

Assessing the impact of cultural ecosystem observation on regional policy making for the live performing arts in Italy.

Maria Lusiani - maria.lusiani@unive.it

Fabrizio Panozzo - bauhaus@unive.it

Andrea Santini - andrea.santini@unive.it

Department of Management, Ca' Foscari University, Venice

Keywords

Cultural observation, cultural policy, evidence based policy

Abstract

Apparently, cultural observation and data analysis have gained prominence in informing cultural policy making, as governments increasingly demand the production of data about culture. But the production of evidence is one thing, its use another. *How* governments use the data produced by cultural observatories remains an open question. This study delves into the specific context of regional cultural policy for live performing arts in Italy, aiming at exploring the intricate relationship between cultural observation and policymaking. The purpose is to understand how data informs policymaking and whether evidence-based policy is applied in the cultural sector. The research adopts a qualitative research design, incorporating document analysis and a focus group to build two case studies. The Observatories of Piemonte and Emilia Romagna, along with the related regional cultural policies for the performing arts, have been chosen as the most consolidated and prolific in the context of Italy. The findings suggest that cultural policies are not driven by the evidence that is asked to be produced, and that the relationship between cultural observation and policymaking is strong, but is to be found, increasingly, in the production of data for impact assessment analyses to support political agendas. However, behind the scenes of this apparent reversal of the logic (policy-driven evidence production, rather than evidence-driven policymaking), there is a strenuous work of cultural observatories in cultivating a continuous dialogue with the civil servants and bureaucrats that often play a key role in remaining attached to the territory and in - invisibly - influencing the direction of political agendas.

1. Background: the practice of cultural observation

Cultural observatories are organisations that systematically monitor and study various aspects of culture, including arts, heritage, cultural industries, and creative sectors. The phenomenon emerged in the 1960s and peaked in the 1990s.

The observatories serve as knowledge hubs and research centres that collect, analyse, and disseminate information related to cultural trends, practices, and policies.

These organisations often collaborate with government agencies, universities, cultural institutions, and other stakeholders to gather data, conduct research, and produce reports on cultural indicators, economic impact, audience engagement, cultural diversity, and other relevant topics.

Cultural observatories can operate at different levels, ranging from local or regional observatories focused on specific geographic areas or themes to national or international observatories, such as UNESCO's, that cover broader contexts and often act as promoters and facilitators of other localised observation practices. Their activities may include monitoring cultural activities and events, conducting surveys and studies, collecting and analysing data, publishing research findings, and providing recommendations for cultural planning and development.

A mapping project directed by Cristina Ortega-Nuere in 2009 identified more than 100 cultural observatories active at that time worldwide, with significant concentrations in Europe and South America. Such a variety of observation practices also implies different motivations for observing and different ways in which the results of the observation are interpreted and integrated into policies.

1.1 Why observe

A central theme for inquiry in cultural observation revolves around the rationale behind the commitment of efforts and resources by public and private entities to monitor cultural trends. In essence, what is the underlying objective for collecting such data?

The primary objective of cultural observatories' data collection is, historically, twofold: to create taxonomies for cultural analysis and to assess the economic impact of culture. These endeavours seek to validate culture as a significant sector of the economy, warranting attention and funding. This approach gained momentum following the introduction of the UK Creative Industries Mapping Documents in 1998 and 2001, which introduced the concept of "creative industries" and categorised them accordingly. Subsequently, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) began publishing annual national reports on the economic estimates for the creative industries.

This led to a period characterised by widespread practices of measuring and demonstrating the economic and occupational implications of cultural policies and investments. During this time, several models and taxonomies for cultural analysis were developed by scholars such as Throsby (2000), NESTA (2006), Work Foundation (Jowell and Hutton 2007), UNCTAD (2008), UNESCO (2009), ESSnet-CULTURE (2012), among others. These frameworks aimed to provide effective categorizations of the cultural sector, encompassing its intricate complexities.

However, in the decade spanning from 2010 to 2020, a gradual shift occurred towards integrating network and relationship analyses, moving away from a sole focus on economic impact. This shift aimed to examine the internal dynamics of the sector and the ripple effects in terms of social impact and cultural welfare. This evolving approach informed the development of new "data-driven" cultural policies. Scholars such as Redaelli (2015), Markusen (2011), Bazalgette (2014), and Holden (2015) contributed to discussions on culture as a complex ecosystem, underscoring the significance of comprehending interdependencies within the sector and evaluating social impact, well-being, participation, and inclusivity in cultural practices.

Recent literature even introduces the concept of Creative and Cultural Ecologies and Ecosystems (CCEEs) as a more encompassing replacement for the static notions of Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) that previously dominated discussions (de Bernard, Comunian, and Gross 2022). This highlights the necessity for a more comprehensive understanding of culture as a dynamic system rather than merely an economic sector.

In conclusion, the purpose of cultural observation data has undergone a transformation over time. While initially focused on economic impact analysis and the validation of culture as a significant sector, there has been a shift towards examining networks, relationships, and social impacts. The emerging concept of culture as a complex ecosystem underscores the need for new frameworks and perspectives to grasp the multifaceted nature of the cultural sector.

1.2 Global context and perspective: from New Public Management to Evidence Based policy

New Public Management (NPM) and Evidence-Based Policy (EBP) are two approaches to public policy that have evolved over time. NPM emerged in the 1980s as a response to concerns about inefficiencies and bureaucracy in public sector organisations. It emphasised market-based mechanisms, performance measurement, and accountability, with the goal of improving efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public services.

Evidence-Based Policy, on the other hand, emerged in the UK in the late 1990s (see Lægreid, P. P., & Christensen, P. T. (2000) and Hadorn, S. et al. (2022)) as a response to a perceived lack of evidence-based decision-making in policy development. EBP emphasises the use of rigorous research and data to inform policy decisions, with the goal of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public policies.

While NPM and EBP share some similarities, they also represent distinct approaches to public policy. NPM emphasises managerialism and market-based mechanisms, while EBP emphasises the importance of evidence and research in policy development. In practice, however, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be complementary.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of evidence-based decision-making in public policy. Governments around the world are increasingly adopting EBP principles in their policy development processes, including the use of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and other research methods.

One example of this shift towards EBP is the UK's What Works network, which aims to promote the use of evidence in policy development across a range of sectors, including education, health, and social welfare. The network includes a number of research centres that provide policymakers with evidence-based guidance and advice.

Evidence-based policy approaches have been also employed in the cultural sector to inform decision-making and support the development of effective policies. In the United Kingdom, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) collaborates with Nesta's Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) to generate research-based insights and authoritative recommendations. The PEC aims to contribute to the success of the UK's creative industries by providing independent research and evidence that informs policy development. Similarly, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has established the Cultural Evidence Portal, which serves as a valuable resource offering a wide range of data and research on cultural participation as well as the economic and societal impact of culture. This portal, along with initiatives like the Culture and Heritage Capital portal, facilitates evidence-based decision-making by providing policymakers with reliable information. Another application of evidence-based approaches can be seen in cultural heritage conservation. Conservation scientists employ scientific analysis to determine optimal preservation methods for cultural artefacts, while social scientists explore the impact of cultural heritage on local communities. Other international examples include the Ontario Arts Council's evidence-based arts education policy, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, and the European Union's Creative Europe program, all of which integrate research and evidence into their policymaking processes.

1.3 Cultural observation and policymaking in Italy

Italy stands out among other countries with its extensive presence of regional cultural observatories. According to Taormina (2011), this phenomenon originated in the late 1970s when the Regions were granted greater legislative autonomy through Presidential Decree 616 of 1977. The first regional observatory projects started to emerge in the late 1980s, notably in Lombardy (1988), Emilia-Romagna (1993), Piedmont (1998) and the autonomous province of Trento (1987).

In 1985, Law 163, Article 5 established the Performing Arts Fund (Fondo Unico per lo Spettacolo) and the National Observatory for the Performing Arts. The purpose was to collect data, identify trends, and provide relevant information to legislative bodies for effective public expenditure planning. The initial activities of some regional observatories, like Emilia-Romagna, focused on the live performing arts sector (theatre, circus, dance, opera) due to its well-established presence and significance.

Between 2007 and 2010, interest in cultural observation resurfaced with the presentation of the interregional project 'ORMA' to the Ministry of Culture (MiC). This project aimed to create regional performing arts observatories coordinated with the national observatory. Notably, it proposed a unified data collection model based on three thematic areas: audience dynamics, expenditure on the

performing arts, and the economic and occupational dimensions of the sector. The project suggested various statistical sources for data collection.

After undergoing a lengthy process, the project was finally proposed as a law in 2019 through House Bill n.1582. This bill mentioned the establishment of the National Networked System of Observatories of the Performing Arts and was subsequently included in Law No. 106 of 15 July 2022. This law mandated the creation of a National Networked System of Observatories of the Performing Arts and introduced a national register for professionals in the performing arts. It also called for an enhanced national performing arts observatory to replace the one established in 1985. The new observatory's responsibilities include monitoring trends in performing arts activities, total annual expenditure, working conditions, show organisation and performance procedures, labour market trends, and types of contracts.

However, due to the fall of the Draghi government in late 2022, the implementation of the law has been halted, and the deadline for regions to activate the network has passed. As a result, Italy currently operates under the old system. To this date 15 out of 21 regions in Italy have formally established cultural observatories but, notably, most of these are not active. This is the case of Veneto Region and its observatory, which is currently the subject of a larger study on cultural ecosystem observation in our department.

The cultural sector in Italy benefits from various sources of data and information provided by different observatories and institutions. The National Observatory focuses on the use of the FUS fund and publishes an annual report that details the beneficiaries and funds allocated to different sectors such as opera, theatre, music, dance, and more. The Panorama Spettacolo project, launched in 2013, conducts in-depth studies on specific themes related to performing arts and film. These publications utilise data from the Italian Society of Authors and Publishers (SIAE), which collects information on ticketing, audience participation, and investment in entertainment. SIAE's comprehensive data covers all municipalities in the country, providing a thorough analysis of performance venues and event organisers.

At the national level Italy benefits from a range of observatories and institutions that provide data and analysis on different aspects of the cultural sector, including funding, audience participation, workers, economic impact, and international comparisons.

The National Social Security Institute (INPS) has its observatory focusing on performing arts workers. The dataset, updated monthly, includes information on the number of workers, remuneration, and hours worked across various professional categories. The Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) follows European standards and publishes cultural statistics on various aspects, including museums, libraries, performing arts, audiovisual sectors, employment, and spending. The data, largely aggregated by macro-area or region, is sourced from multiple entities such as SIAE, the Ministry of Culture, and Chambers of Commerce. Additionally, ISTAT conducts surveys on specific themes and releases unaggregated data for studies conducted on museums, libraries, and household surveys.

Fondazione Symbola collaborates with Unioncamere, the Marche Region, and the Tagliacarne Study Centre to publish the annual report "Io sono cultura" (I am culture). This report focuses on economic dimensions of the cultural and creative sector, including added value, the cultural supply chain's impact on the National Gross Domestic Product, invoicing, supply costs, and the number of companies and employees. Symbola's model is inspired by Throsby's concentric circle model and encompasses various cultural and creative activities. The report combines statistical data from Unioncamere with surveys and thematic research by independent experts in the field. It also offers international perspectives by comparing data and models from other countries.

Collaborations and partnerships between these entities and regional observatories can enhance data collection, analysis, and harmonisation for effective evidence-based policies but, as we have seen, an effective implementation is still hindered by the political context.

2 Methodology

The study employs an exploratory qualitative research design to examine the relationship between cultural observation and policymaking through two case studies in Italy: Piemonte and Emilia-Romagna, which have well-established cultural observatories. The analysis incorporates a systematic review of each region's Cultural Policies, funding calls, deliberations, and reports published by the cultural observatories from 2015 to 2023. The study benefits from the comprehensive analytical work conducted by Gallina and Ponte di Pino (2023) on regional cultural laws. Calls for funding targeting the live performing arts were collected from the regional administration websites, aligning with the focus of a larger study on the Performing Arts ecosystem in Veneto. It is important to note that Italy has an observatory specifically for live performing arts at the national level, rather than a comprehensive cultural observatory. The time frame of the analysis was determined based on the availability of documents from the two regions' administration portals and cultural observatory webpages.

The funding and deliberation documents were analysed, extracting key parameters such as publication date, reference framework law, call/deliberation details, applicants and eligibility criteria, funded project types and objectives, available funds, main evaluation criteria, eligible expenditure, and percentage of project covered by funding. The cultural observatories' reports were analysed based on publication date, focus or themes, frequency, summary analysis and highlights, methodology, and links to source documents.

A total of 25 law, deliberation, and funding documents and 29 observatory reports were screened for Emilia-Romagna, while 12 law, deliberation, and funding documents and 7 observatory reports were analysed for Piedmont. The smaller number of documents for Piedmont is due to the region's and observatory's tendency to publish information on a yearly basis, whereas Emilia-Romagna has a significant number of thematic reports in addition to annual publications. The comparative analysis of these documents aimed to identify evidence of correlation between observation results and

subsequent policy and funding documents. Although limited evidence was found, potential connections were highlighted, and a list of points for clarification and discussion was generated for a focus group.

Participants in the focus group held on Wednesday, May 10th 2023, included the Director of OCP (Osservatorio Culturale del Piemonte), OCP's research coordinator and the former director of the Emilia-Romagna Regional Performing Arts Observatory, now a member of the Superior Council of Performing Arts of the Ministry of Culture. The focus group discussion centred around the origins of the observatories, their relationship with the regional administration, and the dynamics of their influence on the policymaking process. The extent to which policies are informed by cultural observation practices was also explored. The findings are presented in the case study reports and discussed in the subsequent analysis.

3. Case studies

3.1 Emilia Romagna

The culture and creativity observatory

This regional observatory is one of Italy's longest-running and highly regarded institutions in the field. It was established in 1993 and formalised by a regional law in 1999, initially focusing on the performing arts sector under the management of A.T.E.R. (Associazione Teatrale Emilia Romagna, now known as the ATER Foundation), an external body involved in regional administration. The Performing Arts Observatory operates its own online portal and is responsible for conducting a census and mapping of performing arts subjects, venues, and spaces. It also collects and processes periodic data on supply and demand, funding, employment, and conducts thematic research based on surveys and data provided by the national institute of statistics.

Since 2019, the Performing Arts Observatory has been integrated into a shared governance project with ART-ER (Attractiveness Research Territory of Emilia-Romagna), which focuses on research in the Cultural and Creative Sector, and with the Beni e Istituti Culturali (BIC) cultural heritage Observatory. This integration has resulted in the creation of a new portal featuring analytical reports and interactive data visualisation dashboards that provide an overview of the region's cultural and creative ecosystem. The portal highlights the collaboration with INPS and SIAE, which enables access to custom localised datasets. In addition to statistical data, the portal also includes thematic in-depth studies, such as research on the financial and innovation needs of CCIs in Emilia-Romagna, with a focus on Music and Audiovisual in 2019 and Live Entertainment in 2020. These studies employ a bottom-up approach, involving semi-structured interviews with representative entities to facilitate qualitative in-depth analysis. Notably, these surveys give significance to Cultural Associations, acknowledging their role without diminishing their professional status, unlike trends observed in other regions like Veneto and Lombardy. The 2020 survey on performing arts confirms the limitations of

economic impact assessments and the emerging trend of considering broader benefits for the community, integrated territorial development, and social cohesion (ART-ER, 2020).

The document analysis for this region revealed some indications of potential, though implicit, correlation. The sources taken into account are listed (with translated titles) in table 1.

<i>Table 1: document analysis list for Emilia-Romagna</i>	
A- Regione Emilia-Romagna: Live Performing Arts Observatory reports (2015-2023)	
01.	"Performing Arts Venues 2022"
02.	"Employment in the Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna, Data 2020-2021"
03.	"Analysis of the Demand and Supply of Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna 2021"
04.	"Regional and State Funding for Live Performing Arts Activities 2021"
05.	"Cultural Scope in Emilia-Romagna: Sources of Funding (2014-2022) for Regional Entities Engaged in the Performing Arts Sector, in addition to those from public sources."
06.	"Analysis of the Demand and Supply of Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna 2020"
07.	"Regional and State Funding for Live Performing Arts Activities 2021"
08.	"Analysis of the Demand and Supply of Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna 2019"
09.	"Employment in the Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna in 2019"
10.	"Employment in the Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna in 2018"
11.	"Performing Arts Venues 2018"
12.	"Regional and State Funding for Live Performing Arts Activities 2019"
13.	"Analysis of the Demand and Supply of Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna 2018"
14.	"Overall Report 2017"
15.	"State Funding for Live Performing Arts Activities 2018"
16.	"Regional Funding for Live Performing Arts Activities 2018"
17.	"Analysis of the Demand and Supply of Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna 2017"
18.	"Employment in the Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna in 2017"
19.	"Overall Report 2016"
20.	"Employment in the Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna in 2016"
21.	"Economic Trends of Entities funded by the Emilia-Romagna Region in 2016, according to Regional Law 13/99 'Regulations on Performing Arts.'"
22.	"State Funding for Live Performing Arts Activities 2017"
23.	"Regional Funding for Live Performing Arts Activities 2017"
24.	"Analysis of the Demand and Supply of Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna 2016"
25.	"Analysis of the Demand and Supply of Performing Arts in Emilia-Romagna 2015"
26.	"Performing Arts Venues 2016"
27.	"Regional Funding for Live Performing Arts Activities 2016"
28.	"State Funding for Live Performing Arts Activities 2016"
29.	"Overall Report 2015"
30.	
B- Regione Emilia-Romagna - Deliberations (D.G.R.) for funding calls (2015-2023)	
01.	(2023) D.G.R. 123/2023 - LR 37/94 - Invitation addressed to municipalities with a population exceeding 50,000 inhabitants to submit cultural promotion projects - Year 2023.
02.	(2023) D.G.R. 71/2023 - L.R. 37/94 - Notice for cultural promotion activities - Year 2023.
03.	(2022) D.G.R. 1020/2022 - Training for live performance professionals - Year 2022.
04.	(2022) D.G.R. 1375/2022 - LR 13/99 - Notice for the submission of projects related to live performance activities.
05.	(2022) D.G.R. 1837/2022 - L.R. 13/1999 - Notice for the submission of projects related to investment expenses in the performing arts sector.
06.	(2022) D.G.R. 478/2022 - L.R. 13/99 - Notice for the submission of projects related to a residency centre and artist residencies in the territories for the period 2022-2024.
07.	(2020) D.G.R. 1710/2020 - Training for live performance professionals - Second call
08.	(2019) D.G.R. 648/2019 - Training for live performance professionals - First call((2019)
09.	(2019) Public notice for the submission of initiatives aimed at the knowledge and enhancement of historic theatres in Emilia-Romagna. A scena aperta 2019.
10.	(2018) D.G.R. 14/2018 - Update of the list of accredited organisations pursuant to D.G.R. no. 1427 of October 2, 2017, and the list of accredited organisations for compulsory education under DGR 2046/2010 and for the performing arts sector.
11.	(2018) D.G.R. 483/2018 - Training for live performance professionals - Third call.
12.	(2017) D.G.R. 132/2017 - Approval of new qualifications in the field of performing arts for "Instrumentalist Musician" and "Technician in Performing Arts (Performer)," pursuant to D.G.R. no. 2166/05.
13.	(2017) D.G.R. 1776/2015 - Training for live performance professionals - First call.
14.	(2017) D.G.R. 559/2017 - Training for live performance professionals - Second call.
15.	(2016) D.G.R. 1154/2016 - Approval of new qualifications in the field of performing arts for "Costume Designer" and "Director," pursuant to D.G.R. no. 2166/05.
16.	(2016) D.G.R. 1640/2016 - Approval of new qualifications in the field of performing arts for "Rigger" and "Event Organizer Technician," pursuant to D.G.R. no. 2166/05.
17.	(2016) D.G.R. 899/2016 - Approval of new qualifications in the field of performing arts for "Dance Master," "Set Designer," "Lighting Technician," and "Sound Technician," pursuant to D.G.R. no. 2166/05.
18.	
C- Regione Emilia-Romagna - Regional Laws (L.R.)	
01.	(2015) L.R. 13/1999 - Regulations on Performing Arts (amended by LR 4/2021).
02.	(2023) L.R. 37/1994 - Regulations on Cultural Promotion (text amended by LR 3/2023).
03.	(2018) L.R. 2/2018 - Regulations on the Development of the Music Sector.
04.	(2018) L.R. 11/2018 - Coordinated provisions on culture.
05.	(2019) L.R. 14/2008 - Regulations on Policies for the New Generations (text amended by LR 17/2019).
06.	(2019) Regional Program on Performing Arts (L.R. 13/1999). Objectives, priorities, actions, and implementation guidelines for the 2019-2021 triennium - Regional Council Resolution 1986/2019.
07.	(2022) L.R. 3/2016 'Memory of the Twentieth Century. Promotion and Support for activities related to the valorization of the history of the Twentieth Century in Emilia-Romagna.'
08.	(2022) Regional Program on Performing Arts (L.R. 13/1999). Objectives, priorities, actions, and implementation guidelines for the 2022-2024 triennium - Regional Council Resolution 43/2022.

Key findings from our analysis of the above documents are summarised below with references to the listed sources in brackets.

The 2018 (A-11) and 2022 (A-01) reports on performing arts venues, as well as the Analysis of the demand and supply of entertainment in Emilia-Romagna 2021 (A-03), emphasise the territorial analysis of the ratio between the number of venues and events and the population size of municipalities above or below 50,000 inhabitants. In 2023, two funding calls for cultural promotion projects were issued under Regional Law 37/94 (C-02), differentiating funding approaches, amounts, and destinations based on the 50,000 inhabitant threshold: (B-02) targeting municipalities above 50000 inhabitants and (B-01) targeting those with greater population.

The 2022 report on performing arts venues (A-01) examines building maintenance, features, and internet connectivity. In the same year, within the framework of Law 13/99 (C-01) the region published a funding call (B-05) for the restoration, renovation, and enhancement of performing arts venues, including technological innovation.

The 2017 overall report (A-14) discusses professional roles in the sector, noting that leaving the artistic profession as one gets older may be common in certain fields (e.g., dance) but not in others like drama and music, which attract young novices but have selective requirements for professional commitment. Interestingly, since 2015, the region has been issuing annual calls specifically targeting "professional development" and acknowledgement of performing arts workers categories. (B-3,7,8,11,12,13,14,15,16,17)

During the focus group, the former director of the Emilia-Romagna observatory confirmed that observatory representatives have attended regional council board meetings, where they were informally asked to provide advice on areas deserving attention. He also mentioned that while the preface of Regional Law 13 and 39 acknowledges the role of the observatory, no tangible evidence exists to indicate the actual utilisation of its findings. Our guest further highlighted that Emilia-Romagna is the only region with a Performing Arts Statistical Information System (SIS) contributing to the state's statistical network (SISTAN).

3.2 *Piedmont*

Cultural Observatory of Piedmont

The Cultural Observatory of Piedmont (OCP) is another significant example in Italy. Unlike other observatories, OCP was not established by a regional law. Instead, it was created in 1998 through a memorandum of understanding between the Piedmont Region and various entities, including the City of Turin, banking foundations such as Cassa di Risparmio di Torino and San Paolo, the Turin Chamber of Commerce, Unioncamere Piemonte, AGIS, and the Piedmont Institute for Economic and

Social Research (IRES). The Fitzcarraldo Foundation, an independent research centre, manages research, training, and publications. Taormina (2011) and Dal Pozzolo (in Taormina, 2011) emphasise that keeping the observatory separate from the regional administration ensures scientific autonomy and impartial analysis and evaluation processes.

OCP adopts a comprehensive perspective on culture, examining various sector parameters:

- Cultural participation and consumption behaviour, analysed through ISTAT data and thematic sample questionnaires targeting residents (approximately 1500 subjects).
- Monitoring of cultural and creative enterprises (Culture Core), utilising data from Fondazione Symbola - Unioncamere and integrating in-depth interviews, panels with industry operators and experts, and online surveys for sector operators
- Economic resources for the cultural sector, including analysis of FUS funding, regional and municipal funding, CPT (Territorial Public Accounts) data, and contributions from banking foundations.
- Libraries, surveyed through a specific questionnaire distributed to administrators.
- Museums and cultural heritage, leveraging a customised regional data bank on museum visits to analyse cultural demand over a broad time frame.
- Temporary exhibitions, monitored through Art Newspaper rankings and specific questionnaires.
- Live entertainment, focusing on the regional system of professional theatre production and utilising a combination of SIAE data and sector funding information.
- Cinema, based on Cinetel and AGIS Piemonte data.

Additionally, OCP has conducted four surveys on the effects of the pandemic involving around 800 organisations. Unlike the Emilia-Romagna observatory, OCP does not have an interactive data consultation platform. However, its well-structured website provides easy access to all reports produced since 1998.

The analysis of the documents gathered for Piedmont (see list in Table 2) did not reveal any clear correlation. During the focus group, OCP's director confirmed that the majority of the data gathered in Piedmont is informally conveyed to the administration through direct connections with bureaucrats and executives, a process which he poignantly defined as 'percolation' of information. This process is based on civil servants and bureaucrats informally asking the observatory for specific advice and, despite leaving no official trace, it does lead the administration to make informed choices and gain awareness of the cultural sector.

Besides this informal passing of information in the interstices between observatories, civil servants, and bureaucrats our guests mentioned various examples of structured collaboration. These include the Region's use of statistical data in the evaluation phase of the Regional Economic and Financial

Document (DEFR) and funding policies, the observatory's involvement in the development of the current Cultural Legislation, a collaboration with the National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) that has led to the coordination of the process of accreditation of museums for funding allocations and the development of simulations to help the region define library funding allocation based on territorial analysis of the number of inhabitants and book borrowing volumes.

<i>Table 2: document analysis list for Piedmont</i>	
A - Regione Piemonte - Cultural Observatory (OCP) Reports (2015-2023)	
01.	Annual Report 2021-22
02.	Annual Report 2020/21
03.	Annual Report 2019/20
04.	Annual Report 2018
05.	Annual Report 2017
06.	Annual Report 2016
07.	Annual Report 2015
B - Regione Piemonte - Funding calls (2015-2023)	
01.	Live performance - Public funding announcement - Invitation to submit projects related to production activities in the field of Live Performance - Triennium 2022/2024. Year 2022.
02.	Live performance - Public funding announcement - Invitation to submit projects related to programming and promotion of Live Performance - Triennium 2022/2024. Year 2022.
03.	Programs for the promotion of cultural activities, linguistic heritage, and performing arts - Public funding announcement for the year 2021 targeting private organizations, public administrations, and businesses - Regional laws 11/2018 and 13/2020.
04.	Programs for the promotion of cultural activities, linguistic heritage, and performing arts - Public funding announcement for the year 2020 targeting private organizations, public administrations, and businesses - Regional laws 11/2018 and 13/2020.
05.	Professional Theater - Public funding announcement for the year 2019 targeting theater associations, theater companies, and similar entities - Regional Law 11 of August 1, 2018.
06.	Invitation to submit projects for the promotion of theater activities - Year 2018 - Regional Law 58/78.
07.	"Presentation of projects for the enhancement of street art for the year 2018 - Regional Law No. 17/2003."
08.	Public funding announcement for the promotion of prose theater activities - Regional Law No. 68 of 1980 and DPGR No. 4/R of June 201, 2005.
09.	Public funding announcement - Regional Law No. 58 of August 28, 1978 - D.G.R. No. 19-3472 of June 13, 2016. Invitation to submit projects for the promotion and enhancement of cultural and linguistic heritage - year 2016.
C - Regione Piemonte - Regional Laws (L.R.) and decrees	
01.	Regional Law 11/2018 - Coordinated provisions on culture.
02.	Regional Decree 227/2022 - Approval of the three-year cultural program for the years 2022-2024, pursuant to Article 6 of Regional Law of August 1, 2018, No. 11 (Coordinated provisions on culture).
03.	Regional Law 58/1978 - Promotion of the protection and development of cultural activities and assets. (Amended by Regional Law 03/2015)

4. Discussion

The main aspect that emerges from our analysis is that, even in the case of Emilia-Romagna and Piemonte, regions with consolidated observatories that certainly stand out as best practices in the context of cultural observation in Italy, the way in which cultural observation data informs cultural policy is not regulated by formal processes and tends not to leave a clear trace in official documents and reports. Our focus group discussion revealed that in the majority of cases the information is passed on, often informally, to individual executives. Even in the case of Emilia-Romagna, where representatives of the observatory take part in regional council board meetings and where our analysis has revealed some evidence of a correlation between the observatory's reports and the funding calls that followed, there is hardly any official reference to specific data being taken into account to explicitly inform policy making.

Apparently, then, the possibility of a transparent EBP approach in Italy is hindered by a culture that often sees data as a potential threat to political agendas and interests.

While recent literature has shown how the rationale and purpose for cultural observation is gradually shifting from economic impact assessment used to validate existing policies towards more complex and dynamic ecosystem analysis designed to empower a data driven policy making approach that takes into account cultural welfare and internal dynamics, evidence from our study seems to indicate that in Italy not only is this transition still far to come but, according to some of the comments gathered in the focus group, even traditional economic impact assessment is sometimes still frowned upon as those in power want to exert control over the data and the extent of the impact is decided, and communicated to the relevant stakeholders or the general public, beforehand rather than being evaluated ex post.

It is important to note that both observatories examined in our case studies are externalised entities, operating independently from regional administrations although with different degrees of independence. The observatory in Piedmont is an entirely independent consortium of entities collaborating with but not established by the regional administration. The Emilia-Romagna observatory is a case of private-public partnership that, although outsourced, has been created and funded by the region itself. Our guests remarked the importance of externalisation as it helps maintain impartiality and scientific rigour in research. Our study however seems to indicate that despite externalisation efforts, in some cases politics still influences the way in which data is presented and accessed.

Moreover it should be noted that out of the 21 regions in Italy, only 15 have formal regional laws establishing cultural observatories. Many of these observatories are inactive or limited to populating web pages with references to existing reports, primarily at the national level rather than the local level. This contradicts the logical development of the ORMA project into Law 106 (2022), which mandated the activation of cultural observatories in regions to create a network feeding the national cultural observatory. Unfortunately as we have seen, this law has not been implemented, and the deadline for regions to activate the network has passed. Consequently, the country still has a long way to go before achieving harmonised regional data collection to inform both local policy and the central observatory.

Conclusions

Drawing on the acknowledgement of the spread of cultural observatories, and the growing demand for cultural observation by cultural policymakers, we set out to question the relationship between data production and data use in cultural policies. Through an explorative study of cultural observation practices and cultural policies for live performing arts in two Italian regions, we find that the relationship between cultural observation and policymaking is complex. While evidence-based policy is far from being a reality in the setting we have taken into account, our research seems to indicate that even a more traditional, nuanced and possibly outdated approach to economic impact analysis is still frowned upon by some as a potential hindrance to political agendas whereby the expected impact becomes more important to communicate than the actual ex post results. However, the study also shows that the most significant activity in informing policy making takes place in the interstices between observatories, civil servants, and bureaucrats. The close collaboration and exchange of information between observatories and the administrative apparatus plays a crucial role in shaping policy decisions, suggesting that some important work of evidence-based policy *de facto* is still being conducted in the mundane work of day-to-day activity, behind the most overt political scenes, also contributing to the idea that the “who” of policymaking encompasses a vast array of actors beyond appointed governors (Bell and Oakley, 2014).

References

- Bazalgette, P. (2014) *The value of arts and culture to people and society*. Available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The_value_of_arts_and_culture_to_people_and_society_an_evidence_review.pdf (Accessed: 9 December 2022).
- Bell, D. and Oakley, K. (2014) *Cultural Policy*. Taylor & Francis
- Camera dei Deputati (2019) *Istituzione del Sistema nazionale a rete degli osservatori dello spettacolo. A.C. 1582 del 16 Dicembre 2019*. Camera dei Deputati. Available at: <http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/pdl/pdf/leg.18.pdl.camera.1582.18PDL0059500.pdf> (Accessed: 2 November 2022).
- De Bernard, M., Comunian, R. and Gross, J. (2022) 'Cultural and creative ecosystems: a review of theories and methods, towards a new research agenda', *Cultural Trends*, 31(4), pp. 332–353.
- ESSnet-CULTURE (2012) *European Statistical System Network on Culture - Final Report, EssnetCulture, European statistical network on Culture Final report*. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-policy-development/documents/ess-net-report-oct2012.pdf>.
- Gallina, M. and Ponte di Pino, O. (2023) *Le politiche per lo spettacolo dal vivo tra Stato e Regioni*.
- Hadorn, S. et al. (2022) 'Evidence-Based Policymaking in Times of Acute Crisis: Comparing the Use of Scientific Knowledge in Germany, Switzerland, and Italy', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 63(2), pp. 359–382. doi: 10.1007/s11615-022-00382-x.
- Holden, J. (2015) *The Ecology of Culture, Arts and Humanities Research Council*. Available at: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/the-ecology-of-culture/> (Accessed: 10 July 2022).
- Italia. Il Presidente della Repubblica (1985) *Nuova disciplina degli interventi dello Stato a favore dello spettacolo. LEGGE 30 aprile 1985, n. 163*. Available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1985/05/04/085U0163/sg>.
- Jowell, T. and Hutton, W. (2007) *Staying ahead : the economic performance of the UK ' s creative industries, The work foundation*. Available at: <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/research/publications/publicationdetail.aspx?oltemId=176> (Accessed: 13 November 2022).
- Lægreid, P. P. and Christensen, P. T. (2000) *Transcending New Public Management: The Transformation of Public Sector Reforms*. Ashgate Publishing Limited. Available at: <https://books.google.it/books?id=C6FOsZIMxI0C>.

Markusen, A. (2011) *California's Arts and Cultural Ecology*. Available at: https://www.irvine.org/wp-content/uploads/CA_Arts_Ecology_2011Sept20.pdf (Accessed: 22 November 2022).

NESTA (2006) *Creating growth. How UK can develop world class creative businesses*. Available at: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/creating-growth/> (Accessed: 19 July 2021).

Redaelli, E. (2015) 'Cultural mapping: Analyzing its meanings in policy documents', in Duxbury, N., Garrett-Petts, W. F., and MacLennan, D. (eds) *Cultural Mapping as Cultural Inquiry*. Taylor and Francis Inc., pp. 86–98. doi: 10.4324/9781315743066.

Taormina, A. (2011) *Osservare la cultura: Nascita, ruolo e prospettive degli Osservatori culturali in Italia*. Franco Angeli Edizioni.

Throsby, D. (2000) *Economics and Culture*. Cambridge University Press.

UNCTAD (2008) *Creative Economy Report 2008. The Challenge of Assessing the Creative Economy: towards Informed Policy-making, Harvard Business Review*. Available at: http://unctad.org/en/Docs/ditc20082cer_en.pdf
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/35/56/2101733.pdf>
<http://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationWebflyer.aspx?publicationid=1595>
http://www.isc.hbs.edu/Innov_9211.pdf (Accessed: 1 December 2022).

UNESCO (2009) *2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics, UNESCO Institute for Statistics*. Available at: http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/unesco-framework-for-cultural-statistics-2009-en_0.pdf (Accessed: 5 January 2023).