Stakeholder Engagement in Cultural Organizations: An Explorative Study on Participatory Theatre

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Abstract

This article explores the potentialities of the stakeholder engagement framework in the specific context of cultural organizations, underscoring the necessity to develop an interdisciplinary approach that combines the traditional managerial perspective with the contribution offered by other social disciplines, due to the peculiarities of the cultural mission pursued. Specifically, the article aims to investigate on the stakeholder engagement process to verify: a) how it may be adapted to consider the peculiarities of the cultural organizations and their activities; b) why cultural organizations should adopt the framework as here suggested referring to the cultural mission pursued. Combining the literature review with the analysis of a case study of participatory theatre, this article expects: a) to suggest a stakeholder engagement framework that may be specific for cultural organizations and their community; b) to verify its effectiveness in terms of both creation of cultural value and improvement of cultural participation.

Keywords: cultural organization, stakeholder engagement, participatory theatre, cultural performance indicators

1. Introduction

The definition of "stakeholders" as all individuals or groups who can affect or be affected by an organization's activities and «without whose support the organizations would cease to exist», emphasizes the relationship (existing) between stakeholders' satisfaction and the (financial or overall) mission achievement (Stanford Research Institute, 1963, cited by Freeman, 1984, p. 31). During the last decades, however, the organizations' relationship with their stakeholders has strongly changed. The increasing environment complexity, mainly due to the technological development and the market globalization, has produced a thinning of the boundaries between organizations, favoring the growth of different types of partnerships and collaborations among legally independent entities (Waddock, 2002). In this context, the relationship between organizations and stakeholders has evolved from a "hub and spoke approach", in which stakeholders should be "managed" in order to pursue the organization's mission, toward a more interactive approach of stakeholder "engagement", based on concepts like mutuality and interdependency (Svendsen, 1998; Andriof et al., 2002).

Originally, the practice of engaging stakeholders in management activities was linked to specific external influences and the necessity to mitigate any possible conflict with them, but over time it has been taken on a real strategic value for many areas of organizational activities (Jonker & Foster, 2002; Greenwood, 2007).

For the responsibility theories, this practice is able to improve the organization's competitiveness acting, for example, on the accounting of the resources utilization (Gray, 2002), the trust-based cooperation (Peccei & Guest, 2002), or the fiduciary duty of the organization (Evan & Freeman, 2004). According to the managerial theories, instead, the stakeholder engagement, encouraging the unity of values and developing legitimation, may mitigate the organizational risks (Deegan, 2002), or stimulate the continuous managerial learning through the engagement of the stakeholders in the decision-making process (Sillanpaa, 1998). For other scholars, the stakeholder engagement may act as a strategy of achieving the managerial control (Owen et al., 2000) or the social consensus contributing to the construction of the organization's image (Livesey & Kearins, 2002). Moreover, actively participating, stakeholders may increase their level of trust, thus implementing an intangible asset of invaluable importance for any organization, i.e., its reputation (Wheeler & Davies, 2004).

To be effective, however, the engagement strategy cannot be an improvised action. It requires the careful design of a specific engagement process (from the identification of the goals to the analysis of the results) that can be more relevant than the engagement itself (Forrester, 1985; Voinov & Bousquet, 2010). Moreover, it certainly needs to be revised in order to adapt its general assumptions to the peculiarities of the organization under analysis, eventually with the support offered by the theoretical approaches belonging to other connected disciplines of the social sciences.

On this issue, this article aims to investigate on the adoption of the stakeholder engagement framework in the specific context of the cultural organizations, i.e., the organizations oriented to the protection, conservation and promotion of the cultural heritage, the provision of artistic productions, the training in art and music, and more generally the cultural enhancement of their community. The choice depended, first, on the great impact that the stakeholder engagement practices may have in the cultural sector due to the relevant role played by the experiential component for the effectiveness of these organizations' activities and the achievement of their cultural mission. Moreover, in the recent years the stakeholder engagement practices are assuming more and more relevance in these organizations as a strategy to increase the public trust in their action and obtain the necessary resources to finance their activities.

Starting from these considerations, the article has specifically a twofold aim:

1) First, it investigates on the peculiarities of the cultural organizations' mission, trying to define *how* the stakeholder engagement framework may be adapted according to an interdisciplinary approach that may better consider these peculiarities;

2) Second, it aims to verify the effectiveness of the interdisciplinary adaptation here suggested, in order to justify *why* a cultural organization should adopt this "integrated" stakeholder engagement framework.

To answer to these research questions, the article intends to combine the theoretical exploration of the stakeholder engagement framework according to an interdisciplinary approach, with the analysis of a significant case study involving a particular type of cultural organization (i.e., theatres) and stakeholder engagement practice (i.e., the participatory theatre).

The article structure is as follows. The next two sections respectively present the general framework of the stakeholder engagement process and the adaptation suggested for the specific context of the cultural organizations according to an interdisciplinary approach that may better consider the peculiarities of the cultural activities. The following two sections introduce the case study, the former presenting the choices made in terms of type of cultural organization and stakeholder engagement practice, and the latter introducing the data collected and the method adopted for their analysis. The final section includes the data discussion and the main conclusions in reference to the research questions of the article.

2. The Stakeholder Engagement Process

Assuming the several advantages theoretically related to the stakeholder engagement practices (e.g., Sillanpaa, 1998; Owen et al., 2000; Deegan, 2002; Gray, 2002; Evan & Freeman, 2004; etc.), their actual achievement strictly depends on how the organization concretely defines its stakeholder engagement process in accordance with the specific goals being pursued (Forrester, 1985; Voinov & Bousquet, 2010).

Specifically, an effective stakeholder engagement process includes three main steps related to its goals:

1) The stakeholders identification and prioritization;

2) The design of the specific engagement tool to adopt according to the particular level of engagement decided for each stakeholders category;

3) The evaluation of the results achieved through the development of coherent Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

The first step implicitly confirms the "instrumental" perspective of the studies arguing the importance to focus the organization's attention on those stakeholders that can actually affect the organization's value, contributing to its success (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell., Agle, & Wood, 1997). Moving from the «stakeholder maps» representing all «those groups and individuals that can affect, or are affected by, the accomplishment of organizational purpose» (Freeman, 1984, p. 25), it is then necessary to identify which stakeholders' categories play the main role in the success of the business due to their potential attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). (Note 1)

About the second step above-mentioned, the engagement process may certainly entail different practices depending on the specific level of stakeholder engagement chosen. According to Spitzeck and Hansen (2010, p.

380), the choice depends on two relevant dimensions, i.e., power and scope. The former refers to the level of influence on the organization's management allowed to the stakeholders, varying from the hypothesis of "non-participation" to that one of "stakeholder power" (Burchell & Cook, 2006). The latter is related to the «breath of power» granted to stakeholders in the decision-making process of the organization, varying from some specific decisions to the overall organization's management (Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003).

Anyway, many other studies tried to schematize the different levels of stakeholder engagement (e.g., Pretty, 1995; Lynam, De Jong, Sheil, Kusumanto, & Evans, 2007), as well as the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard that identified the hypotheses of consultation, negotiation, involvement, collaboration, and empowerment (AccountAbility, 2011, p. 27). Among them, managers should define the specific type of stakeholders' engagement to adopt according to the stakeholders' priority and characteristics.

Finally, as aforementioned, designing an effective engagement process also requires the development of specific, reliable, timely, and cost-effective KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) that should evaluate the choices made on the engagement strategies, and start a process of learning to improve the organization's action in the future (Syme & Sadler, 1994).

To date, no uniform standards, indicators or scorecards exist to evaluate stakeholder engagement efforts, although these activities should be an integral component of the overall program management of any organization. In literature, few studies dealt with the evaluation of engagement per se, preferring the proposition of principles to guide monitoring of engagement in specific contexts (e.g., Buchy & Race, 2001; Lane, Lucas, Vanclay, Henry, & Coates, 2005). Anyway, these KPIs can be quantitative or qualitative and should be established to measure the value added through engaging with the stakeholders, from the inputs used, to the outputs and outcomes achieved, checking for «signals of success» or areas of improvement in the organization's action (Krick, Forstater, Monaghan, & Sillanpää, 2005).

To be really effective, however, this overall framework of the stakeholder engagement process proposed in the management literature needs to be conciliated with the characteristics of the specific organizational context in which it has to be implemented, eventually integrating its approach with the support of other relevant disciplines.

According to this assumption, as aforementioned, this study aims to focus on the specific context of the cultural organizations, whose primary aim consists in the protection, conservation and promotion of the cultural heritage, in the provision of artistic productions, in the training in art and music, and more generally in the cultural enhancement of the community. The effectiveness of their action is then strongly related to the precise identification of the community of reference, intended as the set of citizens drawn together by geography, identity or interaction and sharing a common interest (in this case related to the cultural organization's activities) (Lee & Newby, 1983).

The reasons of focusing the analysis on the cultural sector were essentially two: first, the great relevance that the stakeholder engagement approach is assuming in the cultural organizations as a strategy to increase the public trust in their activities; second, the wide influence that other social sciences inevitably have in cultural sector due to the particular mission pursued. On this basis, the next section of the article aims to suggest how the stakeholder engagement process may be adapted according to an interdisciplinary approach that is able to consider the peculiarities of the cultural organizations and their mission.

3. Stakeholder Engagement in Cultural Sector: Proposal of an Interdisciplinary Approach

The necessity to correlate the general framework of the stakeholder engagement process with the characteristics of the specific context of application is particularly relevant for cultural organizations due to the great peculiarity of their activities oriented towards the achievement of cultural and social purposes. In wider terms, this peculiarity generates important implications in every aspect of the cultural organizations' management: from the identification of the primary resources, to the search for specific types of financing channels, or to the development of strategies whose ethical implications are particularly important due to the mission of meeting a public and collective need (Glynn, 2000). Indeed, for the full assessment of the effectiveness of the cultural organizations' action, the traditional approach of the managerial literature is often insufficient, because it is unable to understand entirely the effects produced by the activities of these organizations in the human sphere of the individuals involved.

In sum, the cultural organizations aim to create "cultural value" that, while complying with the general conditions of administrative efficiency, remains definitely distinct from the concept of economic value added, requiring the contextual evaluation of the effects produced in terms of perception in the community enjoying the cultural services, at both individual and collective level. In this sense, the analysis of the cultural organizations'

mission may be more effective adopting an interdisciplinary approach that combines its managerial definition, traditionally involving the creation of economic value added, with its declination in the cultural sphere supported by the anthropological and sociological perspectives.

Indeed, first of all these perspectives may support the explanation of the cultural value concept involving the "intrinsic" sphere of the users, i.e., their inherent qualities, their subjective experience and the intangible benefits deriving from seeing an artwork or having a cultural experience (Mason, 2002; Holden, 2006). In this sense, Holden (2006, p. 14) identified the cultural "intrinsic" value as the «set of values that relate to the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally and spiritually». Secondly, these further perspectives may contribute to the analysis of the cultural value in terms of social impact, considering its implication for connecting people «more deeply to the world», growing their «capacity for empathy» through drawing them into the experiences of people «vastly different from their own» (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004, p. 47).

Integrating the two spheres, Matarasso (1997) identified six categories of effects related to the cultural products including both individual (i.e., health and well-being; imagination and vision; personal development) and collective effects (i.e., social cohesion, local image and identity, community empowerment and self-determination). Otherwise, Throsby (2001, pp. 28-29) defined the cultural value as a concept that can be declined in six different expressions: *aesthetic value*, related to the properties of beauty and harmony; *spiritual value*, connected to the intimate qualities shared by humanity; *social value*, based on the interaction among individuals to create a sense of identity; *historical value*, as a vehicle of continuity from past to present; *symbolic value*, in terms of carrier of meaning; *authenticity value*, which qualifies the meaning conveyed in terms of veracity, originality and uniqueness.

Thus, combining the managerial literature approach with the anthropological and sociological perspectives, the engagement process here proposed may be adapted in order to be more adherent to the peculiarities of the cultural organizations and above all to their particular mission. Specifically, regarding the first point of the process inherent to the stakeholder prioritization, for these organizations a salient stakeholder is certainly the community, possessing the cited characteristics of power, legitimacy and urgency as not only beneficiary of the cultural services provided, but also essential financier of the same services. Indeed, the cultural "product", besides presenting specific characteristics such as being intangible or having a value that is not immediately measurable, belongs to the category of "merit goods" promoting the public welfare and becoming «deserving of government funding» as well as of the direct interest of the community (Zuidervaart, 2011, p. 32).

Regarding the second point of the engagement process, as for every organization providing public services, also for cultural organizations the choice of the specific practice to adopt depends on the level of community engagement assumed coherent with the aim pursued (Tugas, 2012). Referring to the general hypothesis of the citizens' engagement by the local authorities, Arnstein (1969) suggested a hierarchical scheme of public participation, representing a ladder with eight rungs. At its lowest level, the ladder considered the hypotheses of *manipulation* and *therapy* as equivalent to a condition of "non-participation" since the real aim of the power holders is «to "educate" or "cure" the participants». In the middle of the ladder, there were the hypotheses of *informing*, *consultation*, and *placation*, representing three different levels of "tokenism", i.e., conditions that require minimal efforts, because citizens may hear and be heard, but their opinions may remain unheard. At the top, the ladder included the hypotheses of *partnership*, *delegated power*, and *citizen control*, corresponding to three different degrees of "citizen power", i.e., conditions guaranteeing an effective citizen engagement in the decision-making process of the local authorities. Simplifying the Arnstein's scheme, Boviardu and Löffler (2009) identified only three levels of public participation, i.e., *communication*, *consultation*, and *co-production*. The first one corresponded to a simple one-way flow of information from organizations to community via public media, reports, and other types of documents or communication channels. The consultation represented the establishment of a two-way dialogue between organizations and community through the arrangement of formal meetings, the conduction of surveys or interviews, and so on. The last and most intensive level of participation corresponded to an active community engagement in the decision-making process of the organization, including the effective creation and service delivery.

In the specific context of the cultural sector, however, the concept of participation needs to be further revised and adapted, because it essentially refers to how community actually lives a cultural experience (McCarthy, Ondaatje, & Zakaras, 2001, p. 6). Generally, it may correspond to three different levels of participation. The first one simply consists in listening to a recording or watching a tv program on art. The second one involves the hypothesis of visiting a museum or attending a live performance as a pure spectator. The last one corresponds to a direct and concrete engagement in the arts (for instance, painting a picture, playing an instrument, writing a

script, and so on). Summarizing, community may live a cultural experience joining through the media, attending, or "doing", the last one certainly corresponding to the most intensive hypothesis of relationship that is feasible between cultural organizations and community. Recent studies have emphasized its usefulness for realizing a process of continuous cultural creation that represents the most effective type of innovation of these organizations (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2011). The application of this highest level of engagement was mainly experienced in museums with the hypothesis of a "participatory museum" providing not just a common cultural content for the visitors, but also a platform that connects the same visitors themselves, making them simultaneously content creators, distributors, employees, and consumers (Simon, 2010). Anyway, this model may certainly have relevant benefits also for the other forms of cultural organizations, but it should be adapted to the specific cultural product provided.

Lastly, also for the cultural organizations, the engagement process requires the development of specific KPIs useful for evaluating the results achieved in comparison with the aim pursued. Exactly on this point, however, the interdisciplinary approach introduced is mainly relevant, since for these organizations the complete assessment of the effects produced by their engagement practices requires, alongside the traditional economic analysis, the statement of some specific *Cultural Performance Indicators* (hereafter CPIs). The expression intends to indicate those parameters that may be useful for evaluating the effectiveness of the engagement practice adopted for the achievement of the cultural mission and then for the creation of cultural value. They are qualitative indicators, generally collected with the questionnaire methodology, attempting to translate the intangible impact of the cultural organization's activities into observable and empirically detectable variables (Silverman, 1985). The choice of the specific CPIs depends on the particular notion of "cultural value" adopted, but, to verify the effectiveness of the process also in the long term, it should include some detectors of the participants' availability and interest to attend to other cultural experiences in the future. Although without a consensus on the quantitative references to adopt, in literature it is indeed recognized the necessity to classify the users of cultural products (or participant to a cultural event) into three categories, i.e., rare, occasional, and frequent (Schuster, 1991; Robinson, 1993; McCarthy et al., 2001). They differ from each other in many aspects, such as the reason for participation (Schuster, 1991), their background and experiences (Bergonzi & Smith, 1996), and their tastes in the cultural products (McCarthy et al., 2001). Anyway, the frequent participants are able to grow their cultural competences more than the others, increasing their attachment to the cultural experiences and maximizing the cultural value produced in multiple manners (mentally, emotionally, and socially) (Stigler & Becker, 1977). In this sense, it should be necessary verifying the effectiveness of the engagement process also referring to its capacity to transform rare and occasional participants into frequent participants.

Thus, summarizing these considerations in reference to the question on *how* the stakeholder engagement process may be adapted to the specific context of the cultural organizations, the general steps aforementioned may be revised according to an interdisciplinary approach as follows:

1) Recognition of the community as a primary stakeholder;

2) Design of the specific tool to adopt according to the level of community engagement decided in reference to the cultural aims pursued;

3) Evaluation of the results achieved through the development of specific CPIs, including the assessment of the effects produced in terms of cultural value and frequency of participation.

The validation of this interdisciplinary approach mainly refers to the second research question of this study aiming to verify *why* a cultural organization should adopt the adaptation here suggested for the stakeholder engagement process in order to support the achievement of its cultural mission.

According to Yin (1994, pp. 6-9), the preferred research strategies for "how" and "why" questions are case studies, histories, and experiments, but the first ones are more advisable than the others in examining contemporary events related to behaviors that cannot be manipulated. This is certainly the hypothesis analyzed in this article, especially considering the great number of individuals that the engagement practice can theoretically involve. For this reason, answering to our research questions required the association of the theoretical analysis just disclosed with the exploration of a significant case study, presented in the next section.

4. Presentation of the Case Study

The specific cultural setting chosen for the analysis is the theatre, characterized, as known, by the human resources' centrality and the peculiarity of the live performance as an exceptional chance of meeting among producers, performers, and spectators. This explains why, perhaps even more than for other cultural

organizations, the relationship established with the community is fundamental in theatres, requiring the development of specific practices of community engagement.

Specifically, the case study analyzed is the Emilia Romagna Teatro Fondazione (hereafter ERT) that is a "stable public theatre" (i.e., an autonomous and public institution, characterized by a strong relationship with its territory) operating as a center of theatrical production since 1977, although established as a foundation only since 2001. It operates in the Italian region of Emilia Romagna with four offices located in the cities of Modena, Cesena, and Bologna. ERT was selected for two main reasons: firstly, its specific vocation to the community engagement as emphasized in its mission statement; secondly, its expertise in terms of engagement practices that has been adopted for several years.

According to its mission, in the last years ERT realized different projects searching for «spectacular and spatial alternatives to the great theatre, in order to realize a meeting with a complex and diverse audience. A public as a participant». Among them, the project under execution in 2015 was "Carissimi Padri" ("Dearest Fathers"), a complex creative process aimed to test new models of collaboration among the social actors of the Modena territory, as well as between ERT and its community. Focused on the study of the years preceding the Italy's entrance into the World War I, the project involved many activities engaging community, such as readings, "show-dinners", dramaturgic laboratories with students (of different ages) and adults' groups, movies projections, and so on, developed in the Modena area in 12 months (from January to December 2015). Its realization involved the collaboration of many social actors of the area such as some local authorities and many cultural and/or no profit organizations (i.e., museums, foundations, libraries and others).

Among its various activities, the project included the realization of three different initiatives of a particular practice known as "participatory theatre" (here after PT) that may be certainly associated with the highest level of culture participation indicated as participating by "doing". (Note 2)

As known, theatre is conventionally characterized by the presence of professional actors passing on a "one-way directed" message which is usually unable to deeply involve the audience (Sloman, 2011). Thus, in spite of its strengths (i.e., the capacity to support informal post-performance discussions among the spectators or to encourage changes in their short-term behaviors), many theatre practitioners began to promote the spread of a new type of performing art that could facilitate stronger and more sustainable changes in the community, favoring its cultural enhancement (Lambert, 1982; Boeren, 1992). On this point, Thyagarajan (2002, p. 14) observed: «two kinds of theatre exist – theatre that is observed (portrayed) and theatre that is involvement (participation). Both forms can be useful in development but the second form has the additional advantage of a greater potential for a high level of participation in the theatre experience». Going beyond the less active configuration of the conventional theatre, the PT is then a theatre made *for* but also *by* the community that may be engaged in the live performance at different levels, from the definition of issues and topics (related to their life) discussed in the performance, until their direct participation in the performance itself. The PT has been largely studied in Human Sciences to verify its usefulness for many sociological scopes, such as the development of the individuals' or communities' capacities (Adams & Golbard, 2001), the strengthening of the community cohesion (Carey & Sutton, 2004), the behavioral change (Slachmuijlder, 2006), the development of the individuals' skills (Boeren, 1992), and so on. To our knowledge, however, until now the PT has not been studied as a community's engagement practice useful, under the perspective of the stakeholder engagement process, for supporting the achievement of the cultural organizations' mission.

5. Method and Data

The analysis of the case study was focused on the PT initiative realized in Modena in May 2015 and lasted three days (May 16, 17, and 23). The evidence derived from three different sources, i.e., document analysis, direct observation and interview, in order to realize a data triangulation (Patton, 1987). Regarding the first source, the study included the analysis of some internal documents describing the various initiatives included in the project "Carissimi Padri" and their main operational aspects such as the financial resources allocated, the timing of implementation, the human resources engaged (internal and external to ERT), and so on. Beyond the internal employees assigned to the overall project coordination, the PT initiative required the engagement of external artistic collaborators, i.e., eight professional actors and one musician. They were responsible of specific aspects related to the PT initiative, i.e., the scripture (edited by three of the eight professional actors), the music (the musician with the collaboration of two professional actors), and the promotion (the other three professional actors), but above all they assumed the role of preparers and supporters of the community participants involved in the initiative.

The document analysis was combined with the direct observation of the entire PT initiative in order to

understand the modality of engagement of the 165 community participants along the various phases of the process that ended with a final live performance, held on the 23rd of May at the municipal building, with a public of over 300 spectators.

Both the document analysis and the direct observation were indispensable for the definition of the main source of data adopted, i.e., the interview of the community participants. Specifically, the interview employed a formal survey with structured questions formulated being careful to avoid possible problems of response set (avoided reversing the polarity of some questions) or curvilinear answers (preferring questions with an easy and clear structure). To this aim, before the survey transmission via internet in order to collect responses anonymously, three voluntaries tested the questionnaire, confirming the clarity and simplicity of the questions.

The survey included four sections of questions. The first one involved the main personal data of the participants (such as education level and other socio-demographic characteristics) due to their supported relationship with the cultural participation level (Robinson, Keegan, Karth, & Triplett, 1985; Robinson, 1993). In this section, a question on the participants' frequency of attending a live performance on average per year specifically intended to divide the respondents in rare, occasional, and frequent participants (Schuster, 1991; Robinson, 1993; McCarthy et al., 2001). On this regard, a quantitative reference, universally recognized, is absent. Thus, we assumed as "rare" the participants with an average number of cultural participations (considering only the theatrical performances and excluding the hypothesis of participation via media) that was close to zero (up to a maximum of twice in a year). The participants with an average from 3 to 5 participations in a year were identified as "occasional", while the participants with an average number of participations per year that was at least equal to twice the minimum of the occasional participants (therefore, from 6 up) were the "frequent" participants.

The second section of the survey aimed to investigate on the motivations for participation of the community participants, that is on why they decided to participate in the arts rather in other leisure and specifically in the PT initiative analyzed, beforehand studied in literature at both the individual and the aggregate level (Urice, 1992; Robinson, 1993).

The third section investigated on the engagement degree in the PT process that was perceived by the participants, assuming the existing relationship between the quality of an activity or an experience and the participant's level of engagement in that activity or experience (Kelly, 1987; Csikzentmihalyi, 1990).

The last section included some questions on the effects of the participation, assumed as measures of the PT effectiveness for achieving the ERT's cultural mission. The CPIs identified were consistent with the shared concept of cultural value (Matarasso, 1997; McCarthy et al., 2004), as well as with the general aim to convert rare and occasional participants in frequent participants for both general (i.e., referred to the entire cultural sector) and specific (i.e., regarding the single cultural organization) purposes (Livesey & Kearins, 2002; Wheeler & Davies, 2004).

The perception items were measured using an unbalanced, four-point scale, generally associated with the response categories of "not at all", "not enough", "enough", "a lot". The unbalanced rating scale is characterized by the absence of a neutral option among the possible responses and it is preferable to a balanced scale «in studies where researchers know, in advance, that nearly all participants' responses will lean in one direction or the other» (Srivastava & Rego, 2011, p. 5.24). This was the case of the survey to the PT participants, whose voluntary participation made more reliable favorable than unfavorable answers, requiring to achieve more precision in the side of the scale receiving the participants' attention. Table 1 summarizes the answers collected.

Table 1. Survey results

1. PERSONAL DATA		
Gender		
Female	88	80.0%
Male	22	20.0%
Age		
Under 15	4	3.6%
16-25	33	30.0%
26-35	24	21.8%
36-45	27	24.6%
46-55	10	9.1%

56-65	7	6.4%
Over 65	5	4.5%
Geographical origin		
Emilia Romagna region	75	68.2%
Outside the Emilia Romagna region	35	31.8%
Level of Education		
None	0	0.0%
Primary school	0	0.0%
Secondary school	10	9.1%
High school	43	39.1%
Degree	47	42.7%
Master's degree and/or PhD	10	9.1%
Profession		
Student	36	32.7%
Worker	2	1.8%
Office worker	23	20.9%
Entrepreneur	3	2.7%
Professional	15	13.6%
Teacher	12	10.9%
Retired	4	3.6%
Unemployed	6	5.5%
Other	9	8.3%
How many times a year do you participate to a theatrical performance on average?		
At most 2 times (rare participants)	33	30.0%
3-5 times (occasional participants)	24	21.8%
Over 5 times (frequent participants)	53	48.2%

2. MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

Which specific environment woke up your interest in the theatres setting? (you can give more than one response)

Familiar	32	29.1%
Scholastic	44	40.0%
Friendly	63	57.3%
Working	11	10.0%
None	9	8.2%
Others	12	10.9%

How did you learn about this PT initiative organized by ERT? (you can give more than one response)

Web site of ERT	11	10.0%
Web site of the "Carissimi Padri" project	32	29.1%
Social network (facebook, twitter)	48	43.6%
Poster, leaflets and other advertising bills of ERT	10	9.1%
Participants of previous PT initiatives of ERT	39	35.5%
Advertisement of the social actors partner	15	13.6%

How much your participation was stimulated by:	*Not at all*	*Not enough*	*Enough*	*A lot*
a) your curiosity/interest in the theatrical production process?	0.0%	0.9%	29.1%	70.0%
b) the ERT's reputation?	13.6%	24.5%	40.9%	21.0%
c) your appreciation of the professionals involved in the initiative?	0.9%	4.5%	16.4%	78.2%
d) the incentive received by some participants to previous PT initiatives of ERT?	31.8%	10.9%	25.5%	31.8%
e) the incentive received by the social actors supporting the project?	44.5%	24.5%	22.7%	8.3%
f) your personal interest in the topics discussed in the PT initiative?	2.7%	13.6%	33.7%	50.0%

3. ENGAGEMENT DEGREE	*Not at all*	*Not enough*	*Enough*	*A lot*
Referring to the PT performance, how much did you feel engaged in the decisions on:				
a) the scripture	8.2%	17.3%	31.8%	42.7%
b) the scripture interpretation	3.6%	10.0%	40.9%	45.5%
c) the setting	3.6%	18.2%	31.8%	46.4%
d) the set design	10.0%	27.3%	33.6%	29.1%
e) the time recitation	4.5%	13.6%	40.0%	41.9%
f) the scene sequence	6.4%	18.2%	38.2%	37.2%

4. CULTURAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Effects in terms of cultural value	Not at all	Not enough	Enough	A lot
In your opinion, how much your participation to the ERT's PT improved your:				
a) awareness and comprehension of the historical and cultural topics discussed	0.9%	10.0%	47.3%	41.8%
b) professional development in the arts	5.5%	18.2%	33.6%	42.7%
c) ability to socialize and collaborate	0.0%	4.5%	34.5%	61.0%
d) degree of trust and confidence in your abilities	0.9%	12.7%	43.6%	42.7%
e) level of self-esteem and awareness	1.8%	10.9%	39.1%	48.2%
Effects in terms of cultural participation				
In your opinion, how much your participation to the ERT's PT improved your:				
a) knowledge on the theatres setting	0.0%	12.7%	30.9%	56.4%
b) willingness and interest in attending other free theatrical shows	0.0%	7.3%	20.0%	72.7%
c) willingness to purchase tickets or subscriptions to attend other live performances upon payment	2.7%	17.3%	40.9%	39.1%
d) trust on the ERT's activities and the ERT's reputation	0.9%	3.6%	31.8%	63.7%
In the future, would you participate to a new PT initiative of ERT?				
Yes			110	100.0%
No			0	0.0%

Moreover, after having reversed the answers of the questions with reverse polarity, each response of the third and fourth sections was evaluated with a score from 1 to 4 (i.e., 1 for "not at all", until to 4 for "a lot") and, for each respondent, the scores of the questions regarding the same survey topic were added. For each topic, the minimum, the maximum, the mean score (even if the latter is less significant in the case considered of an unbalanced scale) and the deviation were calculated to detect significant synthetic data for both the entire panel of replies collected and the three subsamples involving the rare, occasional and frequent participants. Table 2 summarizes the results of the answers analysis.

Table 2. Synthetic data on sections 3 and 4

QUESTIONS	Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean Score	Dev. Std.
Engagement degree				
Total participants	*9*	*24*	*18.65*	*4.11*
- Rare participants	12	24	19.21	3.61
- Occasional participants	9	24	18.25	4.39
- Frequent participants	9	24	18.49	4.31
CPIs				
1) Effects in terms of cultural value				
Total participants	*8*	*20*	*16.62*	*2.80*
- Rare participants	8	20	16.85	2.65
- Occasional participants	12	20	16.50	2.50
- Frequent participants	10	20	16.53	3.02
2) Effects in terms of cultural participation				
Total participants	*8*	*16*	*13.84*	*2.10*
- Rare participants	9	16	13.94	2.03
- Occasional participants	10	16	14.13	1.92
- Frequent participants	8	16	13.64	2.22

6. Discussion and Conclusions

From the data analysis, many considerations may be drawn. First, some confirmations emerge from the personal data of the participants, highlighting the correlation between a wide range of socio-demographic characteristics and the cultural participation (Robinson, 1993).

The totality of the participants included, as mentioned, 165 individuals, largely (about 68%) belonging to the target community of ERT (i.e., the Emilia-Romagna region). They were mostly women (80%), confirming that gender is an essential determinant of cultural participation and, specifically, that women participate more than

men in cultural activities (Bihagen & Katz-Gerro, 2000; Lizardo, 2006). The participants' profession was extremely heterogeneous, as well as their age. Most of them (about 80%) were however under 46 years old, confirming that younger people are more likely to be involved in "doing" cultural activities (as appearing in performances) than older people (Peters & Cherbo, 1996). In general, the participants' level of education was quite high (about 52% held a degree or a higher educational qualification), confirming the previous literature underscoring the strong relationship between cultural participation and education (Schuster, 1991; Robinson, 1993). Anyway, their habits related to the theatre setting were rather different (identifying a presence of rare and occasional participants equal to about 52% total), as well as the motivations underlying the decision to participate to the initiative. As noted in previous studies (Ford Foundation [FF], 1974; Schuster, 1991), it is evident the relevant role of familiar and scholastic incentives to participation (mainly for younger participants), as well as the friendly ones (for older participants). Additionally, to repeat and improve the cultural participation, the individual's appreciation of his/her cultural experience is certainly a key factor (McCarthy et al., 2004).

Regarding the highlighted participants' differences, the analysis verified the effectiveness of the ERT's PT process to overcome them, facilitating the social integration. Indeed, as verified mainly through the direct observation and the third section of the survey, the decision-making process related to the PT performance was very jointed, facilitating the interaction among the community participants, as well as between them and the professional actors. Specifically, except for the definition of the set design (in this specific case due to the careful use of the valuable furnishings of the municipal building), the survey confirmed a high level of participants' engagement in the settlement of many aspects related to the PT performance, such as for the scripture, its interpretation, the scene sequence, and so on (with about 80% of the answers referred to the response categories of "enough" and "a lot").

The overall organization of the PT initiative and the connected decisions involving, for example, promotion, participants' selection, working days, locations (for the rehearsal as for the final performance), and so on, were entirely handled by the ERT's internal employees assigned to the project coordination. Nevertheless, the engagement perceived by the community participants certainly conferred upon them an active role as participants by "doing" (McCarthy et al., 2001). Moreover, considering the total scores attributed to the answers of the third section with a maximum score of 24, the mean of 18.65 and the deviance of 4.1 confirmed the high engagement degree perceived by the participants in the realization of the final live performance. No relevant differences emerged from the calculation of the same synthetic scores for each subpanel identified, even if the values were barely better for rare participants than for the others. This data represented a positive element of the analysis assuming that «only those who are capable of high levels of engagement in the arts experience become frequent participants» (McCarthy et al., 2004, 63).

In terms of the PT effects on the social integration of the participants, the survey verified the usefulness of that experience for improving the participants' ability of socializing ("enough" for about 34% and even "a lot" for about 61% of them). This indicator, as well as the others included in the final section of the survey, directly derived from the ERT's mission of favoring the cultural enhancement of the community through the creation of "cultural value". Indeed, as mentioned, the concept has a first interpretation in terms of collective benefits, just including the cultural organization's capacity to improve the interaction among individuals to create social cohesion and a sense of identity (Matarasso, 1997; Throsby, 2001).

Regarding the other aspects related to the concept and the cultural mission pursued by ERT, the evidence collected by the survey verified a relevant effectiveness of the PT process also in terms of the individual or "intrinsic" development of the participants (Mason, 2002; Holden, 2006). Indeed, they declared that the PT experience certainly contributed to improve the level of confidence in their own abilities ("enough" for about 44%, "a lot" for about 43%), the degree of self-esteem ("enough" for about 39%, "a lot" for about 48%), and their artistic professionalism ("enough" for about 34%, "a lot" for 43%). The PT initiative had also an effective educational function, developing the discussion and comprehension of the historical topics treated "enough" for about 47% e even "a lot" for 42%. The synthetic score associated with the PT effects in terms of cultural value confirmed this evidence, considering the high value of the mean score (16.62) and the low value of the deviance (2.80), in reference to the score of each answer included in the CPI and the maximum score attributable (20).

The final questions of the survey aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the ERT's PT on the further objective of the cultural mission, i.e., the improvement of the community's cultural participation (Stigler & Becker, 1977). To this aim, the survey also included some indicators useful to evaluate the PT contribution to get closer the theatre to the community, with significant implications in operational terms. Specifically, as revealed by the survey, the participation to the ERT's PT contributed to improve the participants' knowledge on the theatre setting ("enough" for about 31%, "a lot" for 56%), strongly increasing their future willingness to attend other live performances

also upon payment ("enough" for about 41%, "a lot" for about 39%) and resulting effective in converting rare and occasional participants in frequent participants (Schuster, 1991; Robinson, 1993; McCarthy et al., 2001). These indicators, associated with the positive effect produced by the PT also on the ERT's reputation (grown among the participants "enough" for about 32% and even "a lot" for about 64%), highlight the PT capacity to put in contact the participants with the theatre setting, both in others' and in ERT's initiatives (Wheeler & Davies, 2004). Also in this case, the synthetic score associated with the PT effects in terms of cultural participation confirmed this evidence, considering the high value of the mean score (13.84) and the low value of the deviance (2.10) in reference to the maximum score attributable to each answer and to the entire CPI (16). For both the CPIs calculated, no relevant differences emerged from the calculation of the same synthetic scores for each subpanel identified, confirming the effectiveness of the initiative for rare as well as for frequent participants. Moreover, on this evidence, it was also emblematic the data on the availability to participate to a successive PT initiative organized by ERT, confirmed by all of the participants.

Summarizing all of the considerations above, it is therefore possible providing a concise answer to the two research questions of this article.

Regarding the first one, the study aimed to verify how the framework of the stakeholder engagement process should be adapted in order to consider the cultural organizations' peculiarities related to their particular mission, i.e., essentially the cultural enhancement of the community. To this end, an interdisciplinary analysis was conducted to combine the managerial literature on the stakeholder engagement with the contribution offered by other social sciences such as the anthropological and sociological studies, whose relevance for the context chosen directly derives from the main "intrinsic" and collective benefits related to the cultural products (Matarasso, 1997; Mason, 2002: Holden, 2006). The analysis confirmed the community's "salience" in cultural organizations (Mitchell et al., 1997) and the opportunity to define specific tools of community engagement, oriented towards more and more interactive modalities of cultural participation (McCarthy et al., 2001; Bakhshi & Throsby, 2011).

Concurrently, the study highlighted that a similar approach should require the adoption of specific CPIs to verify its effectiveness in reference to the cultural mission pursued and specifically in terms of both creation of cultural value and improvement of the cultural participation in the community (Schuster, 1991; Robinson, 1993; Throsby, 2001). To this aim and mainly referring to the second research question on why a cultural organization should adopt the interdisciplinary stakeholder engagement framework here suggested, this article also presented and discussed a significant case study. ERT had stood out for its strong relationship with the community due to its nature of "stable theatre" with a particular vocation towards original practices of community engagement, such as the examined "participatory theatre". Specifically, after having confirmed the correlation of the cultural participation with some socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (FF, 1974; Schuster, 1991; Robinson, 1993) and the high level of engagement in "doing" perceived by almost all of the same participants (McCarthy et al., 2001), the analysis focused on the stakeholder engagement process realized by ERT for its original PT initiative, through the measurement of specific CPIs. The data, mainly collected with the survey methodology, first of all confirmed the effectiveness of the ERT's PT to create cultural value in terms of both collective benefits (i.e., social cohesion, sense of identity, and so on) and intrinsic or individual development of the participants (i.e., self-esteem, artistic abilities, and so on) (Matarasso, 1997; Throsby, 2001). Moreover, the analysis confirmed the PT utility as both original practice of stakeholder engagement, contributing to the development of the ERT's reputation (Wheeler & Davies, 2004), and effective instrument for the improvement of the community's cultural participation (Stigler & Becker, 1977; McCarthy et al., 2004), encouraging cultural organizations to adopt the framework here proposed.

Finally, as to the limitations and future development of this research, we underline the following. First, it may be certainly interesting to organize some follow-up interviews with the PT participants to investigate on the effects of their experience in the long period, especially in terms of cultural participation. Second, to generalize the results and develop a cross-sectional study, the analysis may be repeated in different contexts, intended in terms of both type of cultural organization and practice of stakeholder engagement.

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Notes

Note 1. Power represents the capability of stakeholders to impose their will influencing the organization's behavior through the control of essential resources (Pfeiffer, 1981). Legitimacy refers to the stakeholders' right of specific benefits arising from the organization's activities due to a contractual as well as a moral obligation assumed toward them by the organization (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). Finally, the concept of urgency refers to the degree of quickness to which managers have to deal with the stakeholders' demands requiring different levels of attention (Gago & Antolin, 2004).

Note 2. It is the expression adopted in this study, because it is certainly the most evocative in reference to the aim

pursued. Anyway as Sloman outlines (2011, p. 45), the approach adopted in the participatory theatre is also identified with other wordings such as theatre for development, theatre for education, popular theatre, transformatory theatre, and so on. In ERT, it is also named "*atelier*" to emphasize its usefulness as a real laboratory of live performances.

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