

# The Adoption of Local Networks in the Italian Museum Field

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## 1.1 Introduction

Traditionally, Italian museums have been considered as organizations aimed to essentially preserve artistic objects, and have been characterized by low performance standards (Valentino and Masetto, 2000). Since the 90s, though, a far-reaching reform has invested Italian public sector organizations, including museums, most of which (70%) are owned by public bodies (Bagdadli, 1997). The main aims of the reform were to improve both the service quality of these organizations, by encouraging more market-oriented practices, and to increase their efficiency, by introducing managerial practices. Nowadays, Lombardia Region, the largest and most affluent Italian Region, is favoring and pushing the reform of the museum sector in this direction faster and more effectively than other regions (Jalla, 2000). In order to foster museum renewal, Lombardia encouraged the creation of local networks.

The recent promotion of local networks provides an interesting opportunity to analyze how Italian museums implemented the new managerial guidelines, which were so different from the traditional model of Italian museum, and to understand the consequences of these practices on museum competitiveness.

In order to investigate this issue, we adopt the institutional change framework, analyzing the role of organizational actors in determining the appearance of different patterns of adoption of new practices. In order to investigate the consequences of the different patterns on museum competitiveness we refer to the studies on the influence of networking on museums (Bagdadli, 1997; Bagdadli, 2001; Alberti, Bernardi, Moro, 2005) and try to integrate them with our observations.

The early formulation of new institutional theory attributed a constraining power to institutions. It emphasized the ceremonial conformity of organizations to them and focused on the process of organizational homogenization and stability (Meyer and Rowan, 1977 and 1991; Meyer, Scott, and Deal, 1992; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Since DiMaggio and Powell's suggestions to expand the scope of new institutional theory (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Powell, 1991), much research has been conducted, to the extent that "the topic of institutional change has emerged as a central focus for organizational researchers" (Dacin, Goodstein, Scott, 2002: 45).

Researchers explored diverse issues related with institutional change, ranging from the sources of institutional change (Oliver, 1992; Greenwood and Hinings, 1996), to organizational responsiveness to institutional pressures (Oliver, 1991; Goodstein, 1994; Hensmans, 2003), and to different responses and implementation of institutional demands (Townley, 2002; Kostova and Roth, 2002). Furthermore, all the different phases of institutionalization were theorized and connected with different patterns of adoption of institutional pressures (Tolbert and Zucker, 1996). In addition to that, other researches focused on the complete process of institutional change (Greenwood, Suddaby, Hinings, 2002) or on a specific phase (Lawrence, Hardy and Phillips, 2002).

Part of such investigations concentrated on meso-level dynamics, focusing on field level processes (Leblebici, Salancik, Copay and King, 1991; Hoffman, 1999; Greenwood, et al; Kraatz and Zajac, 1996). Other studies focused on the micro processes of institutionalization, investigating the relationship between institutions and action (Barley, 1986; Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Lawrence, 1999; Johnson, Smith and Codling, 2000; Seo and Creed, 2002; Zilber 2002).

Several studies analyzed the contribution of agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) to institutional change, exploring the issue of organizational leaders (Brint and Karabel, 1991; Fligstein, 1991; Greenwood and Hinings, 1996; Kraatz and Moore, 2002) DiMaggio, 1988; Aldrich and Fiol, 1994, Beckert, 1999, Jones 2001); by testing their role and exploring their characteristics in stable, in-crisis, and emerging field.

These recent findings showed an increasing attention to the interplay between organizational actors and institutional pressures as a critical element in explaining the process and the results of institutional change. Nevertheless, only a few recent empirical investigations specifically explored the issue of diverse responses and patterns of adoption (Goodstein, 1994; Townley, 2002; Kostova and Roth, 2002). Moreover, only a few empirical studies clarified how individual and contextual characteristics combine and enable organizational actors to adopt different degrees of implementation. Furthermore these studies did not evaluate the consequences of different patterns on organizational performance.

In our investigation, we build upon the recent findings on actor role in institutional change and integrate them by analyzing how and why organizational actors affect different responses and patterns of adoption of institutional pressures. In particular, we intend to find out both the individual and the contextual characteristics that enabled Italian museum directors and public administrators to oppose or to favor the institutional change promoted at Regional level.

Finally starting from the analysis of the empirical studies on the effects of networks on museums, we intend to investigate the effects of different patterns on museum competitiveness.

## **1.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTION**

A set of topics which developed in institutional investigations may offer the theoretical background to elaborate the issue of individuals' contribution to the emergence of different patterns of adoption of institutional pressures. These include organizational

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strategic responsiveness, organizational leader active agency and micro-processes of institutionalization. In this section, we briefly review these topics and try to integrate them, investigating which individual and contextual characteristics are important in explaining different patterns of implementation. Finally we review empirical studies about the consequences of local networks on museum competitiveness and try to integrate them collecting observations on the relationship between patterns and effects on performance.

### **Patterns of adoption of institutional pressures**

Early versions of new institutional theory focused on permanence and stability of institutions, emphasizing their taken-for-granted and constraining character (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Oliver (1991) noted that this literature lacked attention to the strategic behavior that organizations enact in response to institutional pressures. Integrating the institutional and resource-dependence theories, the author developed a set of conditions to predict organizational resistance or conformity to institutional pressures. Organizations do not unavoidably conform to institutional pressures, as their behavior may “vary from compliance to resistance depending on the nature and the context of the pressures themselves” (1991:146). Goodstein (1994) tested empirically this theoretical framework in a study concerning employer adoption of work-family initiatives. His work illustrated that the institutional environment is not deterministic and that organizational strategic choices depend on the characteristics of the organizations (i.e. their size and visibility), on the institutional pressures (i.e. their degree of diffusion), and on their interplay with technical factors (i.e. compromise is more likely when the impact of institutional pressures on technical outcome is negative). The investigation of Kostova and Roth (2002) elaborated the issue of organizational responsiveness, connecting this phenomenon with the appearance of different patterns of adoption of organizational practices. The study analyzed the adoption of an organizational practice (quality management) by the subsidiaries of a multinational corporation, employing an active agency perspective, and arguing that subsidiaries may employ discretion in adopting practices. The authors tested and proved that the institutional profile of the host country and the relational contexts of the organizations influenced the patterns of adoption, which were classified into four different ones: “active, minimal, assent and ceremonial” (Kostova and Roth, 2002: 229). The emergence of these patterns depended on the favorability of institutional and relational context to the practice itself. Investigations on strategic responsiveness to institutional pressures (Covaleski and Dirsmith, 1988; Oliver, 1991; Goodstein, 1994; Baum and Oliver, 1991; Hensmans, 2003) clarified that organizations can actively modify the institutional environment, and offered the opportunity to investigate how institutional rules may change through the interplay of organizational actors and institutional structure (Lawrence, 1999).

Moreover, empirical studies on the role of organizational actors contributed to highlight the dynamics of institutional change. Fligstein (1991) illustrated the evolution of M-form, analyzing the interplay between background, interests, values, and power position of organizational leaders and of the main wider structural events in the environment. Other empirical studies emphasized the role of professional elites’ interests in af-

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fecting institutional change during wider transformations (DiMaggio, 1991; Brint and Karabel, 1991; Galaskiewicz, 1991). Greenwood and Hinings, in their explanation of the occurrence of radical change, clarified how “the external processes of de-institutionalization have to be understood *together* with the internal dynamics of interpretation, adoption, rejection by the individual organization” (1996: 1041). In explaining change processes, they illustrated that context, institutional and market variables are as important as intra-organizational variables, such as the presence of actors in power position, with a capacity for action. Lounsbury (2002) clarified how and when context variables and organizational actors interact, investigating how a phase of institutional logic transformation created the opportunity for professional associations to de-institutionalize the existing institutional order and to create a new one, more coherent with their interests. This study empirically tested that the uncertainty (Beckert, 1999) connected with the process of institutional logic change allowed organizational actors to make new status claims and contribute to an institutional erosion and re-creation process.

Other empirical studies clarified that organizational leaders are more likely to initiate institutional change under some conditions. More specifically, these investigations illustrated how organizational leaders were more able to affect change dynamics if they came from the field periphery, where deviant and self interested behaviors are more plausible than in the field focal organizations, and if they already implemented a similar change (Leblebici, et al., 1991; Kraatz and Moore, 2002).

In order to better understand the relationship between actors and institutional pressure implementation, we believe that we need to integrate the topics of organizational strategic responsiveness, active agency and entrepreneurship with the investigation of the micro-level aspects of institutionalization (Zucker, 1977, Zilber, 2002). This analysis, by focusing on their patterns of social interactions, is useful in order to bring actors back in institutional change investigation. Barley and Tolbert (1997), basing on institutional theory and Giddens’ structuration theory (Giddens, 1976, 1979), highlighted the reciprocal constitutive relationship between scripts and institutions (Barley, 1986), where scripts are “observable, recurrent activities and pattern of interaction characteristic of a particular setting” (Barley and Tolbert, 1997: 98). They formulated a four steps model which foresees that institutional change occurs, under a condition of contextual change, when behaviors do not replicate, but revise the scripts that inform action (ibidem, 1997: 102). Johnson et al. (2000) further expanded this theorization by exploring the relation among scripts, behavior and institutional rules. In their study on the privatization of public sector, they theorized that organizational actors may implement institutional rules with different paces of adoption and with attitude of conflict or compliance. The rate and the patterns of adoption depend on their involvement in institutional change process, their interests in the process outcome, the degree to which they experience behaviors that are different from their own ones, and finally the extent to which they perceive that their enacted behavior is symbolically reinforced.

The investigation of Townley (2002) on the issue of different responses and implementation of institutional pressures could be somehow included in the discussion of micro processes (Dacin, et al., 2002). The author analyzed the interplay of competing rationalities characterizing myths and organizational members, focusing on the introduc-

tion of business planning and performance measures in a cultural organization. Moreover, he illustrated how institutional change may be explained by referring to conflict and convergence relationships between the rationalities underlying myths and those characterizing organizational members. Business planning and performance measures introduced forms of rationality that are somehow different from those of organizational members; the degree of conflicts between the rationalities may explain resistance or compliance responses to institutional pressures.

The analysis of strategic responsiveness, of organizational actors' role and of micro-processes of institutional change contributed to illustrate the importance acquired by actors' discretion towards institutional pressures in institutional analysis. Nevertheless, very few empirical studies investigated the topic of different patterns of adoption of institutional pressures (Goodstein, 1994; Townley, 2002; Kostova and Roth, 2002). Moreover, what is still unclear is how individual features (such as values) and contextual characteristics (such as the actors' power position in a network and the amount of resources they have) combine to determine a certain pattern of adoption.

In our study, we investigate the issue of different degrees of implementation of institutional pressures, aiming to highlight which individual and contextual characteristics are connected with the appearance of different patterns of adoption of networks. Our research aims at responding to the following question: which individual and contextual characteristics determine which pattern of adoption of networks?

### **Networks and competitiveness**

In the last ten years, the notion of competitiveness has often appeared, when scholars and practitioners studied museum organizations. In a context of decreasing resources in the Italian public sector and of increasing competition in the market of cultural services, also museums have to be competitive, in order to survive (Moretti, 1999). The notion of competition for museums corresponds to the goal of reaching financial and economical sustainability in a way that is consistent with the mission of contributing to the cultural growth of human kind (Jalla, 2000; Moretti, 1999).

The introduction of local networks in the Italian State and regional legislation (regional law 39/1974, 1/2000; State law, 112/1998) responds to the need to enable museums to be competitive in the above described way. In fact, networks may enable museums to reduce costs, to share resources and investments, in order to improve the quality of their cultural services. Several empirical studies on the effects of networking on museum competitiveness showed that the main observed consequences of networks on museums at national and European level (Bagdadli, 1997 and 2001; Provincia di Milano, 2001) were:

- the increase of visitors and revenues;
- the enrichment of the offering system;
- the increase of efficiency through the exploitation of scale economies (i.e. employees sharing);
- the increase of promotion activities;

- the increase of financial resources, public and private.

Based on these studies we want to observe how the different patterns affect the museum performance.

### 1.3 METHOD

#### Research context

In our investigation, we explore how actors affect the adoption of institutional pressures, determining the appearance of different patterns of implementation and the consequences of these patterns on organizational performance. The Italian museum sector represents an ideal setting to explore this issue. Recently, significant changes in institutional logics characterizing Italian museum occurred and novel managerial practices were introduced. In this early phase of institutionalization, the investigation of individual contribution to institutional change may be fruitful (Tolbert and Zucker, 1996).

In Italy there are about 3,500 museums, most of which are (70%) owned by public bodies, at a central, regional or municipal level. The public ownership and the legislative ambiguities caused a lack of autonomy and of identity for our museums (Jalla, 2000). Museums were often managed as offices of the public bodies they belonged to, without a separate budget and personnel, bounded to the resource availability and rhythm of the public sector, with no possibility to decide autonomously their cultural and financial strategy (Moretti, 1999).

The ambiguities of Italian legislation contributed to create uncertainty about museums identity. Since 1939, the year in which the Italian State promulgated its well-known preservation law (State law n.1089/1939) and which ruled the heritage sector till the 1997, it is possible to identify three main legislative stages (Moretti, 1999). The first stage ranges from the 40s to the 60s; it is the “start up” stage, during which museums were not recognized as autonomous organizations, but only as a set of artistic objects linked to the territory. Initiatives were essentially related to conservation, while the organizational and institutional aspects of museums were neglected. The second phase is the “central and local bodies re-organization” stage and occurred in the 70s. During this stage a central body, the Ministry for Cultural Goods, was created in order to govern all cultural initiatives, while more operative competences were transferred to the newly-created Regions, with the exception of those related to museums owned by the State. This decentralization, though, was not effective (Moretti, 1999). The third phase occurred in the 80s and is known as the “financing” stage, characterized by special projects, useful for temporary museum activities, but unable to clarify the institutional role of Italian museums and improve their economic conditions (Moretti, 1999; Jalla, 2000). In all these stages the museum remained an isolated institution, financially depending on public bodies, mostly deprived of all kind of autonomy.

Along the years museums continued to be considered as a “set of artistic objects [...] instead of a subject, able to organize activities and establish relations, a subject that,

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through the management of preserved objects, promotes knowledge diffusion” (Jalla, 2000: 70, italics in the text).

The lack of museum identity and of organic attention to the sector determined at the organizational level a condition of inefficiency and isolation: only 52% of Italian museums was open to the public, while about the other 50% was open only on demand, or was under constant restructuring. Museum budgets depended almost entirely on public funds, as revenues from visits or commercial activities represented a small percentage of the budget and attempts to enact resource-saving and differentiation were isolated (Bagdadli, 1997).

The reform of public sector organizations, which occurred in the 90s, modified the institutional context characterizing Italian museums. The focal aim of the reform was to improve the quality and efficiency of public organizations, in a context of decreasing financial resources and legitimacy for public services (Pollit and Bouckaert, 2002). The reform introduced a new definition of museums, similar to the ICOM one and able to recognize museums as subjects with a specific role in social education. <sup>1</sup> Moreover, it defined a real decentralization to the Regions of programming and control of museums located in their areas and, thus, defined a clearer distribution of competences. The reform promoted new structures of governance, more market-oriented (i.e. private foundations or associations), encouraged the creation of local networks, and defined quality standards. The State delegated to the Regions the task of implementing the accreditation procedure through which the performance of museums was assessed<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the increasing decentralization process of museum management from Central Government to the Regions, the regional level is particularly well suited for the analysis of institutional pressure effects on organizations.

Lombardia Region showed particular attention to museums since 1974, when it promulgated a law to classify them and stimulate cooperation<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, these initiatives were not organic and proved unable to significantly and homogeneously better museum economic conditions throughout the Region (ANMLI, 1998). Nowadays, Lombardia Region, coherently with the broader process of museum renewal at national

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<sup>1</sup> ICOM, the International Council of Museums, defines a museum as a stable, non-profit organization, open to the public, aimed at contributing to social development and education. Museums collect, preserve and exhibit humanity objects in order to promote study, education and entertainment. Our legislation adopted this definition in 1998 with the law 112/1998.

<sup>2</sup> The ministerial document on quality standards states that museums must 1) have a set of formal rules about their activities and an official act of constitution; 2) plan their financial and economical dynamics; 3) have accessible and adequate buildings; 4) employ a director, a curator, a responsible of the building and collection security; 5) guarantee the security of the collection, people and building; 6) preserve, promote, catalogue the collection; 7) create cultural services, more accessible to the public and promote additional services to improve the interaction with the public; 8) maintain relationship with its territory (cultural minister law, n. 10/2001). At the time of the investigation, Lombardia Region has already enacted the ministerial law on quality standards and created a process of accreditation. Accreditation has not been included in our analysis because the process was only at the beginning.

<sup>3</sup> The regional law 39/74 introduced the idea of local network to improve museum services, but it did not produce effects, because in the 70s both the national and the regional legislation were not adequate to favor network creation.

level, is favoring museum reform faster and more effectively than the other Italian Regions (Jalla, 2000; Valentino and Masetto, 2001). The Region fostered this process of renewal through the promotion of local networks among museums at provincial and regional level.

Through provincial networks, Lombardia Region intended to promote process of sharing resources among museums, in order to stimulate resources saving mechanisms and improve museum efficiency (regional law n. 1/2000). The role of Provinces was critic in network creation, because they were responsible for coordinating and co-financing the creation of networks in their own territories.

It is important to emphasize that not only the content and the objectives of regional initiatives changed, but also the process of communication and coordination of these initiatives evolved, becoming more collegial than in the past. Lombardia Region introduced the practices of working groups in each province in order to develop relationship and promote discussion among museum directors on the opportunity of creating local networks. Moreover, the reform created working groups at regional level including directors of main Lombardia museums, representatives of Italian museum associations and regional and provincial officers, to discuss and plan the general direction of museum renewal. Finally, the Region promoted meetings, including all museums and provinces, in order to introduce its program and to control its advancement.

The introduction of these practices promoted the emergence of new institutional pressures on Lombardia museums. This early phase of institutionalization is interesting to investigate how actors affect the implementation of the new organizational arrangements and with which consequences on their competitiveness (Zucker and Tolbert, 1996).

## Method

In order to analyze the issue of responses to institutional pressures we conducted a qualitative research on the introduction of local networks in museums located in Lombardia Region. Empirical investigation comprised document analysis and semi-structured interviews with those organizational actors responsible for the implementation of new practices: museum directors and public administrators at the provincial and regional level.

We analyzed documents related to the museum reform since 1999<sup>4</sup>: these included laws, financing projects, conference proceedings, documents submitted by museums to regional bodies, reports promoted by the Region. Document analysis was useful to clarify how the institutional context changed as well as to define the main instruments through which Lombardia Region promoted renewal. Document analysis was supplemented by interviews with the director of Cultural Department of Lombardia Region and with the representatives of the two main Italian associations (ANMLI and ICOM).

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<sup>4</sup> In 1999, Lombardia Region was preparing its general regional law (n.1/2000) on museum renewal. Thus, we adopted it as the initial mile stone of our analysis.

<sup>5</sup> "ANMLI" is the national association of local museums and institutions; it was founded in the 50s and included the directors of Italian museums, except those responsible of State museum



We asked interviewees to describe how the role of Lombardia Region changed with the reform of public sector and to clarify which were its main instruments of renewal, their content and objectives, and to define main differences with past regional initiatives concerning museums.

The core section of interviews included each responsible of the museum local network or cultural service of all the eleven Lombardia Provinces and the directors of the most important museums in each Province, according to their dimension and their cultural significance. We conducted a total of 25 in-depth, face-to-face interviews of about 90-120 minutes each, which were taped and transcribed.

We asked museum directors and provincial officers to narrate how they interpreted the introduction of local networks, highlighting their weaknesses and strengths. Secondly, we asked them whether and to what extent they enacted local networks, clarifying whether they were favorable or not and the advantages and disadvantages related to them. Finally we asked them to describe the main consequences they connected to the introduction of the network and we collected documental evidence about some main indicators of museum performance: increase of visitors and related revenues, costs reduction and resources sharing, development of the offering systems, ability to attract public and private resources.

## 1.5 RESULTS

By analyzing how organizational actors reacted to regional initiatives and enacted them, we identified the characteristics that could explain their behaviors in adopting institutional pressures.

In order to distinguish the different patterns of adoption of local networks and new forms of governance, we classified them in active, ceremonial and rejected adoption. These patterns differ, depending on whether actors enacted them or not, on the extent to which they implemented them, and on whether they showed a high involvement and commitment in practice implementation (Kostova and Roth, 2002). In order to highlight the dynamics of individual and contextual variables influencing organizational actors behavior towards institutional pressures, we consider as individual characteristics everything that is unique to the individual, such as values and experiences. On the other side, we consider as contextual characteristics the power position in a network and in the organization, the patterns of interactions, the amount of organizational resources the organizational actors have.

### **Patterns of adoption of Local networks**

The lack of personnel and financial resources made museums unable to improve their services or differentiate them in order to become more efficient and attractive to their public. The introduction of local networks aimed at stimulating the sharing of resources and activities among museums of the same provincial area. Furthermore, net-

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(15% of the total national museums). "ICOM Italia" is the national subsidiary of the international association. Lombardia Region involved these associations in the museum sector renewal.

works aimed at encouraging a cooperative mindset among museums, in order to break their tradition of isolation. The director of the cultural department of Lombardia Region explained the reasons for the introduction of networks:

We know that many museums are not able to improve their services and to follow the wave of innovation characterizing the cultural sector, because of their lack of resources and skills. Local networks allow museums to share costs and investments, increasing their efficiency and service quality. We know that professionals have difficulties to cooperate; they know each other, but usually they prefer to concentrate on their organizations, without establishing stable relations with the other museums, so we have to push the logic of partnership, if we want to help them.

The design of a network pilot study, co-financed by the Region and by each Province, preceded the realization of the network. Moreover, the creation of provincial working groups, formed by museum directors and province representatives, accompanied the process.

Our interviews revealed that networks were not realized in each province. Sometimes, enacted networks represented a symbolic effort, as museums shared only temporary and not critical activities or resources, such as the costs of producing a common brochure.

Provincial representatives and museum directors actively enacted local networks, under the following conditions:

- collaborative relationships pre-existed among museum directors;
- museums involved in the network were relatively large institutions, with a permanent collection and professional staff;
- the provinces provided enough financial and human resources to support the process of network creation;
- the working group practice was adopted with regularity;
- museum directors perceived advantages connected to the initiative;
- Museum directors believed that networking had a positive intrinsic value, not directly related to performance improvement, for their organizations.

A provincial officer and the director of the main provincial museum explained the active enactment of a local network with these words:

Before the Region initiative, I had already coordinated the creation of a tourist guide, including all museums of this area. I organized meetings and personally called all museum representatives to create the guide. I had worked at the regional office located in this province and I expressly asked to move at the provincial one, because I believed in this project and I shared its objectives. When the Region promulgated the law stimulating the creation of local networks, our directors already

knew each other. Moreover, we added financial resources to the regional ones faster than the other provinces. [...] In the provincial working groups there was a balance between the larger and the smaller museums, and I organized meetings with all museum directors not included in the working group. I felt that museum directors shared a common opinion about the advantages they may achieve through networking.

The provincial network is a “healthy path” for museums; we obtained visibility, we felt more deeply embedded in our territory and we rediscovered our mission of contributing to social education. I took part to both the provincial working group and the regional one, and I discussed and shared with other colleagues the advantages connected to the network.

On the contrary, we observed that networks were not created when:

- provincial administrators perceived that the financial resources offered by the Region for network enactment were not adequate to initiate the process, although they perceived the advantages related with networks;
- only a few museums in the provincial area employed stable personnel, while most were small organizations without a director;
- museum directors perceived that networking represented an additional cost, without any advantages;
- Museum directors did not believe in an intrinsic value of networking.

A provincial representative explained why they did not enact a local network with these words:

Here the picture on networks is really puzzling; the Region delegated us tasks and competences without any regularity, and without giving us enough money and people to create the provincial network. Without resources I could not believe in anything. [...] Our problem is that when I called museum directors to encourage this project, usually I did not find anybody. We have only one real museum and a set of small structures without stable personnel I could speak to. [...] And when I managed to discuss the project with a museum representative, the reaction was usually negative because a network requires additional efforts and costs, and the positive outcomes are not taken for granted.

The main museum director in this province described the failure of the project with these words:

[...] Of course, networking is possible, it could be great, but I sincerely think that through it my museum may not substantially improve its performance. Our visits are enough. I think that they might not “double” if I shared some initiatives with other museums. [...] I contributed to the

network pilot study, but what did it happen after it? Nothing. The Province did not take care of the project and there were not similar museums in our territory, with which we had something to share. Nowadays this museum has its visibility, its professionals and its educational projects are already attractive. I do not know to what degree the effort of networking could be useful in this situation.

Ceremonial adoption occurred when museum directors and provincial officers formally created a local network, but did not show any involvement in the project. Through these networks museums usually shared only temporary and not critical activities, such as the production of a brochure, and neglected to share personnel or to plan common educational and interactive services. Ceremonial adoption occurred when museum directors or provincial administrators were interested in the legitimacy and financial advantage that the creation of network could bring in the short run, but were skeptical about its real effectiveness in the long run as they did not believe that it had an intrinsic value. A museum director explained this issue with these words:

[...] I took part to both the network pilot study and to the creation of the network. Why not? The Region financed the project. To participate was a way to obtain funds and show our acceptance of its initiative, but local network was a constraining process, and not a spontaneous one, so I think that it may not produce significant effects on museums. We realized a common brochure, but this is not a network and anyone perceived the necessity to do more than this.

In synthesis, the actors we interviewed accepted and enacted, actively or ceremonially, the local network, when they perceived to obtain an advantage (performance improvement, financial resources, and reputation) from it. Moreover the active enactment occurred when the practice was already in the background of organizational actors, when they recognized a relational context favorable to the practice (museums were similar and capable of establishing relations), and in their experience (provincial and regional working groups) they had confirmation of their positive interpretation of the practice outcomes. In the absence of perception performance advantages and of support from local context, both museum and province representatives rejected the practice. The ceremonial enactment occurred when actors recognized a technical and legitimacy advantage in implementing the practice, but did not attribute to it any intrinsic value, because they perceived the practice as compulsory and not useful in the long run.

In Table 1, we synthesized the above described results, separating individual and contextual variables.

Table 1. Local Networks

		<b>Rejection</b>	<b>Ceremonial</b>	<b>Active</b>
<b>Individual</b>	<b>Values coherent with the logic underlying the practice</b>	Absence helpful	Absence necessary	Helpful
	<b>Past experience of the same arrangement or similar</b>	Unnecessary	Unnecessary	Helpful
<b>Contextual</b>	<b>Legitimization and financial support received from local context (Private or public)</b>	Absence necessary	Necessary	Necessary
	<b>Socialization with directors whose values and past experiences are coherent with a “private sector culture”</b>	Unnecessary	Unnecessary	Helpful
	<b>Perception of performance advantages connected to the networks</b>	Absence necessary	Necessary	Necessary
	<b>Big size and availability of internal resources</b>	Unnecessary	Unnecessary	Necessary

Table 1 We define a condition as ‘necessary and sufficient’ when it could alone explain the emergence of the pattern; ‘necessary’, when the condition is necessary, but alone is not enough to explain the phenomenon, ‘unnecessary’, when the condition is not critical for the occurrence of the pattern; ‘helpful’ when the condition is not critical, but, if present, may favor the emergence of the pattern.

### **Museum competitiveness**

Our observations showed that museums adopting actively local networks improved their performance in a long term perspective, while those that adopted them only ceremonially benefited increasing financial resources in a short term perspective.

In fact, even though the effects on museums performance are not yet completely appreciable (the process completed only one year ago), where the networks were actively implemented we could observe:

- an increase in the visitors, mainly from the local area;

- new promotional activities, such as the creation of common brochures and brand;
- an enlargement of the offering system through the organization of new exhibitions and events;
- the restoration of some main buildings;
- an increase of funds from local bodies

Moreover we observed

- the birth of a sense of belonging to a common enterprise among the museums

When the networks were implemented only ceremonially we observed that the funds associated with the implementation were used only to create a brochure where there were not common initiatives, but a presentation of each museum belonging to the provincial territory. Sometimes the financial resources were only redistributed among the museums of the province. Hence, even though it was possible to observe an increase in the resources of the museums, they were not related with long term projects, but only to a one-shot initiative, not able to increase their competitiveness.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study aimed at analyzing how organizational actors respond to institutional pressures and the consequences of the different patterns of implementation on museum performance.

We discovered that the perception of advantages connected with the enactment of the practice, the adequate size of museums involved in the process, the availability of organizational resources, and the legitimacy and financial support that directors may receive from local context, have to be necessarily present for active adoption to occur. These findings illustrated that the process of institutionalization begins with the enactment of arrangements that are useful to respond to a set of problems (Zucker and Tolbert, 1996), and that responses to institutional pressures may depend on resources and legitimacy advantages related with the implementation (Oliver, 1991). Nevertheless, the emergence of a calculating logic is not enough to distinguish the active adoption from the rejection and from the ceremonial patterns. To explain the active enactment of the practices, we have to integrate the issue of actors' interests and functional advantages with the museum directors' values. In fact, we observed that directors' values have to be coherent to the logic underlying the new practices, in order to determine the appearance of the active pattern.

As far as the patterns of socialization of museum directors and their experience of similar arrangements are concerned, we observed that these variables contributed to increase the commitment of the actors to the new practices and favored the active adoption. Nevertheless, they did not decisively influence the pattern of rejection and of ceremonial adoption. These findings confirmed that the degree of adoption of new institutional arrangements could be interpreted by monitoring the social processes through which individual scripts change or remain stable (Johnson et al. 2000), but highlighted

that while these issues are useful to catalyze the active adoption, they are not able to discriminate among the three patterns we considered.

Our investigation also showed that the combination of individual and contextual variables is different for ceremonial and rejection patterns. In particular, we observed that ceremonial patterns differ from active patterns as to the importance of museums directors' values and of the museum size and commercial exploitability. The enactment of local networks was only symbolic when directors recognized the economic advantages and the reputation and financial support connected with the enactment, but did not believe in the intrinsic value of the arrangement. Moreover, we observed that the size and the commercial exploitability of the museums were not relevant in the ceremonial adoption: directors did not believe in the practices, as they only wanted to gain the financial and symbolic advantages connected with them, so that the effective applicability of the practice to their organizations was not important.

The lack of resource availability in the organization and in the local context, was a factor that determined the occurrence of the rejection pattern. In this case, museum directors' values do not have a decisive influence, because power relations and ability to gain access to resource are more important. Thus, while the value commitment to the practice may discriminate between the ceremonial and the active adoption, under the above-mentioned conditions, this variable is not so influent in understanding the pattern of rejection.

Our analysis showed the importance of contextual variables such as the availability of resources and legitimacy from the local context, the support from the subject covering the dominant power position, the size and financial resource of the organization. If these practices are present, we may observe that museum directors adopt (ceremonially or actively) the local network. On the other side, if these variables are absent, museum directors reject the practices. Moreover, we observed that the role of individual variables, such as values and past experience, are useful to discriminate between ceremonial and active pattern, when the above-mentioned contextual conditions determine the adoption instead of the rejection. In fact, the existence of values, coherent with the new practices, may increase the commitment of museum directors to the practice and determine the occurrence of the active adoption, instead of the ceremonial one.

As far as museum competitiveness is concerned, we found out that the active implementation of local networks improved museum performance, enabling them to assume a long term perspective. On the other side the ceremonial adoption allowed museum to enjoy financial resources, but it did not contribute to the improvement of their competitiveness. The rejection of local networks cut museum off the process of renewal.

## **1.6 CONCLUSIONS**

Recent findings about institutional change emphasized the role of organizational actors in affecting institutional change, and clarified the characteristics and activities that enable them to initiate and respond to institutional logics transformation (Lawrence, 1999; Hoffman, 1999; Johnson, et al., 2000; Jones, 2001; Garud et al., 2002; Lawrence and Phillips, 2004; Maguire, et al. 2004). However, these studies analyzed the individual contribution to change by embracing a unique perspective. On the one hand, re-

search emphasized the role of contextual and relational variables, such as that of actors' power position and control on critical resources (Leblebici et al., 1991; Hoffman, 1999), as well as the role of the patterns of social interaction in which individuals are involved (Johnson et al., 2000). On the other hand, research focused on individual characteristics, such as actors' interests and social skills (Fligstein, 1991; Brint and Karabel, 1991) and career background (Kraatz and Moore, 2002). However, these studies did not specifically analyze how all these variables combine and influence the results of institutional change, thus determining the appearance of different patterns of adoption of institutional pressures. Moreover, these studies did not analyze the consequences of the different patterns on the organizational performance.

Our study contributed to the development of the institutional change issue, by focusing on actors' role in determining different patterns of adoption of institutional pressures, by illustrating that different combination of individual and contextual characteristics may influence different responses to institutional demands, and by showing the effect of these responses on organizational performance. The analysis of the distribution of power position, of interests in the legitimacy and resources advantages, of values, of support from the local context may be important to different degrees in order to explore the implementation of institutional practices and forms. Thus, an integration of different perspectives of analysis could be more suitable for the analysis of actors' role in the implementation of institutional demands than the adoption of a unique perspective.

This research presents several limits. First, as we analyzed patterns of adoption and individual characteristics in an early phase of institutionalization, it could be useful to repeat our interviews in a stage of institutional stability, in order to clarify how the role of different characteristics may change with the increasing power of institutions. Secondly, we have to better clarify the distribution of power positions in the museum population, which are the critical resources in its environment, and how the patterns of social interaction of museum directors and public manager influence their interpretations of new institutional arrangements. Moreover, we have to increase the number of actors involved in the investigation, including directors of smaller and less important museums and groups, such as private local firms. This could be useful to illustrate to what extent variables such as organizational dimension, centrality and linkages with financing actors could be crucial in explaining patterns of adoption.

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