

DEVOLUTION IN ITALIAN CULTURAL POLICIES

MICRO VIEW AND ACTUAL IMPACTS

Stefano Monti

Devolution has definitely become a ‘flagship’ in the Italian political debate. It has affected any aspect of public policy over the last 17 years and the cultural sector has not been spared. Its key aim is to decentralise legal and administration powers in a way that could reduce the burden of State offices work and set up a more efficient and effective administration able to meet citizens’ needs. After a long tradition of centralized policies and administration, long, costly and often inefficient procedures required a profound change. The reforms were so led by the ideal to implement public policies closest to citizens’ needs, to provide direct responses and increase their participation to local governments’ actions (democratization and participative policy), to deliver more effective services (better performance) and distribute more equally the burden of administrative work of State offices (decentralisation of day-to-day administration).

In order to see if these aims have been fulfilled, we will go through two real case studies, so adopting a micro viewpoint of analysis. The SBCR (Lazio, IT) and GA/ER (Emilia-Romagna, IT) are two administrative “networks” set up between local municipalities to coordinate libraries’ services and initiatives in support of young artists. The choice of the micro viewpoint is supported by the fact that devolution has its direct effects on regional and local governments’ actions. Within the general debate about devolution, the tension between central/periphery powers and resources is often one of the main concerns. However, in our analysis this is not the case. Our objective is to specifically see what devolution implies not in terms of transferred powers and resources, but in terms of resources’ management. We want to understand if and how regions and municipalities assign and manage resources to cultural initiatives. This should give us some clues to get the effects of devolution in terms of better performance when looking at the day-to-day practical application of macro policy reforms. At this level, the analysis becomes interesting as well as challenging: how to distinguish common trends from local specificities? Actually, the two case studies’ present common problems even if they are related to two different cultural sectors: librarian heritage (protection and promotion) and contemporary arts (promotion). This evidence, analysed through the lenses of the literature on cultural policy reforms and managerial rhetoric, confirms that the selected examples are not isolated cases. Instead, a common “curse” in Italian cultural policies emerges.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS: HOW TO FILL THE ACTUAL GAP BETWEEN MACRO POLICY AND MICRO MANAGEMENT?

The specific objective of the analysis is to study the actual effects of devolution looking at two real cases. The common problems have been analysed within the theoretical framework of cultural management studies. What emerges is a constant gap between “cultural policies” and “the way policies are implemented” (management). The GA/ER and SBCR are two example of what we will call “geographical devolution” as powers pass from national to regional and local levels, but cultural activities still depend on public administration rules (ex. on financial and human resources management) in the same way as it happened before at the national level. This means that cultural activities gain no autonomy from the “binding” procedures and conditions which characterize public administration. Devolution seems eventually to “bypass” these constraints transferring them from higher to lower government levels. The *convenzione* regime, in particular, does not create an autonomous body dealing with local services. Instead, local services still depend on each local affiliated municipality’s decisions (Phase I). In order to solve this kind of problems, local administrators are used to “outsource” public services through a certain form of the so called “privatization” (Phase II). But privatization as such is

not necessarily better than “public”. It is somehow accepted that “privatization” equals better management, but this assumption does not consider the different implications and meaning of “privatizing”. The term can refer to the introduction of private management principles (the aims-resources-objectives chain) or simply to the acquisition of private funds or the application of private law to employ new human resources in a more flexible and quicker way. New organizations with a certain degree of autonomy from the public sector are often created as to act in a more flexible way (ex. for financial and resource management). This should also allow the public sector to involve professionals with specific competences both from the private and public cultural sector. However, this is only partially true since decisional processes often undergo very limited change. Basically, the members of the decisional board of these organizations are often the culture councillors of the same municipalities that created the organizations. In other words, they maintain all decisional powers on crucial matters like financial resources for cultural projects. Professionals are usually part of bodies which just have consulting functions, but no decisional powers. New organisations are formally autonomy from public administrations but they are not really innovative as far as decisional process is concerned. Our purpose is thus to address the attention to powers’ devolution with respect to its real effectiveness given the purpose of devolution policies. The core question is: does devolution positively affect cultural aims? If so, why and how? We will try to answer these questions through our analysis. We also want to show that the problems discussed actually hinge on a common “way of doing”, frequently observed within the Italian cultural sector (and the public sector more in general). This happens despite of the specific field of activities as in our cases, one related to librarian heritage and the other to contemporary artistic production.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PAPER STRUCTURE

The answers to the questions posed in this study are based on empirical research and literature overview. We have consulted the relevant literature on cultural policy devolution and managerial rhetoric in order to place the study in context and provide a theoretical framework supporting the outcomes of our empirical investigation. The article is structured as follows. First, the Italian devolution policy is quickly reviewed in order to place the study in contest and the object of analysis is presented within this framework. Second, by analyzing the two case studies, it investigates the effects of cultural policy devolution (macro level) using a managerial perspective (micro level). Third, it offers an insight into the rhetoric surrounding cultural policy devolution suggesting a distinction between geographical and organizational devolution. In conclusions, the article proposes further research on the discussed issues in order to bridge the gap between rhetoric and practice.

DEVOLUTION IN ITALIAN CULTURAL POLICY: THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Devolution reforms start in the 90's: constitutional changes and the so called 'Bassanini laws' grant Italian regions and local administrations with increased legislative and administrative powers in different fields including culture. The general principle inspiring the reform is to give regions more competences in an increased number of subjects. Regions are in fact supposed to better interpret and respond to regional needs. As for legislative powers (devolution), regions can now enact laws on *promozione e valorizzazione* (promotion) of cultural goods and activities according to the State guidelines (the so called *leggi quadro*), while the State retains all powers concerning the *tutela* (protection) of Cultural Heritage. Accordingly, local administrations are granted all administration powers under the principles of subsidiarity, differentiation and adequateness (decentralisation). Higher administration levels must intervene only when the lowest level is not able to fulfil citizens' needs. The law 142/90 completes the legislative framework further re-organizing local bodies, giving municipalities and provinces more autonomy and providing them with juridical tools to enhance cooperation in local services' management. The law 142/90 is thus at the heart of the change that local administrations' day-to-day work underwent. The juridical tools introduced - *convenzioni* (kind of agreement), consortia and municipal unions - give local administrations the possibility to entirely manage local services and, if the case, start collaborations with other public and private stakeholders. This of course affected all kinds of public services and also those concerning cultural facilities (like libraries) and youth (initiatives to support young artists). This law is particularly relevant in the analysis of the GA/ER and SBCR case studies as they used the *Convenzione* to coordinate cultural services with regional relevance: library services, in the first case; art exhibitions/competitions/festivals, in the second. Under this agreement, municipalities started to collaborate with the aim to create a library system in the Castelli Romani area in Lazio and to provide a regional support to the "young creatives" between the age of 18 and 35 residing in Emilia-Romagna.

OBJECT OF ANALYSIS: THE GA/ER AND CSBCR CASE STUDIES

The GA/ER and SBCR were launched at the end of 90's, during the first decade of devolution reforms. The GA/ER was created as a municipalities' network to provide a sound support to the "young creatives" between the age of 18 and 35 residing in Emilia-Romagna (IT). It tries to take over the weak support that contemporary artistic production suffers in Italy. The circuit members organize art exhibitions, competitions and they spread information about the local initiatives across a consistent number of young artists. Set up through a *Convenzione* between the Region and the representative municipality of the GA/ER (Forlì), the "circuit" has been organized as a decentralized network. The representative performs the administrative and accounting tasks, whilst the municipalities affiliated organize the local initiatives. Local administrations can also activate specific collaborations with museums, theatres, etc. when required by specific projects. The Region takes part to the "network" as an institutional supporter and financial partner. The circuit has no financial autonomy. The GA/ER members and the Region assign part of their financial resources on an annual basis according to the costs of local initiatives and the resources available. From 1999 to 2006, the regional and municipalities' subsidies covered an annual spending of about 50.000,00 Euros per year. A similar situation can be observed for human resources. GA/ER projects are managed by the civil servants of the local young artists' bureaus. The idea of a library system was born in 1985 as the *summa* of cooperative experiences amongst local Castelli Romani libraries, upon realizing that it was the proper time to develop a network of their own cultural territorial services. In 1991 a *Convenzione* was signed between the local institutions and the libraries, the first agreement in the Lazio region to identify this system with a regional law (law 142/90). This model experimented between 1985-1996 showed its inadequacies, consisting of a weak consulting group which was not always the expression of both politicians and librarians, but, often, it was the instrument of dialogue between the employees of the system. The process of grouping municipalities under a single and centralized administrative body has been accompanied by specific necessities, such as the understaffing in the Castelli Romani area, which pushed the libraries forward a decisive passage, changing the juridical status of the *Convenzione* into a Consortium. In 1997 the Consortium was officially recognized at the national level, bringing together 11 municipalities (today 17): it gradually became the reference institution of the whole area, developing culture in a strategic way.

The GA/ER case study goes through the "privatization" of this network intended as a way to introduce private management principles. The starting point of the research is the huge increment of public subsidy (+ 780%) followed by the transformation of the GA/ER into a non-for profit organization which can finally raise private funds, include private stakeholders and hire new people according to private law. The case study has two aims. First, it investigates the consequences of the budget increase in the light of new organizational and managerial needs. Second, it analyses the subsequent transformation of the GA/ER into a *legal persona* (2009) and its potential effects in responding to organizational and managerial needs. Third, it suggests further research using a managerial perspective in order to reduce the gap between macro goals (public policy view) and micro conditions for the action (management view).

At the same time, the second case study offers insight into the "managerialization" of the Consortium SBCR, instituted in 1997 following the disposals of the national law 142/90 on local governments' powers. In particular, at that time it was seen as the proper juridical model which could manage the 17 municipalities associated in the Castelli Romani area (Lazio, IT), to realize the ambitious project of a unique big library. Each municipality associated adheres to a responsibility proportional to the amount given as participation fee. As regard to the internal organization chart, it is very basic, formed by four main bodies: the majors' assembly, the board of directors, the president and the director. Director's role is a particularly delicate one, having the responsibility to balance the different proposals coming from each library of the system and submitting it into the budget (to be approved by the Board); furthermore, he has also to value all the suggestions coming from the 17 municipalities associated, in particular the problems and needs expressed by majors during the Assembly, the political issues coming from each one of them, often in clash with the cultural objectives established by the staff (constant trade off resources/goals). The Assembly is a particularly important body, because it expresses the adhesion of the 17 municipalities associated, which debate the relevant issues around the same table. It expresses the real and political-administrative control body, made up of the representatives of each associated municipality therefore the major. In this way the political domain is assured over the time, forcing also significant trade off between the political and cultural aims (rigidity of the functioning system).

Throughout the years the Consortium SBCR has increased its services both in quantity and in quality, acting as a facilitator of local development in the Castelli Romani cultural district. The case study wants to focus in particular on the rigid status of this public body, which is profoundly limited by the impossibility of acting in a direct way on the greater part of the resources, facing, as in the recent past, the relevant problems of understaffing and organizational reconstruction. Second, the analysis wants also to suggest the introduction of an Operative Managing Foundation, which could add more flexibility and autonomy of resources. Third, it poses the crucial question related to the supporting role of such juridical model, which does not eliminate the political expression of the 17 municipalities associated over the time, where politicians can trade resources/goals during the Assembly. In this way the Consortium SBCR will be assisted by a private professional who will be part of the Board of Directors of the Foundation. The linking managerial logic will so be provided from inside the organization as with a proactive member acting from the internal governance structure.

In the two cases, the region and local municipalities, therefore public bodies, are respectively the funders and direct administrators of the projects following the 90's devolution reforms. The *Convenzione* so gathered local municipalities, provinces and the region who committed to give a financial and institutional support to public services considered of regional relevance while respecting local specificities. In Lazio, the *Convenzione* granted a "recognized identity" to the fragmented territory of the Castelli Romani area that always suffered their proximity to Rome. In Emilia Romagna, instead, the GA/ER circuit attempts to take over the weak support that contemporary artistic production suffers in Italy. However, our research significantly shows that devolved powers did not prevent municipalities from several "operational" problems deriving from the specificities of the public sector. The GA/ER and SBCR are not even outposts of local administrations as they are managed locally and a regional governing body - autonomous from public administrations - does not exist. Under the *Convenzione*, the GA/ER and SBCR aims still hinge on the "binding rules [that] make extremely difficult and rigid (and costly) the life of whatever body within the public sector [...]" (Zan, 2003).

Table 1 - GA/ER and SBCR history

PHASE I		
Juridical regime <i>Convenzione</i>	SBCR and GA/ER	
<i>Definition</i>	Agreement among municipalities and the region to provide an institutional and financial support to local services regionally relevant	
<i>How it works</i>	Each municipality administrates its own services trying to coordinate its actions with the other <i>Convenzione</i> 's signatories. The <i>Convenzione</i> does not create an autonomous organization from the municipalities affiliated and no regional governing body exists.	
<i>Funding</i>	Public	
▫ <u>Problems emerged</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of autonomy and responsibility logic: the <i>Convenzione</i> creates a sort of outpost of the affiliated municipalities - Fragmentation and lack of unique regional vision - Overlapping functions (general administration/project management) and lack of professional management competences 	
PHASE II		
Juridical change	Consortium SBCR	Association GA/ER
<i>Definition</i>	The Consortium is a public organization which produces cultural, informative and bibliographical services for documentation centres directly managed for the public libraries of each associated municipality. The internal organization chart is very basic and it is formed by four main bodies: the majors' assembly, the board of directors, the president and the director.	The Association is non-for profit organization which includes an Assembly, decisional body composed by the municipalities' culture councillors, a Technical Management Committee, support management body composed by civil servants (GA/ER) and librarians (SBCR), a Board of Directors, a coordination body composed of technical representatives elected from the Technical Management Committee, an Accountability Auditor, chosen from outside the organization.
<i>How it works</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Assembly is the real and political- administrative control body, made up of the majors of each associated municipality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Assembly has all decisional powers on resources and activities' plan approval. - Private members cannot be part of the Assembly in any case. - The Technical Management Committee plans the activities to be approved by the Assembly.
<i>Funding</i>	Public	Public and private (to be find)
<i>Advantages</i>	Its creation has been fundamental, because it has enabled the library system to acquire a proper legal persona, in order to solve the understaffing problem and to manage in an associative way the 17 municipal libraries.	Thanks to the legal persona status, the Association can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) employ human resources with a private law contract; b) raise private funds; c) participate to public competitions (e.g. European competitions); d) acquire new members, also from the third and for-profit sector
▫ <u>Problems emerged/ envisaged</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The public status reveals the impossibility of the personnel to act directly in an autonomous way (no "economic responsibility") - On the librarians' side, it is fundamental to achieve the overall adhesion of the majors' assembly to the ideals and objectives of the Consortium, because it also indirectly reflects the approval to its general cultural purposes - Private stakeholders are quite absent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decisions still hinge on political counterparts of projects, so autonomy from the public sector is somehow incomplete - Private stakeholders have a mere financial role
PHASE III		
Future purposes	Operational Management Foundation to set up as supporting body of the Consortium (external)	The Association has just been created and need to be implemented in spite of the limits emerged in our analysis

Phase I - Problems emerged under the *convenzione* regime

Lack of autonomy and responsibility logic. The lack of autonomy due to the *convenzione* regime means that the SBCR and GA/ER decisions on basic issues like financial and human resources are taken by each affiliated municipality's Committee. No common governance bodies exist, employment of human resources depends on each municipality's financial budget and general public administration rules. Accordingly, no clear responsibility exists at central level as public funds are assigned on annual basis according to annual financial availabilities and not on specific assignment criteria. Complications deriving from the "autonomy deficit" of the *convenzione* regime firstly emerged as understaffing

problems raised. In the SBCR case, to hire new people the regional parliament enacted a specific norm, the regional law 29/96². Although it can sound odd that a managerial need is solved through laws, this is in line with Italy's high level of "juridification" (Meneguzzo 1995; Ladu 1997; Panozzo 2000b; Bonini Baraldi 2005) that led the reform process of Italy's cultural sector over the past 15 years through a staggering number of norms, laws and regulations concerning its institutional and organisational situations (Zan, Bonini Baraldi and Gordon, 2007). As for the GA/ER, no particular staff needs emerged before 2007, when the circuit was granted a huge public subsidy. In 2007-08, almost all Ital-

ian regions signed the so called *APQ - Accordo di Programma Quadro*³ and received a quote of the newly-instituted Fondo per le Politiche Giovanili (Fund for Youth Policies) 2007-2009 that amounts to 130 million Euros per year. Emilia-Romagna received 4.230 million Euros per year to start new projects or further develop ongoing projects, like the young artists' circuit. Public resources jumped from 50.000 Euros to 430.000 Euros per year during the period 2007-2009 (+780%). After this significant budget increment, the artistic circuit faced more than before the operative limits of the *convenzione*. Devolved administrative powers basically resulted in a transfer of public administrations constraints from the central to the local level. GA/ER, as a unique entity, had not the power to immediately employ new people with managerial competences, as needed.

Fragmentation and lack of unique regional vision. The GA/ER did not follow specific procedures to assign the new resources because a common decisional procedure has actually never existed. Basically, most of the municipalities affiliated presented their three-years projects, the others just asked for a quote to finance established local projects (like the music festival in Ravenna), when unable to present a three-years initiative. The new budget was hence assigned to 6 projects, one for each member municipality, plus a quota destined to Forlì for administration. The projects were planned for the first time on a three-year-basis. The new plan certainly created new expectations on the circuit, but the Forlì offices proved to be not able to manage the new burden of administrative and accountability work and asked for new human resources. When Forlì came to the decision to hire people with new competences, it needed to go through the municipal Committee. The GA/ER again proved to depend on each municipality's decisions and administrative procedures, so confirming its internal fragmentation and difficult coordination on basic matters like decision on resources according to specific needs and goals.

This is typical of the *convenzione* regime. Decisions are taken by each municipality often lacking a shared vision of the multi-territorial project because *convenzioni* do not include the institution of autonomous governance bodies. In terms of "geographical devolution", municipalities have total control of the projects, but this does not necessarily correspond to an improvement and more effective performance of service delivering. What need to be changed is the administration logic (managerialization) and not the mere administration level.

Overlapping functions (general administration and project management) and lack of professional management competences. Civil servants are the "professional" workers of the GA/ER. The new burden of work (accounting and administrative procedures and long-term projects' management), the increasing need to separate the overlapping administrative and "artistic" tasks, and the need of managerial competences called for a re-organization of the structure, new employees and introduction of specific governance bodies acting according to responsibility principles. In the CSBCR case, the *Convenzione* showed soon its inadequacies, being a weak consulting group which was not the expression of the dialogue between the political and creative bodies, but, more often, a further instrument of discussion among the librarians. In both cases, a clearer distinction from people responsible for "arts management" and "accountability" and "general management" tasks became more and more necessary. Notably, the fact that the representative municipality dealt only with administration procedures and that no one was responsible for giving projects' guide lines at the regional level, showed the actual fragmented nature of the circuit.

PHASE II - AN ATTEMPT TO OVERCOME PUBLIC MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS: THE CONSORTIUM AND THE ASSOCIATION

In the SBCR case, it was the problem of understaffing which especially pushed the libraries forward a decisive juridical passage, changing the status of the *Convenzione* into a Consortium after 15 years of *Convenzione* inadequacies (from 1985 to 1996). The library system had in fact a weak consulting group and decisions were often expression of politicians more than librarians. Focusing on one of the institutional models proposed by the law 142/90, the Consortium was chosen as the proper juridical form which associated 17 municipalities with the objective of participating in a common activity, pooling their resources to achieve a common goal and realize the ambitious project of a unique library. At the moment, each municipality is responsible according to the amount given as participation fee. As regard to the internal organization chart, it is very basic, formed by four main bodies: the majors' assembly, the board of directors, the president and the director. The huge increase of the public subsidy was instead the occasion for the GA/ER to experiment the limits of the *Convenzione* due, in the end, to its strong rela-

tionship with the public sector. Due to the impossibility to manage the resources with a certain degree of flexibility and autonomy from the public sector, GA/ER's members and the region itself pushed forward the idea to create a new organisation, autonomous from the public sector. The requested transformation was informally called "privatization": the goal was to create a new organization (juridically) able to raise private funds, include private stakeholders among its members and hire new people according to private law. In general, the issue was most addressed from a juridical than a managerial viewpoint, sometimes adopting the concept of "privatization" as a panacea. This kind of thoughts were considered as the only way to meet the new and more ambitious GA/ER's aims which follow the budget increase. The purpose is now to enhance GA/ER's regional, national and international visibility and launch a regional cultural district. It must be said that, in the previous years, the GA/ER's members had already pointed out the need to transform the circuit and introduce "private management" logics. However, lacking financial resources but also a clear and shared vision on the GA/ER's growth, the members did not come up with an explicit proposal before 2007-2008.

As previously introduced, the budget increase created a new burden of work (accounting and administrative procedures and long-term projects' management). So, the increasing need to separate the overlapping administrative and "artistic" tasks and to introduce professional managerial competences called for a re-organization of the structure, new employees and introduction of specific governance bodies acting according to responsibility principles. The GA/ER so started to express the need to have more flexibility and decisional power in order to fulfil the new and more ambitious aims. First of all, new people and competences were required, secondly the GA/ER was in need of a stronger institutional recognition. The region proposed to include new members (11 among municipalities and provinces) and, at the same time, transform the circuit into a non-for profit Association. Thanks to the Association autonomous governance, the increased number of public bodies would have only benefited the GA/ER instead of generating a more complicated governance structure. In particular, the Association, thanks to its status of *legal persona*, would have also given the possibility to: a) employ human resources with a private law contract. Differently from the circuit of public administrations' offices, the association can act as under private law, so it can employ staff for specific needs without facing the numerous ties characterizing public administrations; b) raise private funds; c) participate to public competitions (e.g. European competitions); d) acquire new members, also from the third and for-profit sector. Furthermore, the Association is granted financial autonomy and has a simple but well defined organizational structure which clearly distinguishes between the (political) leadership (General Assembly and President) and the organs responsible for management (Board of Directors and Management Committee) - as in the SBCR Consortium - with the possibility to create work teams by areas of interest. In the end, it will also benefit of a particular fiscal system thanks to the law 398/1991, addressed to sport organizations and recently extended to the cultural ones. The Association was finally instituted in May 2009. From an accountability viewpoint, the Association has financial autonomy, and control on budget and expenses is carried out by an external auditor. However, accountability control is something different from the "accountable" logic according to the Anglo-Saxon meaning. In both cases, the Assembly is a particularly important body, because it expresses the adhesion of the 17 municipalities associated, which debate the relevant issues around the same table. It expresses the real and political-administrative control body, made up of the representatives of each associated municipality therefore the major. In this way the political domain is assured over the time, forcing also significant trade-off between the political and cultural aims (rigidity of the functioning system). Director's role is particularly delicate, having the responsibility to balance the different proposals coming from each library of the system and submitting it into the budget (to be approved by the Board); furthermore, he has also to value all the suggestions coming from the 17 municipalities associated, in particular the problems and needs expressed by majors during the Assembly, the political issues coming from each one of them, often in clash with the cultural objectives established by the staff (constant trade off resources/goals).

PHASE III - PRESENT PROBLEMS UNDER THE CONSORTIUM AND THE ASSOCIATION

Decisions still hinge on political counterparts of projects. Quite interestingly, it's sufficient to go through the decision making process of the new organization to find that not that much has really changed. Deal-

making, in fact, still hinges on the political component of the GA/ER, now composed by a more than doubled number of public bodies representatives (7 plus the 11 who joined the circuit in 2009). What's peculiar is that, although participation of private stakeholders was one of the reasons of the change, private members have a role of financial partners within the GA/ER Association. The decisional body (Assembly) is composed by the local culture councillors of the municipalities affiliated.

Private stakeholders with a mere financial role. The Statute makes precise that only "founders and ordinary members" can be part of the Assembly, which is the decision body. These are notably public bodies (founders) and members from the third sector (ordinary members). Private professionals can only take part to the Association as financial partners but they have no decisional power on GA/ER's activities, budget and outcomes.

"What is left inside this "model" to satisfy managerial logic? Certainly some degrees of freedom exist: but the chain *objectives, resources, actions, results* is profoundly limited by the impossibility of acting in a direct way on the greater part of resources (personnel costs, increase or decrease in staffing in relation to diverse classes of required professionalism), merely providing a bit of flexibility in costs and income generation, and maybe a better customer orientation" (Zan 2006, p. 80).

...AND FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR THE CONSORTIUM SBCR

With respect to the GA/ER case, the Consortium SBCR has gone further in the devolution process, surpassing the rigidity of such a library system, which have been a problematic issue in the last twenty years. In particular, in juridical terms, it has reached a crucial point of decision, the institution of an Operative Managing Foundation, which can be strategically significant for the future enhancement of the territory, signifying a measured exit from the public sector, relaxing the rules and excessive regulation that characterize public administration. The introduction of a flexible juridical instrument such as the legal Operative Managing Foundation should be a determinant element for the organizational decentralization of the library system, which currently maintains the robust standards of centralized control. This model has spread among the cultural institutions, museums, archives, theatres and libraries- for its balanced synergy developed between public and private bodies inside the same structure and gave the opportunity to private entrepreneurs to take part to projects which benefit the public community.

It must be said that in such a context, this juridical model supports the Consortium but does not eliminate its consulting function. This keeps expressing the political will of the 17 municipalities associated, where politicians can debate and trade resources/goals during the Assembly's sessions. This feature is fundamental because it reassumes the inputs of the Castelli Romani territory, which cannot find other means through which integrate their projects, collaborate and develop synergies on the behalf of civic society. The goals established can be reached only if this proactive model of relationships will be established in the long term prospective.

In managerial terms, the preference for such a model comes from the possibility to "enable the positive dialogue between the managerial needs which are also characterized by a high level of professional competencies", and it introduces the possibility to attract privates' attention, stimulating more funds, a new visibility and responsabilization prospective. In fact, the particular context has pressed for a multidimensional approach, which could also take into account the variety of local actors involved into this governance structure, like privates, who have played a significant role in the delicate phase of the institutionalisation process.

As seen above, the role of private members of the GA/ER in the decision-making process is in principle avoided. They can join the Association, but they have no right to vote within the Assembly. The logic of the choice was to avoid the projects to depend on private money.

In the Consortium SBCR case, private actors have thus represented the strategic actors to involve in a long term prospective, an opportunity to catch aimed at adopting the devolution process in managerial terms, transferring from the private sector the necessary knowledge capital inside the public "weak" boundaries.

This process has been experimented by the Consortium SBCR, supported since 2006 by the private society Monti&Taft (which operates in the management of culture sector), especially during the delicate phase of redefining its institutional settings from a juridical and operative point of view, and has demonstrated the willingness of a public institution such as a Consortium of libraries to adopt a managerial

logic. The Consortium accepted to import the so called *objectives, resources, actions, results* chain from within, and a delegate of the private society has become proactive member of the Board of Directors, named by the Consortium itself. Before that, the private consultancy experienced several difficulties trying to propose new ways of thinking and act within the bodies usually working according to public sector principles. That's why it's crucial its inclusion in the Board of Directors as the sole effective way to influence operations from within. In particular, this kind of professionalism has been fundamental during the crucial consulting phase with the 17 majors/assessors (September-December 2008). The intent was to propose and debate with the politicians the hypothetical model of local development and the juridical means through which implement it.

WHAT DEVOLUTION MEANT IN THE TWO CASES

In the two analyzed cases, "devolution" finally combines with "decentralization" and "privatization" forms. To understand the differences between devolution and decentralisation and their relationship to privatisation, one might begin by expanding Donahue's typology, as suggested by Schuster. Devolution could in fact be analysed according to the dimensions of financing and performance (delivery of goods and services) but also of policy-making and administration (management) (Schuster, 1997)⁴.

In both case studies, the pervasive nature of the public sector underlined the inadequacy of the juridical tools used within a devolution context when not accompanied by appropriate managerial changes. The following SWOT analysis tries to sum the consequences of devolution in Italian cultural policies starting from "assumption" of devolution as a strength. This in fact depends on how it combines with other "dimensions" of policy making, like financing, administration and performance (what changes with the Association is mainly financing, but not administration - by local municipalities - and performance - by local municipalities but it should involve more and new stakeholders for the future).

Strengths. Devolution in cultural policies certainly introduced a direct "dialogue" between citizens and local administrations managing local services. This is more evident in the Consortium SBCR because of the role that a library can have for a number of citizens most likely higher than that of young artists. Even if we are far away from assessing the impact of devolution in terms of wider participation of citizens, it is sure that a great institutional commitment is required to support this kind of projects in the long term. In spite of the underlined problems, almost 20 years after their creation, we can say that such a kind support has necessarily existed.

Weaknesses. However, the lack of autonomy from public administration suggests the limitedness of the change. As we explained above, the "public nature" of the *Convenzione* puts several constraints to the effectiveness of the projects given its aims. Moreover, lacking autonomy, the new projects could not be managed according to "responsibility" criteria. It's someone else (political counterpart) that decide the amount of resources the "professionals" need for the cultural project. If they have no say on that and if the assignment does not depend on results, how could devolution improve local governments' performance? Of course, evaluation of results related to the cultural field is very challenging. However, several attempts are trying to combine qualitative and quantitative indicators in order to build a shared vision on outcomes' evaluation.

Opportunities. On the other hand, thanks to devolution local municipalities could experiment new ways of managing local services, actually going much further devolution. The Consortium and the Association are a (partial) attempt to change internal management. The experiment, in fact, did not turn out positively, due to the highlighted problems. Experimentation can become a "threat" if it does correspond just to a formal change, with no or partial consequences from an operational point of view. Privates could represent the strategic stakeholder to involve into the development process, starting to consider them not only as project partners, but also and above all as part of the internal system of governance, enhancing a mutual transfer of "capital of knowledge" in a long term prospective.

Threats. The wide political consensus created around the promotion of the library's heritage and the support to youth creativity clashes with some problematic issues. The Consortium SBCR had to face the political issues debated during each Majors' Assembly and to make a trade off, balancing the suggestions coming from each one of the 17 municipalities associated, which often clash with the specific cultural goals set by the Directions. Having a modest approach, this becomes also a concrete weakness of the system, consisting in time wasting to

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct control of the GA/ER and the CSBCR at regional and local level (devolution and decentralization) • Renovated institutional commitment of regional and level authorities for their increasing role in public policies 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionals have no decisional powers on human and financial resources • Local projects are still managed according to public administrations rules
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Region and municipalities has the powers and tools to experiment new collaboration forms to manage local services • Supporting action of privates operating from within the organization or as external consultants 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create forms only “apparently” innovative but still dependent on public sector constraints

Table 2 - SWOT analysis

understand the specific issues, write down and read the feasibility of each action: it emerges a relative rigidity of this public institution, the Consortium, characterized by the very prevalence of its “public nature”, which affects its flexibility and limited disposal of the resources, due to the impossibility to act in a direct way the greater part of the resources (personnel costs, increase or decrease in staffing in relation to diverse classes of required new professionalism- 20 years of reform!). Linked to this, the low effectiveness related to the libraries opening time, which depends on the specific rules set forth each municipality, which limits also the growth process of the potential exploited. Furthermore, the public nature is reflected in the inability to act in an autonomous way also in fundraising activities, limiting the resources available just on the public ones (Region, Province, Municipality) and avoiding any other possible alternative funds addressed specifically to the private sector (ex. 5perMille bids or the European Community ones).

In the GA/ER case it is premature to bring forward hypothesis as long as the future of the Association is concerned. However, as the case of the Consortium already proved, it might face some similar problems. On the one side, in juridical terms, the Association has certainly some advantages compared to the Consortium. First of all, it is a *legal persona*, with all the positive consequences that this generates (see previous paragraph). However, in managerial terms, it cannot be ignored that a “professional” guide within the organization is still missing, although in principle it was required by the GA/ER’s members themselves. Public employees may not always have the adequate competences to create a “regional cultural district” and help young artists to take part to national and international events (among the new aims). Furthermore, private have no say in the decisional process and the new *legal persona* status is not sufficient itself to attract private funds.

Similar problems pushed the Consortium SBCR to go further devolution and surpass the rigidity of such library systems. In particular, as previously explained, the Consortium is going to create an Operative Managing Foundation which can be strategically significant for the future enhancement of the territory.

Concluding remarks

The cases analyzed significantly reflect the main trends of the Italian cultural sector, where the public nature prevails and crisis emerges each time there’s a partial (attempt to) exit from the public sphere. Our analysis reflects a kind of “Italian curse”, characterized by the very presence of a “bureaucratized system” -public administration -which has crucially compromised the creation of an efficient governance structure in both cases and affected the activities’ planning schedule.

Pressures for changes are evident in both the case studies, especially if we think that such structures totally depend on public resources and often lead non profitable actions. What’s crucial is the opportunity to adopt a managerial perspective but this cannot be simply introduced by public bodies that have acted for such a long time according to the public sector rules/logic.

The case studies analyzed show that devolution in Italy has not a unique meaning or a single, given outcome. “In general, the term devolution should be used to refer to the movement of responsibility for a government programme to a lower level of government”. Its goal is to “lighten” the pressure on State offices, create more respondent policies for citizens’ needs and a more efficient and effective management of public services. Actually, devolution often resulted in a “geographical” move of competences within the Italian public sector showing its rigidity both at the national, regional and local level. In the devolution debate, one of the main concerns is the tension between central and periphery powers/resources. In our cases, relative budgets are not necessarily a reliable clue to “measure” devolution. The GA/ER set new and more ambitious aims only thanks to the national subsidy acquired from 2007. Within the Consortium SBCR, resources are available thanks to an established partnership between regional and local actors (province and municipalities). Interestingly, given the resources available, it’s management of resources to emerge in both cases as a constant concern. Devolution granted administration powers to local public bodies, but it had to face the specificities of the Italian context or, better said, the “rigid functioning mechanisms” that characterize Italian public administration.

If we look at devolution with regard to its multi-dimensional sphere, we note that devolution finally resulted in something that can be defined a kind of “privatization”. To understand the differences between devolution and decentralisation and their relationship to privatisation, one might begin by expanding Donahue’s typology. To his dimensions of financing and performance (delivery of goods and services) one might usefully add policy-making and administration (management)⁸. Privatization concerns the attempt to create external organizations and involving new actors from the private and third sector (with the Consortium and the Association, delivery of public services has been outsourced in a certain sense).

Privatization can be here intended also as to raise private funds, to introduce the ‘objective-resources-actions-results’ logic mainly derived from the private sector, but especially to transferring new professional competences the local projects could benefit from and refer to private law to hire new people (financing and administration). Policy-making is mainly granted to the region, according to the laws we presented at the beginning. In a nutshell, devolution in its four dimensions (policy-making, administration, financing and performance⁹) has quite complex and often unattended outcomes, with initiatives like the GA/ER and the Consortium SBCR struggling between public sector constraints and attempts to go further devolution. What seems to be crucial is to receive more autonomy from the public sector providing autonomous functioning rules.

Until now, the attempts to exit from public sectors have remained modest. A great emphasis has been put on formal changes, but decision making process keeps more or less unchanged and room for private professionals’ action is pushing to further synergies, developed through the transfer of knowledge capital in a long term prospective and to the possibility to enhance the adoption of appropriate managerial changes.

More innovative results are attended as long as the Association develops and the Operational Foundation is created.

ABSTRACT

La Devolution e la politica culturale italiana

La Devolution riveste un punto centrale nel dibattito politico italiano: ha riguardato ogni aspetto della politica pubblica negli ultimi 17 anni, e il settore culturale non ne è stato risparmiato. L’obiettivo principale è quello di decentralizzare i poteri giuridici e amministrativi in modo da ridurre il peso del lavoro degli uffici pubblici statali, e di organizzare un’amministrazione più efficiente ed efficace in grado di soddisfare le necessità dei cittadini. Dopo una lunga tradizione basata su politica e amministrazione centralizzate, procedure lunghe, costose e spesso inefficienti richiedevano un profondo cambiamento. Le riforme sono state quindi indirizzate all’implemento di politiche pubbliche più vicine ai cittadini, a incrementare la loro partecipazione nelle azioni di governo locali (politica di democratizzazione e partecipativa), a fornire servizi più efficienti (migliori prestazioni) e a distribuire più equamente il carico amministrativo degli uffici statali (decentralizzazione dell’amministrazione quotidiana).

KEYWORDS

CULTURAL POLICY; DEVOLUTION; DECENTRALIZATION; “MANAGERIALIZATION”; PRIVATIZATION; PUBLIC MANAGEMENT.

AUTHOR

STEFANO MONTI