

TEMA

OBSERVATORIES, OBSERVERS

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The need for data collection, analysis, and monitoring systems to assess the effectiveness and impacts of cultural policies at different levels of government has been a recurring theme in the debate on culture for at least three decades.

We therefore wanted to collect, in this issue of Economia della Cultura, reflections and testimonies on the role of the Cultural Observatories, in their varied mission, composition, and location, focusing on their purpose, regulatory sources, management models, and methodological aspects.

The proposed analysis also relates to the impacts of these bodies, the establishment of which, if public in nature, is even more aimed at cross-referencing data and evaluation elements on service delivery, the dynamics and operational implications of institutional activities, and the strategies of the territorial system.

Cultural observatories are often conceived as tools to support the choices of public decision-makers – as well as companies – although some of them often appear disconnected from public policy developments, with the risk of being, in essence, self-referential.

The aim is to focus attention on the real and potential role of the observatories, starting from the experience of some of the operators directly involved and the comparison with experts in cultural and environmental policies who have an active relationship with the observatories.

Starting from an updated overview – necessarily selective in terms of typology and topics dealt with – the aim is to assess the most recent advances in this field in Italy, also in relation to the experiences and developments observable in other countries, even though the picture that emerges is not always comparable due to the lack of homogeneity in the treatment of topics and in the purpose of the activities observed.

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Clearly, it is not possible to offer an unequivocal answer on the usefulness of the observatories, although in these pages an assumption of the editors is confirmed: that the quality and usefulness of these bodies are linked to the interaction between territorial policies, normative assumptions, and aspects of values; the contributions of the authors outline guidelines for strengthening the virtuous paths described and better defining and pursuing objectives.

The interventions aimed at introducing the Theme provide an overview and contextualise it at an international level. The main measures aimed at activating cultural observatories in Italy at the national and regional level are also dealt with in a diachronic key, up to the interventions on the subject envisaged by Law 106/2022 and other provisions on the performing arts, which have brought back to the forefront the debate, repeatedly aroused in recent years, on the advisability of building a network of regional performing arts observatories.

The opening is entrusted to Annalisa Cicerchia with the article Cultural Observatories in Europe and the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends, followed by Luca Dal Pozzolo, director of the Cultural Observatory of Piedmont, who proposes reflections on the very nature of observation in the cultural sphere and an examination of the 'turbulence' and paradigm shifts that have characterised the sector since 2008, leading to the fundamental issues to be addressed.

First among these issues is the task of the Observatories to relate the dynamics, highlighting their contradictions, while remaining aware of the centrality of the data and its heuristic value, and in any case eschewing the rhetoric associated with its 'scientific-ness'.

After the articles by Antonio Taormina The Cultural Observatories and the Regions and Maria Grazia Bellisario Observing to share. UNESCO, landscape, networks: reflections and comments on the experiences of the Observatories, Andrea Gallelli's contribution brings attention back to the European sphere by dealing with the cultural statistics proposed by EUROSTAT, the European Union's statistical office, which devotes ample space to the sector. The author, who describes the origins and functions of the body, highlights a central element, that the cultural statistics disseminated by EUROSTAT are based on concepts and definitions shared by the EU Member States.

Franco Bianchini and Alexandra Oanca place at the centre of their considerations the need to broaden research activities pertaining to the 'Cities' and 'Capitals' of Culture, recognitions that, starting with a programme launched in 1985 by the European institutions, have found responses in many countries, at different territorial levels. Building on studies on the topic, the authors propose a 'research agenda' that starts from the very definition of culture adopted by the CoCs and extends to the idea of 'partnership' and its impacts on local cultural sectors.

In the documentation section, Flavia Barca offers a broad overview of the observation of gender policy data, starting with the experience active since 2021 at the Ministry of Culture and those already established in the international arena. The author emphasises how gender equality data on the

labour market have a key role to play in affecting social awareness and how their collection process can be an element of 'transparency as well as capacitation'. She points out that 'policies have a strict need for reliable data on which to base strategies and with which to monitor their implementation and effectiveness'.

Benedetta Castiglioni gets to the heart of the Landscape Observatory system as 'open places of exchange and confrontation', instruments for the implementation of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention. She does so with reference to a specific area, the educational one, fundamental for the collective growth and participation of territorial communities, describing the didactic project *In20amo il paesaggio* – promoted on the twentieth anniversary of the Convention, in close cooperation between the University of Padova, MiC and territorial institutions – active since 2020 in secondary schools in Veneto.

One of the issues that has always been at the centre of the debate on publicly issued cultural observatories concerns the type of relationship and how the observatories collaborate with the university. Maria Lusiani, Fabrizio Panozzo, and Andrea Sartini of the Department of Management of the Ca' Foscari University of Venice address this issue, starting from the development of a research project of the university to which they belong, focused on the analysis and mapping of the performing arts ecosystem in Veneto.

What emerges from the discussion is the centrality of the contribution that the academic world can provide on the scientific and methodological side, which goes hand in hand with the need to safeguard the necessary third-party status of the observers themselves.

To propose the evolution of the Cultural Observatories in recent years, we requested, for inclusion in the documentation, a contribution from the Basque Observatory of Culture – a now historic experience – in which the ongoing transformation processes affecting these bodies are outlined, providing important elements for reflection.

In the section dedicated to testimonies Irene Bongiovanni, President of ConfCooperative Culture Tourism and Sport, referring to the need to rethink and redesign personal services and cultural welfare, highlights how the cooperative model is able to find the right balance between social needs and new business models and can represent the most appropriate partner to start cultural-based development projects and trigger a dialogue between 'Public' and 'Private' that is truly generative. In this sense, the Observatory for the Special Public-Private Partnership will be able to offer important contributions.

In the sphere of cultural observation, the role of those bodies that produce research, studies, analyses, and monitoring activities pertaining to the cultural and creative sectors is indispensable in our country, fulfilling *de facto* – in the absence of an institutional subject – the functions of national culture observatories, even though this is not their primary function. The contributions by Giovanna Castelli about the Civita Association, the director of the Federculture Foundation Umberto Croppi, and the director of the Symbola Foundation Domenico Sturabotti describe the areas of inter-

vention and projects of these bodies, which produce annual reports that have become fundamental reference points for the Italian cultural system over time.

Carlo Testini's contribution, which closes the testimonies, notes the discrepancy between the attention paid to the Third Sector and more generally to cultural associations in regional laws on the Performing Arts and Culture, and the inadequacy of the tools used to analyse them, where the quantitative aspect prevails. It points out the potential role of regional observatories and the National Observatory for the Performing Arts in this direction, also in relation to the approval of the 2017 «Third Sector Code», the start of a reform that represents an important opportunity for the non-profit cultural sector.

Remaining in the field of entertainment, we would like to point out an important recent development in relation to the topic we are dealing with. The AGIS (the Italian General Entertainment Association) and the SIAE (the Italian Society of Authors and Publishers) have signed an agreement for the creation of a single Entertainment Observatory (the SIAE already has an Observatory) aimed at the acquisition, processing, and unification of data in the sector.

It is noteworthy that for the implementation of the project, the two institutions will cooperate with the Associazione per l'Economia della Cultura.

At this stage, the cultural sector needs research activities, places for reflection and discussion on the relationships between cultural, social and economic policies in order to face the upcoming challenges. The role of the Cultural Observatories could be decisive.

Keywords: cultural observatories, mission, composition, location, purposes, regulatory sources, management models, methodological aspects, case studies

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