Venice opera house, I collected data and I analyzed them as I will explain in the following paragraphs.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

When I moved to Venice in 2010 I was living with a flatmate who worked at the opera house. He is a musicologist with a strong passion for Wagner’s works. At that time he was working at the education department, preparing educational materials and organizing activities for the schools. Sometimes he asked me to listen beforehand to the lectures he was preparing for the pupils. That is why now I know something about Wagner and his Tristan and Isolde. He always said to have a pedagogical streak, and I thought that job was perfectly matching him (plus, it was convenient for my curiosity!). It was thanks to him that I started going to the opera. He gave me tickets for the dress rehearsals and the educational materials, so that I could go prepared.

That was two years before I started the Ph.D. program in management.

During the first year of my Ph.D. studies I took many courses in economics and management, among which some quantitative methodological courses. When I decided not to apply any of the methodological tools I was provided, it wasn’t because I hate mathematics and statistic. On the opposite, I have always loved them (and I also think to be rather good at them). But I couldn’t stand their application to social science. I decided I had enough of it when I saw people

measuring corporate ethics and running regressions with it. I truly think Fermat would not have approved!

When discussing with my supervisor about the topic of my dissertation, the only thing I knew was that I wanted to do things differently, that I wanted to see things by myself, go in depth, and get involved firsthand. My supervisor's research interest are in the field of cultural management and on the relationship between arts and management. One day we went together to see the Bizet's Carmen, and we then decided to match my recent born interest for the opera with a research on cultural management.

Before entering the field, I reviewed some literature on cultural and creative industry, focusing in particular on labour conditions adopted in such sectors. However, the story that caught my attention in the field was not about labour conditions. It was a story about the implementation of a managerial logic that lead the opera house to distinguish itself from the national context, by boasting both a sound financial situation and a great artistic production.

IN THE FIELD

The negotiations for the access in the organization were quite easy. My supervisor asked directly to the vice-president of the organization's board, who happened to be a professor of strategic management with whom he worked some years before. He agreed (quite enthusiastically), he himself decided to talk with the chief executive, he suggested the department that was better suitable to conduct my research, and told its manager that I was up to join its staff.

As a Ph.D. student I had the possibility to arrange an internship with the stage office of the University, guaranteeing a formal access to the organization for six months. I was assigned to the production department.

The nature of my activities in the field were thus of two different types.

First, as an intern I have been instructed about the functioning of the department and I gave some support in the technical planning office and in the scenic design office. On one hand, working in the office has often limited my

observation point to the office itself, and it has kept me busy for long time. On the other hand I grasped the chance to experience how people actually work, and to be an active part of the system. In this way, along with informal chat about work and organization, I had very practical work-related exchanges.

Second, as an external observer I went to assist to the rehearsals and the production process, in which I did not interfere.

The internship lasted for six months, from the 1st of April to the 1st of October 2014. After that period of time, in which my presence in the organization was on a daily base, I came back to the opera house from time to time until June 2015, to conduct interviews or to attend rehearsals.

DATA COLLECTION

During the fieldwork I collected field notes from both participant observations (me as an intern) and direct observations (me as an observer). They include reported dialogues and conversations, descriptions of facts and events, personal considerations and feelings, and technical notes related to the work activities in which I was involved. Despite the fact that I spent most of my time in the production department, I had lots of opportunities to investigate other areas. I follow an entire production, from the first rehearsal to the last performance, and several rehearsals of other productions, where I had the possibility to take notes as observer, but also to talk with soloists, maestros, props technicians, and stage managers. I spent several nights on the backstage to take pictures of the costumes for the archives, where I had the possibility to meet both artists and tailors. I went to assist to the recording of the web-radio program, and I had long and clarifying conversations with employees from the marketing and artistic departments' offices, that, even if they were not recorded, contributed considerably to my understanding of the organization, its functioning, and of its people.

Towards the end of my internship, I started conducting intensive interviews with key people, which I recorded and transcribed. I made a total of 13 interviews from August 2014 to June 2015 (almost 9 months after the end of the

internship). I interviewed the chief executive, all the five directors of the departments (I interviewed twice the finance director), two middle-managers (one in the artistic department, the other in the human resource department) the union representative of the artistic mass, the chief of the stage technicians, two soloists singers. In addition I conducted two interviews that were not recorded (they were not scheduled in advance, and I didn't have the recorder with me), and that I reported immediately after the conversation ended. These were with the responsible of ballets productions, and with a member of the chorus. The scope of the interviews, thus, was to deepen the understanding of the topics that arose during the fieldwork, and, particularly for the directors, to have a more formal and official position with respect to La Fenice's strategy and performance.

During and after the fieldwork, I collected press documents and media contents divulged by the organization, that I consider as part of the official narrative of the organization.

In addition to qualitative data, I collected the financial statements and the season's programs of La Fenice from 2005 to 2013 (the financial statements) and to 2015 (the season's program). Financial statements were collected from the National Court of Auditor reports (which also contain data for the other opera houses), while the season's programs were downloaded from La Fenice website. In December 2004 the new opera house was inaugurated after almost 9 years of construction works that followed the serious fire that destroyed the theater in January 1996. For this reason I decided not to look at financial and productivity data for the period prior 2005. Concerning the production data, I considered only opera productions (thus excluding ballets, concerts, and other events) performed both in the main theater hall, and in the secondary theater (Teatro Malibran, which counts around 900 seats), while I didn't consider the dress rehearsals opened to the audience (which are usually counted for funding purposes). Unfortunately, it was not possible to separate costs and revenues according to the typology of artistic production, thus, when reported, they refer to the overall production (opera, concerts, ballets, and other events).

For the analysis of the Italian context, in addition to the data available in the National Court of Auditor's reports and to the texts of relevant decrees and laws, I collected newspaper articles on the reform of the opera system (first 100 results sorted by relevance by Google the 17th of March 2015, with the search terms: *decreto valore cultura fondazioni liriche*) and on the crisis of the opera sector (first 50 results sorted by relevance by Google the 17th of March 2015, with search terms: *fondazioni liriche crisi*), plus some additional articles specifically addressed to opera houses' cases (La Fenice, Rome opera house, the MET) in Italian, French, and English.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

I began the process of analysis while in the field, even if in a more intuitive and less structured way. This was needed for the continuous process of sense making required by grounded theory principles.

Only at the end of the internship I started to analyze field materials in a more structured way, even though I returned to the fieldwork from time to time when I thought I needed to collect more materials.

Since the field materials were dispersed in digital texts, emails, and different notebooks, I proceeded by categorizing the sources before putting them together. Texts were divided in observations; conversations and discussions; technical notes related to work activities; interviews; and research diary.

I then proceeded by coding the data, following the example provided by Kunda (2013). The activity of coding refers to the process of moving from data to more abstract categories, and it took different steps.

With the first step I went through the data following a chronological order. I associated one or more categories to the incidents by keeping a low level of abstraction. Categories were thus very close to the data themselves. Some of them were the same words used by "natives" (e.g. "artistic masses"), or recurrent topics of conversation (e.g. "La Traviata"). Some other identify concepts that, for me, represented an example of that incident (e.g. "feeling of frustration"). All of the categories were meant to catch the message that people

wanted to transmit, trying to understand the terms in the meanings actors have given them.

At the end of the first round, I got 357 categories. I then grouped them in second-level categories. Some of them were linked to topics covered by management studies (e.g. “bureaucracy”, “professionalism”, “organizational culture”). Some other, apparently still very related to the context, were used as metaphors, synecdoches or metonymies (e.g. “La Traviata” used to define the commercial strategy of the theater).

After that, I selected the material coming from official sources and I separated it from observations and informal conversations. The “official version” that I described in Chapter 5 came from internal documents and financial statements (which are publicly available), from ad-hoc studies and press releases, and from my interviews with the managers. From the analysis of the official version, the most recurrent categories were based on the explanation of the “new strategy”, and on the description of the “virtuous opera house”. Other arguments, which I grouped under the category “legitimation”, included “benchmarks, facts and numbers”, discourses related with the idea of “cultural industry”, and social arguments (“culture as public good”, “avoiding layoffs”). Discourses categorized as “Legitimation” provided justifications for the adoption of the new strategy, and proofs of virtuosity, but the official version often recurred to “legitimation” also to neglect or minimize conflicts. I reported this analysis in Chapter 6, intertwining it with discourses coming from “less official voices”.

“Less official voices” included observations, my descriptions of facts and events, informal chats and conversations coming from different departments and from different hierarchical levels. It also included interviews with employees in non-managerial positions. Here the category “art for art’s sake” is much more recurrent than in the official version, especially in chats, conversations and interviews, while in the descriptions of facts and events I coded many incidents under the category “conflicts”, which goes from specific work-related arguments (mistakes and complaints), to tensions between professional groups (e.g. “artists vs. technicians”), up to general organizational routines and practices (“rigidity vs flexibility”, “control vs autonomy”, “formal rules vs emotionality”).

From the interactions between the three macro-categories of “art for art’s sake” (mainly coming from the less official voices) and those of “culture as public good” and “management” (both consisting in comments about the official version), each of one containing several interconnected categories, the topics that emerge as the most striking were “conflicts”, “frustration”, “artistic quality” and “innovation”, around which I developed Chapter 7 and 8..

SENSE MAKING AND CONTINUOUS RESEARCH DESIGN

Grounded theory approach requires a constant sense making, throughout collection of field materials, achieved by coding, analyzing and theorizing (Czarniawska, 2014).

During my Ph.D. training, I have been taught that the research process has to start with the statement of a research question, while data collection, methodological statements, data analysis should all follow. Thus I felt going backward with respect to all my colleagues, since when I went to the field and I started collecting data, I was not aware of what my study would ended up to be. At the beginning, from October 2013 until March 2014, I was focusing on the labour issues in cultural industry, particularly on precariousness and conflicts. What it ended up to be my research lines are quite different from those initial thoughts. With time, this “unconventional order” didn’t bother me too much, especially because the reasoning and the discussions about the research lines were very stimulating and satisfying.

In the field, when I was not involved in organizational activities, I used my time trying to square the circle. I reviewed additional literature based on new insights coming from the field, and I sketched drawings or conceptual maps linking observations with theories. After the fieldwork, the design process continues through a more focused analysis of the field material, that I progressively enriched with additional encounters with organization’s members.

What I did was to continuously try to make sense of the things I saw and heard, questioning about what captured my attention and why, and figuring out how

this could be included in discourses going on in management studies. Keywords were continuously changing.. Most of the academic literature I used, was selected to help me in the interpretation of categories and connections that progressively emerge from the analysis, and, thus, represents more a result of the research process itself rather than the basis upon which it has been developed. This also explain why the bibliography ranges from the most natural (given the department from which this study arrives) discipline of management, to those of economics, sociology and philosophy.

I kept notes of my research process in a notebook. What emerges from the research process is that my interpretation of the case changed considerably with time. At the beginning I was very critical about the managerialization process that has interested the opera house. I had the preconception that financial and artistic goals were radically conflicting, and I desired the arts to be free from any financial concern. My first reaction to the commercial trend undertaken by the management, well represented with the continuous replication of *La Traviata*, was indignation. But when I saw *La Traviata*, I loved it, and when I read the news about the crisis of other opera houses, I was happy that *La Fenice* was not experiencing the same dramatic effects. I was struggling to find a way to reconcile my first indignant reaction, with the emotions that *La Traviata* gave me and with the vibrant organizational life in which I was involved. I thus realized that my indignation was due to preconceptions based on an over identification with the romantic approach to the arts, and, thus, to a non-neutral ideological position. On the other hand, I could not even accept the coldness and rationality of computations in the art sector, where emotionality and subjectivity are strongly involved. I realized that I could not solve the puzzle without a deep reasoning on meanings. The field narrated me its stories, which I analyzed with increasing level of abstraction. The last level of abstraction take the form of the following question: "what are we talking about?". What is the meaning associated with words such as artistic quality, artistic innovation, success, or artistic work? With these questions in mind, I went back again to the stories of the field, looking for meanings, and I analyzed the literature that makes use of the same concepts. I realized that different meanings were

attached to the same concept in “my” field with respect to the literature, as, for instance in the words connected with creativity and innovation. Struggling with meanings was indeed the exercise I needed to “neutralize” my ideological position (that, like every ideology is attached to specific meanings) and complete my interpretation of the case. I don’t want with this words stating that the results of this research are neutral, but only that the words are used in the meaning that emerged from my personal interpretation of the field. Meanings change, what is innovation and what is creative is different today from what it was in the past, and is different in the arts with respect to other economic sectors. And I think this is one of the most relevant aspects a researcher must address when the object of study is a process that is supposed to bring changes.

I hope the research journey that I narrated in this chapter can give the reader a broader understanding of why and how my research has taken the form and the contents of this thesis. I also hope to have taken the reader with me in this journey from the first page, and, during this journey, to have stimulated critical reflections on arts, management, and arts management.

ANNEX 1

OPERA PROGRAMS FROM SEASON 2004-2005 TO SEASON 2014-2015

Season	Title	Author	Reruns	From	To	Year	Production	Stage
2004-2005	La traviata	Verdi	8	12-nov	20-nov	2004	new	main
	Morte dell'aria + Il Cordovano	Petrassi	5	03-dic	11-dic	2004	new	second.
	Le roi de Lahore	Massenet	8	18-dic	05-gen	2004	new	main
	Maometto Secondo	Rossini	5	28-gen	06-feb	2005	new	main
	La finta semplice	Mozart	5	11-feb	19-feb	2005	new	second.
	Parsifal	Wagner	5	12-mar	23-mar	2005	new	main
	Pia de' Tolomei	Donizetti	5	15-apr	24-apr	2005	new	main
	Daphne	Strauss	5	09-giu	21-giu	2005	new	main
	La grande-duchesse de Gerolstein	Offenbach	5	21-ott	29-ott	2005	new	second.
2005-2006	La juive	Halevy	7	11-nov	23-nov	2005	guest	main
	Die Walkure	Wagner	6	25-gen	07-feb	2006	guest	main
	I quattro rusteghi	Wolf-Ferrari	5	22-feb	26-feb	2006	new	main
	Die Zauberflote	Mozart	8	21-apr	30-apr	2006	guest	main
	Luisa Miller	Verdi	5	19-mag	28-mag	2006	guest	main
	Lucio Silla	Mozart	5	23-giu	01-lug	2006	new*	main
	La Didone	Cavalli	4	13-set	19-set	2006	new*	second.
	L'Olimpiade	Vivaldi	5	13-ott	22-ott	2006	new	second.
2006-2007	Il crociato in egitto	Meyerbeer	7	14-gen	21-gen	2007	new	main
	La vedova scaltra	Wolf-Ferrari	7	10-feb	20-feb	2007	new	main
	Erwartung - Francesca da Rimini	Zandonai	5	16-mar	24-mar	2007	new	main
	La traviata	Verdi	8	20-apr	29-apr	2007	1st revival	main
	Siegfried	Wagner	5	14-giu	26-giu	2007	new*	main
	Signor Goldoni	Mosca	5	21-set	29-set	2007	new	main
	Ercole sul Termodonte	Vivaldi	4	04-ott	13-ott	2007	new*	second.
	Bajazet	Vivaldi	4	05-ott	14-ott	2007	new*	second.
	Thais	Massenet	5	21-ott	30-ott	2007	1st revival	main
	Turandot	Puccini	8	09-dic	18-dic	2007	guest	main

2008	La rondine	Puccini	7	26-gen	05-feb	2008	new*	main
	Elektra	Strauss	5	28-feb	11-mar	2008	guest	main
	Il Barbiere di Siviglia	Rossini	8	18-apr	27-apr	2008	1st revival	main
	Tosca	Puccini	8	23-mag	31-mag	2008	guest	main
	Death in Venice	Britten	5	20-giu	29-giu	2008	guest	main
	La leggenda del serpente bianco	Shaoyu	5	23-lug	27-lug	2008	new*	main
	Boris Godunov	Musorgskil	5	14-set	23-set	2008	guest	main
	La virtù de' strali d'Amore	Cavalli	4	10-ott	16-ott	2008	new	second.
	Nabucco	Verdi	8	19-ott	29-ott	2008	guest	main
Von heute auf morgen & Pagliacci	Leoncavallo	5	12-dic	20-dic	2008	new	main	
2009	Die tote Stadt	Korngold	5	23-gen	31-gen	2009	new*	main
	Romeo et Juliette	Korngold	6	19-feb	01-mar	2009	new*	main
	Maria Stuarda	Donizetti	7	24-apr	03-mag	2009	new*	main
	Madama Butterfly	Puccini	8	22-mag	31-mag	2009	guest	main
	Gotterdammerung	Wagner	5	25-giu	07-lug	2009	guest	main
	La traviata	Verdi	12	06-set	19-set	2009	2nd revival	main
	Agrippina	Handel	7	09-ott	18-ott	2009	new	second.
	Il killer di parole	Ambrosini	5	27-ott	05-nov	2009	new	main
Sarka - Cavalleria Rusticana	Mascagni	5	11-dic	20-dic	2009	new	main	
2010	Manon Lescaut	Puccini	7	29-gen	04-feb	2010	new*	main
	Il Barbiere di Siviglia	Rossini	3	11-feb	16-feb	2010	2nd revival	main
	DITTICO Le Rire/Dido & Aeneas	Purcell	5	14-mar	21-mar	2010	new	main
	Don Giovanni	Mozart	12	18-mag	30-mag	2010	new*	main
	The turn of the screw	Britten	5	25-giu	03-lug	2010	new	main
	La traviata	Verdi	9	05-set	03-ott	2010	3rd revival	main
	Rigoletto	Verdi	7	25-set	06-ott	2010	new	main
	L'elisir d'amore	Donizetti	11	29-ott	10-nov	2010	1st revival	main
	Il killer di parole	Ambrosini	5	10-dic	18-dic	2010	new*	main
2011	Intolleranza	Nono	5	28-gen	05-feb	2011	new	main
	La bohème	Puccini	12	25-feb	13-mar	2011	new	main
	Rigoletto	Verdi	4	25-mar	29-mar	2011	1st revival	main
	Lucia di Lammermoor	Donizetti	11	20-mag	01-giu	2011	new*	main
	Das Rheingold*	Wagner	5	24-giu	02-lug	2011	new	main
	A Midsummer Night's Dream	Britten	4	09-lug	13-lug	2011	new*	main
	La traviata	Verdi	10	27-ago	11-set	2011	4th revival	main
	Il Barbiere di Siviglia	Rossini	11	02-set	09-ott	2011	3rd revival	second.
	Don Giovanni	Mozart	13	20-set	02-ott	2011	1st revival	main
	Le nozze di Figaro	Mozart	9	14-ott	23-ott	2011	new	main

	Acis and Galatea	Handel	6	26-ott	30-ott	2011	new*	main	
	Il trovatore	Verdi	8	02-dic	11-dic	2011	new*	main	
2012	Lou Salomé	Sinopoli	4	21-gen	28-gen	2012	new	main	
	L'inganno felice	Rossini	6	10-feb	04-mar	2012	new	second.	
	Così fan tutte	Mozart	8	16-feb	03-mar	2012	new	main	
	L'opera da tre soldi	Brecht	5	07-mar	11-mar	2012	guest	main	
	La sonnambula	Bellini	7	21-apr	25-mag	2012	new	main	
	Powder her face	Hensher	5	27-apr	10-mag	2012	guest	second.	
	La bohème	Puccini	10	11-mag	29-mag	2012	1st revival	main	
	Carmen	Bizet	13	21-giu	12-lug	2012	new*	main	
	L'elisir d'amore	Donizetti	5	06-lug	15-lug	2012	2nd revival	main	
	La traviata	Verdi	13	02-set	30-set	2012	5th revival	main	
	Rigoletto	Verdi	8	14-set	29-set	2012	2nd revival	main	
	L'occasione fa il ladro	Rossini	5	12-ott	20-ott	2012	new	second.	
	2012-2013	Otello	Verdi	7	16-nov	30-nov	2012	new*	main
Tristan und Isolde		Wagner	5	18-nov	01-dic	2012	new	main	
I masnadieri		Verdi	5	18-gen	26-gen	2013	new*	main	
La bohème		Puccini	11	07-feb	20-feb	2013	2nd revival	main	
Vec Makropulos		Janacek	5	15-mar	23-mar	2013	new*	main	
La cambiale di matrimonio		Rossini	9	16-mar	17-apr	2013	new	second.	
Don Giovanni		Mozart	8	30-apr	28-mag	2013	2nd revival	main	
Le nozze di Figaro		Mozart	6	05-mag	25-mag	2013	1st revival	main	
Così fan tutte		Mozart	5	12-mag	26-mag	2013	1st revival	main	
Madama Butterfly		Puccini	9	21-giu	30-giu	2013	new	main	
Otello		Verdi	3	10-lug	17-lug	2013	1st revival	extern	
Il Barbiere di Siviglia		Rossini	5	25-lug	08-ago	2013	4th revival	second.	
La traviata		Verdi	14	30-ago	28-set	2013	6th revival	main	
Carmen		Bizet	9	15-set	26-ott	2013	1st revival	main	
Aspern		Argento	5	02-ott	10-ott	2013	new	second.	
Madama Butterfly		Puccini	7	12-ott	31-ott	2013	1st revival	main	
L'elisir d'amore		Donizetti	5	13-ott	30-ott	2013	3rd revival	main	
2013-2014		L'africaine	Meyerbeer	6	23-nov	01-dic	2013	new	main
		La scala di seta	Rossini	7	17-gen	31-gen	2014	new	second.
		La clemenza di Tito	Mozart	5	24-gen	01-feb	2014	guest	main
	La traviata	Verdi	10	15-feb	15-mar	2014	7th revival	main	
	Il Barbiere di Siviglia	Rossini	9	20-feb	20-mar	2014	5th revival	main	
	Il campiello	Wolf-Ferrari	5	28-feb	11-mar	2014	guest	second.	

	Elegy for Young Lovers	Henze	5	27-mar	06-apr	2014	guest	second.
	La bohème	Puccini	10	19-apr	30-mag	2014	3rd revival	main
	Madama Butterfly	Puccini	9	26-apr	01-giu	2014	2nd revival	main
	Tosca	Puccini	8	16-mag	31-mag	2014	new	main
	The Rake's progress	Stravinskij	5	27-giu	05-lug	2014	new*	main
	La traviata	Verdi	10	26-ago	25-set	2014	8th revival	main
	L'inganno felice	Rossini	4	18-set	27-set	2014	1st revival	main
	Don Giovanni	Mozart	9	10-ott	19-ott	2014	3rd revival	main
	La porta della legge	Sciarrino	5	24-ott	02-nov	2014	guest	second.
	Il trovatore	Verdi	7	11-set	28-set	2014	1st revival	main
2014-2015	Simon Boccanegra	Verdi	6	22-nov	06-dic	2014	new	main
	La traviata	Verdi	5	23-nov	07-dic	2014	9th revival	main
	I Capuleti e i Montecchi	Bellini	6	14-gen	20-gen	2015	new*	main
	Il signor Bruschino	Rossini	5	23-gen	31-gen	2015	new	second.
	L'elisir d'amore	Donizetti	5	30-gen	19-feb	2015	4th revival	main
	Don Pasquale	Donizetti	5	08-feb	22-feb	2015	1st revival	main
	La traviata	Verdi	8	13-feb	29-mar	2015	10th revival	main
	Alceste	Gluck	5	20-mar	28-mar	2015	new*	main
	La traviata	Verdi	10	24-apr	07-giu	2015	11th revival	main
	Madama Butterfly	Puccini	6	08-mag	31-mag	2015	3rd revival	main
	Norma	Bellini	6	20-mag	06-giu	2015	new	main
	Juditha triumphans	Vivaldi	5	19-giu	27-giu	2015	new	main
	La scala di seta	Rossini	4	20-giu	28-giu	2015	1st revival	second.
	Otello	Verdi	3	07-lug	12-lug	2015	2nd revival	extern
	Il Ponte sulla Drina	(tbc)	5	08-lug	15-lug	2015	new*	main
	La traviata	Verdi	12	28-ago	04-ott	2015	12th revival	main
	Tosca	Puccini	7	29-ago	02-ott	2015	1st revival	main
	La cambiale di matrimonio	Rossini	5	12-set	26-set	2015	1st revival	main
	Il medico dei pazzi	Barzizza	5	06-ott	13-ott	2015	new*	second.
	Die Zauberflöte	Mozart	11	20-ott	31-ott	2015	new*	main

- Production: New means “new production”; New* means “new coproduction”; Guest means “guest production”
- Das Rheingold has been performed in form of concert (without costumes and scenes)
- Ballets, concerts, and “Operas for the young” are not included

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Estratto per riassunto della tesi di dottorato

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Dottorato: MANAGEMENT

Ciclo: 28°

Titolo della tesi : RESHAPING OPERA. A critical reflection on arts management

Abstract:

Le performing arts sono spesso considerate come un settore in perenne crisi, che, per le sue caratteristiche strutturali e il suo ruolo nella società, ha sempre dovuto contare sul supporto pubblico per mantenersi in vita. In Italia, la crisi pluriennale dei teatri d'opera lirica, ha portato ad interrogarsi particolarmente sulle capacità manageriali e sulle scelte strategiche adottate dalle organizzazioni. Il caso che qui viene raccontato, si presenta come un caso di successo, in cui, pur dentro i confini della produzione culturale sovvenzionata dallo stato, una svolta manageriale ha portato ad un sensibile miglioramento in produttività ed efficienza, e a un sostanziale incremento di entrate proprie rispetto ai contributi pubblici. La descrizione e l'analisi del caso, lungi dall'essere presentato come best practice con pretese di generalizzazione, permette una riflessione critica sul management delle arti che parte dalla tensione tra arte e commercio sottolineate inizialmente dalla Frankfort School. In particolare ci si sofferma sulla frustrazione della massa creativa, contraltare dell'esaltazione della classe creativa, e sul ruolo conservativo intrapreso dal management in organizzazioni che hanno nell'innovazione artistica la loro ragion d'essere.

The performing arts have long been considered as a sector in permanent crisis, which, because of its structural characteristics and its role in society, has always counted on external support (mainly from the state) to survive. In Italy, the pluriennial crisis of the opera houses induced to question about the managerial abilities and the strategic choices of these organizations. The case narrated here, represents a successful case in which, still inside the borders of a subsidized cultural production, a managerial turn led to substantial improvements in efficiency and productivity levels, and to a significant increase of earned revenues compared to public grants. The description and analysis of the case, far from being presented as a best practice with any claim of generalization, allows for a critical reflection on arts management, starting from the tension between art and commerce discussed initially by the Frankfort School. In particular, the focus will be on the frustration of the creative mass, opposing the current celebration of the creative class, and on the conservative version of management that is applied in organizations whose essence is innovation and experimentation.

Firma dello studente

