The Institutional Change of Italian Public Museums Between Legitimacy and Efficiency: Do Museum Directors Have a Role? [1]

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Abstract

As in many western countries, an increasing process of managerialization reformed the Italian public sector organizations, including museums, traditionally owned by public bodies. Consistently with the institutionalization of managerialism in the museum sector, the National Museum of Science and Technology (NMST), was transformed in a private foundation in 1999, hired a museum director in 2001 with managerial experience who enacted a more market-oriented strategy.

Recent findings in the new institutional theory which constitutes the theoretical framework of this paper clarified that leaders may have a critical role in affecting the pattern of adoptions of institutional demands. Nevertheless, it is not still clear which are the conditions under which a leader may be able to enact actively and effectively institutional pressures. Moreover, the effects of active change on organizational social and technical performance remain empirically under-explored. The NMST is an exemplary case to investigate these issues, because of its recent managerial transformation. Our study revealed that a relationship of consistency among the leader's background, the adopted strategy and the institutional pressures is the condition for the occurrence of an active implementation of institutional demands and of positive effects both on social and on technical performance.

Keywords
Institutional change, organizational leader, active change, organizational performance.

Introduction

In its early formulations (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), new institutional theory emphasized how "institutional pressures force organizations to adopt similar practices or structures to gain legitimacy and support" (Seo and Creed, 2002). According to this perspective, in institutionalized environments, organizations conform ceremonially to the institutional demands and enact the practice of "de-coupling" (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 356). This means that they separate their formal structure from their activities and thus a misalignment between talk – decisions – actions occurs. Enacting

1

the practice of decoupling, an organization develops a formal side (that is, what it declares and decides) that does not correspond to the existing activities within the organization itself.

Since they conform ceremonially to institutional demands, leaving their daily activities undisturbed, organizations could obtain legitimacy and social acceptance. On the contrary, if organizations attempt to integrate institutional prescriptions and their backstage processes, they may provoke conflicts both within and outside themselves and threaten their survival. According to this perspective, organizations are "passive appearances manipulators, not concerned with task performance" (Powell, 1991: 183) and institutions are elements able to constrain organizations in conforming automatically to them.

However, if institutions are so stable and taken for granted that organizations adopt and maintain them over time, separating them from their daily activities, how organizations and institutions could change? (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

In order to answer to this question an "expanded" new institutionalism (Powell, 1991: 186) was encouraged, that included the topics of organizational leaders' active agency, in order to investigate the dynamics of institutional change (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Fligstein, 1985 and 1991; DiMaggio, 1991; Brint and Karabel, 1991). The recent findings about institutional change explored diverse issues, adopting different level of analysis (Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence, 2004; Townley, 2002; Zilber, 2002; Kraatz and Moore 2002; Oliver, 1992; Beckert, 1999; Leblebici, Salancik, Copay and King, 1991; Jones, 2001). These studies clarified that the compliance and the related de-coupling represent only one of the strategies organizations may enact in order to respond to institutional pressures (Oliver, 1991; Kostova and Roth, 2002) and that organizational actors may have a critical role in initiating, impeding or legitimating and diffusing institutional change (Lawrence, Hardy and Phillips, 2002; Greenwood, Suddaby, Hinings, 2002).

Nevertheless, today new institutional theory is still ambiguous about the conditions under which organizational actors could avoid enacting an attitude of compliance toward institutional pressures and adopt a more active strategy. Moreover, although the recent findings clarified that organizations may adopt institutional pressures with different degrees of implementation, they failed to investigate which are the effects on the organizational social and technical performances connected with the different patterns of adoption. In particular, they did not explore whether the effective adoption of institutional demands could actually induce conflicts in the inner and outer contexts of an organzation and so threaten its legitimacy and survival (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

In order to fill the gaps that the theory represents, we will use an approach typical of the old institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Selznick, 1996), focusing on a specific organization and his leader. In our opinion, this approach could clarify better the relationship between individuals and institutions, highlighting how the specific actions of an organizational leader and the characteristics of his organization can influence the institutionalization process within the organization itself and at field level. In particular, we will investigate the conditions under which a leader, facing new institutional demands, does not conform ceremonially to them but actively adopts them. Moreover, we will explore which effects this behavior could produce on the organizational social

and technical performance, aiming to test whether the active and effective adoption of institutional pressures may be dangerous for the organizational life.

We examine our propositions through a single case study about the managerial transformation of an important Italian museum, the National Museum of Science and Technology (NMST).

As in many Western countries, in Italy public management has been reformed since the 1990s, in order to use more efficiently the decreasing public resources, to improve service quality, and to obtain a symbolic and legitimacy advantage (Pollit and Bouckaert, 2002). Museums, as public bodies, have been involved in this "managerialization process". Interesting results of this process are the introduction of new modes of governance, more oriented to public-private partnership, and of managerial practices, more oriented to efficiency and service quality. Consistently with the institutionalization of managerialism in the museum sector, the NMST, owned by a public body since 1953 and transformed in a private foundation in 1999, adopted a manager as museum's director in 2001 and since then it enacted a more market-oriented strategy. Because of these characteristics, it is a unique case to investigate the conditions under which an organizational actor does not enact the de-coupling and whether the effects connected to this strategy threaten organizational survival or not.

Theoretical Background and Propositions

The Avoidance of De-coupling, the Active Change and Its Effects on Organizational Survival

DiMaggio and Powell affirmed, "In the shift from old to new Institutionalism something has been lost" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991: 27).

New institutionalism, in its early formulation, was concerned with the process of social legitimisation and organizational reproduction, explored the institutionalization of rules and organizational forms, neglecting the analysis of the specific organization, and focused the investigation on institutional dynamics as a cognitive process, occurred at field level (Zucker, 1987). In this context, the issues of individuals' power, interests and values and the topic of individual interactions, as mechanisms able to influence the institutionalization, were lost.

This early approach considered institutions as "taken for granted scripts, rules and classifications" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991: 15) and it represented organizations as conforming ceremonially to them, like in an automatic and unavoidable process (DiMaggio, 1988: 4). Moreover, because of the inconsistencies existing between organizations' daily activities and institutions, (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), organizations had to enact the decoupling, that is, to separate their formal structures form their backstage processes, minimizing control and evaluation and handling coordination informally. According to this perspective, the device of de-coupling enables organizations to hide the inconsistencies between institutional myths and backstage processes and thus to gain legitimacy. Otherwise, the attempt of the organization to integrate institutional pressures and daily activities in its formal structure may make these inconsistencies evident and thus threaten the organizational survival.

New institutionalist researchers themselves criticized this early approach. They highlighted that it was not suitable to explain how institutions and organizations could change and questioned that institutionalized organizations have to be loosely-coupled, in order to survive (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, Powell, 1991). Thus, in order to expand the scope of new institutional theory, they emphasized the necessity to re-introduce the issue of change, agency and efficiency in institutional analyses.

Since DiMaggio and Powell (1991) suggestions on the need to expand the scope of neo institutionalism, researchers explored diverse issues on institutional change and illustrated the importance that organizational actors acquired in interpreting how institutional change is initiated, legitimated and diffused (Lounsbury, 2002; Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence, 2004; Greenwood, Suddaby, Hinings, 2002).

In particular recent studies on the institutional change topic focused on interpreting the emergence of different patterns of adoption of institutional pressures. These studies clarified that organizations do not unavoidably conform to institutional pressures, but that their behavior may "vary from compliance to resistance depending on the nature and the context of the pressures themselves" (Oliver, 1991:146).

Goodstein (1994) tested this theoretical concept in his study concerning employer adoption of work family initiatives. This study illustrated that the institutional environment is not deterministic and that organizational strategic choices depend on the characteristics of the organizations (i.e. their size and visibility), the institutional pressures (i.e. their degree of diffusion), and on their interplay with technical factors (i.e. compromise is more likely when the impact of institutional pressures on technical outcome is negative). Kostova and Roth (2002) deepened this framework in their empirical investigation about the adoption of an organizational practice by the subsidiaries of a multinational corporation. In their investigation, the authors classified four different patterns of adoption "active, minimal, assent and ceremonial" (2002: 229) and illustrated that the appearance of these patterns depended on the favorability of institutional and relational context to the practice itself.

Moreover, few studies clarified that the emergence of a specific pattern of adoption, as the ceremonial adoption and the connected de-coupling could be, may depend on the relationship between the institutional environment and organizational actors. Johnson and colleagues (2000) in their study on the privatization of public sector, theorized that the rate and the patterns of adoption depend on the involvement of the organizational actors in institutional change process, on their interests in the process outcome, on the degree to which they experience behaviors that are different from their own ones, and finally on the extent to which they perceive that their enacted behavior is symbolically reinforced. Furthermore, the investigation of Townley (2002) illustrated how institutional change may be explained, referring to conflict and convergence relationship between the rationalities underlying myths and those characterizing organizational members. The author analyzed the introduction of business planning and performance measures in a Canadian cultural department. These business-like practices introduced forms of rationality that were somehow different from those of organizational members and the degree of conflicts between the rationalities may explain resistance or compliance responses to institutional pressures.

According to these studies, the de-coupling is not a taken for granted device when organizations respond to institutional pressures and organizational actors' values,

cognitions and interests are decisive factors affecting patterns of adoption. Nevertheless, it is still not clear which are the conditions under which organizational actors find preferable and more convenient an active and effective enactment of institutional pressures than the ceremonial adoption and the de-coupling.

With reference to the effects of the avoidance of the de-coupling, the early institutional research on organizational responses to institutional pressures failed to analyze empirically the negative consequences of tightly coupling on organizational survival, mainly assumed them (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Meyer, Scott and Deal, 1992). On the other hand, these studies focused on testing empirically the appropriateness of de-coupling in public and non-profit sector organizations, "characterized by poorly understood technologies and operating in environment with modest technical demands", (Powell, 1991: 189) and thus inclined to compete mainly for social acceptance.

In fact, Meyer and Rowan (1977) theorized that institutionalized organizations have to conform to the myths in order to get social and cultural appraisal, and thus to obtain resources for surviving. According to this perspective, the alignment of the organization's formal structure and backstage processes could determine internal and external conflicts, instability, loss of legitimacy and consequently of resources, threatening the organizational survival. According to this theorization, few empirical studies illustrated that it was more convenient for organizations to conform ceremonially to the myths, implement the decoupling and reach legitimization, than try to integrate institutional demands and backstage processes (Meyer, Scott and Deal, 1992; Scott, 1992b; Meyer and Rowan, 1992; D'Aunno, Sutton, Price, 1991; Baum and Oliver, 1991; Brunsson, 1989). However, all these studies focused on sectors, such as the educational and health care ones, where the technical requirements were weak.

However, new institutionalists themselves criticized and made questionable (Powell, 1991; Orrù, Biggart, Hamilton, 1991) the approach of separating technical and institutional issues, because this perspective gives an over-socialized view of the organization.

Moreover, institutional researches admitted that their predictions about the effects of decoupling were ambiguous when the focus of the investigation was on technical practices that become institutionally enforced (Meyer, Scott, Deal, 1992: 62). In fact, in such a case, it was not clear whether institutional pressures and daily activities are conflicting or not and therefore if the effects of tightly coupling could be dangerous for the organization survival. As far as empirical research on this topic is concerned, few studies about the public sector managerialization showed that the decoupling was not the only observable results when technical practices are institutionalized, but that the tightly coupling and a related improvement in both the social and technical performance was sometimes observable (Clarke and Newman, 1997).

Finally, although the recent findings about the emergence of different patterns of adoptions solved the ambiguities connected to the issue of ceremonial isomorphism (Goodstein, 1994; Kostova and Roth, 2002; Townley, 2002), they did not evaluate the consequences of this behavior on the organizational performance, neglecting to discuss whether the avoidance of the de-coupling may actually threaten organizational survival. Thus, because of this lack of empirical research on this issue, the effects of de-coupling avoidance on organizational survival remained under-explored and mainly when technical practices that are institutionally enforced are analyzed.

In order to fill the gaps that the theory represents we would explore the conditions enabling organizational actors to avoid the de-coupling and which are the effects of this strategy on organizational survival. Our first research objective is to illustrate how an organizational leader may avoid ceremonial isomorphism and the de-coupling, implement an active and effective change and create a tightly coupled organization. Secondly, we investigate the consequences of leader's behavior on the organizational formal structure and daily activities , in order to test whether tightly coupling practice is dangerous for organizational legitimacy and technical performance or not.
Our propositions are as follows:

> Proposition 1: an organizational leader may actively respond to institutional pressures and thus create a tightly coupled organization.

> Proposition 2: a tightly coupled organization may obtain positive effects both on legitimacy and on technical performance

Our main aim is to analyze the conditions under which the active enactment of institutional pressures (proposition 1) and its related positive effects n organizational performance (proposition 2) may occur.

Fitness between organizational leader and institutional environment's characteristics
The "expanded" new institutionalism revealed a connection between leader's interests and values, field characteristics and institutional change. Change happens when individual actors, basing on their interests, experience and power position, are able to interpret the institutional environment and, if they have enough resources, formulate a new strategy that, on the one side, is consistent with the environmental demands and, on the other one, can realize their interests (Fligstein, 1985 and 1991; Jones, 2001; Beckert 1999; Hoffman, 1999; Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings, 2002). According to this perspective, Fligstein (1991) accounted for the evolution of M-form, analyzing the interplay between background, interests and power position of the organizational leaders and main wider structural events in the environment. Lounsbury (2002) clarified how and when context variables and organizational actors interact, investigating how a phase of institutional logic transformation, in financial field in U.S., created the opportunity for professional associations to de-institutionalize the existing institutional order and to create a new one, more coherent with their interests. Similarly Kraatz and Moore (2002) in their investigation on the American colleges, showed that the coherence between the experience and background of college presidents and the wider environmental changes affected the adoption of new organizational arrangements.

Even if these findings introduced the condition of consistency between leader interests and background, environmental pressures and strategy, in order to explain the occurrence of institutional change, they did not explore whether the enacted organizational change is successful for the organizational survival or not.

Several researches about the relationship between the leader career background and strategy analyzed the link existing between manager's background, the organizational context, the kind of strategy and its effectiveness. In particular, Gunz and Jalland (1996), through a review of the main researches on this topic elaborated a model and a number of propositions that link manager's features to the strategy's choice and to its implementation success. The main idea resulting from all reviewed researches is that

different strategies call for managers with different experiences and that the effectiveness at realizing the intended strategy depends on the existence of a match between the strategy itself and the manager's skills.

Many empirical researches confirmed the relation between manager's background, the strategy choice, and its success. Several authors (Gupta and Govindarajan 1984; Gupta, 1984; Miller and Toulouse, 1986) have compared different strategies, and found out the manager's characteristics that fit better with them. Finally, they found that manager's characteristics could give a bigger contribution to the effectiveness of the strategy they fit with than to any other one. Miller and Toulouse (1986) found that in the link between leader and strategy is useful to include environmental characteristics. In fact, leader personality, strategy adoption and its effectiveness have a strong relationship when they fit with the environment pressures.

From these researches, it is clear that when the organization's strategy, the leader's career background and the environment demands are consistent, the strategy is not only adopted, but it is also effective.
Our proposition is as follow:

> Proposition 3: the occurrence of an active change and of the tightly coupling practice with its positive effect on efficiency and legitimacy's achievement are connected to the consistency between leader's experience, strategy, and the environment demands.

Methodology

Research Context

Our study explores the conditions under which an organizational leader, in facing institutional pressures, could enact an active behavior and avoid the de-coupling, obtaining both social acceptance and technical performance improvement. Several characteristics of the Italian museum sector make this setting ideal for our purpose.

A recent reform invested the museum sector in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these organizations and modified the decisions-making rights' distribution of museum's field, and created new myths (Scott and Meyer, 1991:129).

Due to a profound decentralization process (Pollit and Bouckaert, 2002), Regions acquired programming and funding powers on museums; Provinces and Municipalities gained operative competences. Local bodies and mainly the Regions are now the main institutionalization sources; moreover, private subjects become stakeholders and represent a provider of social support and resources for those museums, which adopted a private form of governance.

As far as the environment myths are concerned, it is possible to observe a shift from a museum as an organization whose aim is the conservation of the collection, to a museum as an organization whose mission is cultural education, interpretation, and promotion to a larger public (Jalla, 2000). Moreover present museum "typification" (Scott,

1987: 495) includes attention to financial assets, human resource management, customer and service orientation and to the structure and collection quality (Bagdadli, 1997; Moretti 1999; Valentino and Mosetto, 2001).

Lombardia Region, one of the largest and richest Regions in North Italy, has been particularly attentive to create procedures to improve museums' services and to clarify museums myths. Enforcing new financing mechanisms, the Region favors the rising of local museums networks, creates processes of quality certification, helps the development of a museum profession, promotes the autonomy of museums, and encourages the adoption of new form of governance models such as private foundations. Today, in Lombardia Region, the idea of a museum increasingly attentive to efficiency and effectiveness is becoming less ambiguous. In this Region, there is a clear ongoing process of structuration of the museum field, based on this new museum archetype (Bagdadli and Paolino, 2004).

The National Museum of Science and Technology of Milan is a critical and at the same time an exemplary case (Yin, 1994). Usually Italian museums are characterized by low performance level, have not a very articulate services system, depend almost completely on public funds, and are usually leaded by directors with an humanities background. Since 2001, The NMST has adopted a different organizational model and nowadays it meets many conditions to test our research objectives. The NMST is embedded in a field increasingly characterized by managerialism myth and the new appointed director has a managerial background; he adopted a strategy that fits both with his experience and field demands.

Method

As recommended for the single-case method (Yin, 1994), we used evidence from different sources, covering the period from 1999 to 2003.

Firstly, we analyzed documents and records illustrating the formal aspect of museum change; we read newspaper articles about the official declarations of museum director at conferences, his interviews, and relating to the general strategy of the museum; moreover, we read the internal communications from the director to the organization. From this analysis, we derived the main events that determined the museum evolution and the official declarations of the director about the content of his change strategy. Then we analyzed documents about the internal situation of the museum; we studied organizational charts, budgets, human resource composition, employees contracts, and the visitors dynamics. From them, we derived how core activities and personnel changed in the organizations, the evolution and the composition of revenues and costs, and which were the effects of the new strategy on the demand side.

We interviewed the director and the responsibles of all departments (scientific, artistic, finance, administration, marketing and human resources). The interviews lasted about 30 minutes, during which people were asked only to narrate the main changes they observed and enacted in the last four years. Moreover, we spent three months of participant observation in the NMST, collaborating with the directors of main museum departments. Our interviews and observations focused on exploring which was the attitude of the museum's director within the organization, which of the declared changes

people perceived as really implemented in their organization and if they favored or resisted them and why.

Moreover, we interviewed the museum sector's main players, the Lombardia Region cultural service director; the directors of the most important Lombardia museums; the representatives of the biggest museum Italian associations (ANMLI and ICOM). We conducted this survey in order to clarify if the response of NMST to institutional demands was a unique or a common behavior among Lombardia's museums and why. Finally, we analyzed Lombardia Region archive records and main papers, articles, books about the recent museums' reform, in order to clarify the content of institutional pressures on the museum.

Variables

Variable included in the study are:

Leader active role
In the literature, there is not a clear way to study leader's active role in the change process. We decided to study:
- The level of myths abstraction and contents produced by Lombardia Region, the main institutionalizing agent in the regional museum field and the overlap with the practices effectively implemented at the NMST;
- The presence of the managerial practices adopted by the NMST in other museums;
- The director's behavior in adopting these practices.

Tightly coupled organization
To understand if NMST is a loose or tightly coupled organization we analyzed (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Powell, 1988; Brunsson, 1989):
- Main director's official declarations to internal and external stakeholders;
- Actions and practices effectively implemented in the organization;
- The effectiveness of control and coordination mechanisms.

Efficiency, effectiveness
Quality standards developed for Italian museums (D.M 10 may 2001) were adapted and used as indicators of efficiency and effectiveness; specifically we considered the increase of:
- Financial autonomy;
- Investments in human capital;
- Number and quality of services;
- Visitors;
- The improvement of the collections and of the structure.

Legitimacy
Legitimacy was measured as the organization's ability to (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1991; D'Aunno, Sutton and Price, 1991):
- Attract funds from the key public and private actors;
- Obtain certifications;
- Obtain social support from the public opinion.
- Gain internal appreciation among human resource and board of trustees

Results

The Active Process of Institutionalization and the Tightly Coupled Organization

The analysis of myths abstraction and contents produced by the Lombardia Region and by the other field museums, of the practices effectively implemented at the NMST, and of director approach, showed an active role of the museum leader in implementing the managerial renewal.

Moreover, the analysis of main leader's declaration and effective organizational actions showed an alignment. Museum's control mechanisms were not minimized and coordination mechanisms were not informal. All these elements suggest the existence of a tightly coupled organization.

This gives support to Proposition 1. We specify below results from the analysis.

1. *The Leader's Active Role*

The analysis of the level of myths abstraction and contents produced by Lombardia Region, which can be found in regional laws, acts, and meetings' reports, reveals a constant but general pressure towards efficiency and effectiveness. More specific myths were developed at regional level encouraging the development of local networks, changing the financial mechanisms toward specific coordinated projects, helping the development of a museum profession; defining new professional roles dedicated to museum services to the public; encouraging and financing building and collections' maintenance, and promoting attention to clients.

Analyzing the managerial practices implemented at the NMST we observed that they were more specific to the museum's conditions and leader's past experience than those created by the Region, and were adopted with a critical approach, as we could deduct from the following observations. The NMST do not take part to a local network but to a European one. It established only a ticket-sharing program with few museums and developed a specific educational project with the Natural History Museum, another large museum in Milano. About new financing mechanisms, more project-oriented, in the NMST this methodology was implemented not only to obtain public funds, but it has become the usual way to get private funds, an habit about which precise indications do not exist in the field. As far as professional experts, NMST not only met the regional requirements employing all requested roles (director, curators, responsible for educational service, responsible for security of building and collection), but employed and trained a whole educational team for laboratories and visits management, museum exhibits and layout experts, a fundraiser, a controller, a communication and events team and a special projects one. About the building and the collection maintenance, regional procedures and funds exist to help museums in fulfilling these objectives. The NMST managed to restore the ancient parts of the building and the collection in an original way, attracting different financial sources, mainly private (i.e. restoring acoustic laboratories with funds provided by TDK, or restoring an ancient room integrating regional funds and private ones). Finally, about attention to clients, the visiting hours overcome the regional suggestions, with evening visits and events cycles; moreover, the museum established a procedure to examine visits development. The educational activities were increased and

improved with interactivity laboratories and collections quality growth. Finally, these actions were strictly connected to the personal director interpretation of museum mission, as "public understanding of science", therefore as an instrument to increase the cultural spread[2].

About the other museums as mimetic institutional pressures source, we observed through interviews with all main Lombardia museums, that none of them have yet implemented such complex managerial practices. Although some of them are following the efficiency and effectiveness improvement path, their managerial project is not so well defined and developed as the NMST one. In their renewal projects, a general attention for resources generation process, such as events, sponsorship, for communication and professionals has emerged, but these program could not be connected to the coherent strategic project of the NMST. So they cold not be a mimetic source for it.

The last evidence we used to analyze the active role of leader was the director's attitude to show his actions. From press documents, internal communiqués, direct observations and interviews, is possible to observe that his behavior is that of a person who is creating something out from the "dust" [3] and not simply adopting passively a practice.
In synthesis, the myths, manly institutionalized through the regional action, were not enacted passively by the NMST, but they were adapted and modified, respecting the organizations characteristics and the leader's projects. Moreover, the director attitude is an evidence of this approach.

2. The Tightly Coupled Organization

We summarize main leader's declarations about the new museum direction and strategy collected from official sources and interviews:
1. the integration of the more traditional science museum and the more innovative science centre concept, through a services system composed of the usual museum visits, interactive laboratories, exhibits and conferences;
2. increasing investments in communication, laboratories and exhibit interactivity, public training and conservation, and in the restoration of the building and the collection;
3. the introduction of new managerial practices and instruments, specifically promoting the investment in human capital, financial and economical control, fundraising and planning;
4. the development of a service system more attentive to public cultural growth;
5. the conquest of a National and European visibility;
6. the building of a strong relations network with Lombardia territory; and with private subjects in order to enlarge resource providers.

A completely new approach about museum-environment relationship, that of openness to external control, was declared which could be depicted with this leader's sentence: "When I arrived I took more than 400 photos that testify museum's decaying state. By six years, I'll take other 400 photos"[4]

3. Actions

In the last three years, since the new leader was appointed, most declarations resulted in concrete actions specified below.

Science centre and traditional museum integration (declaration 1 and 2)
The traditional museum was integrated with the science centre concept through the increase in the number of laboratories and exhibits; their layout and technological devices was improved. Collection pieces were registered, and many of them, in decaying phase, were restored. Any laboratory was developed near to its connected collection section, so the observing may be associate directly to the experiencing. The strictly cultural traditional function was enforced by employing new educational experts and by empowering the existing ones. Conferences about scientific themes and teachers training activity have been organized in order to promote the museum's interactivity.

New managerial practices introduction (declaration 3)
Investments in human capital increased; the NMST eliminated most precarious contracts; public contracts were substituted with private ones and tasks were reorganized consistently with the renewed museum's mission.
There is not yet a detailed planning, but general guidelines have been defined in order to plan activities for three years. Moreover, a person with a background in financial and economical control was employed, so many wasting money situations were recognized, and budget and final balance have been used as programming and control instruments.
A fundraising function was introduced; the number of private funds providers was enlarged and the investment quality grew, as donations were connected to specific projects.
A new communication function is developing the museum image which will be able in the future to attract more public and private investors.

Relationship with external stakeholders (declarations 4, 5 and 6)
The development of an enlarged service system is the evidence of a real new attention to the visitors. This system is able to satisfy different clients' expectations, and to develop effectively their scientific education, through the interactive and traditional learning approach integration.
European and national visibility increased through the relationships with important European science museums, such as "Deuthsches Museum" and the "Fundaciò la Caisa". Moreover the NMST has been cited [5] together with the "Idis Foundation" in Napoli, as an innovative and good example of Italian museum management.
About the relationship with Lombardia territory, an important project has been developed for the technical cultural spread in the schools of the whole Region: this project implementation has requested frequent contacts with schools, other science museums, and Region representatives.

4. Control and Coordination Mechanisms

At the NMST, the external and internal control is strong, and the coordination is not implemented mainly through informal process.

An effective "openness approach" reveals the importance of external control: the director invites journalists and common visitors who write about the museum to verify their opinions through a complete visit, above all on the museum backstage.

In the organization he promotes the value of "transparency and comparison" and of formal coordination by:
- Talking with employees every day and so exerting a direct control on their action and results;
- Promoting team-group;
- Being attentive to spread museums relevant results in the organization through internal and external communication;
- Organizing frequent executive meetings, recognized by employees as democratic occasions to interact with the leader.

In synthesis, from this analysis emerges that there is an alignment between leader's declarations and actions, and that the organization is ready to expose its backstage activity to external control and to promote the formal comparison among organizational units.

The Efficiency, Effectiveness and Legitimacy

All indicators used showed an increase in the museum efficiency and effectiveness and, partially, in legitimacy, giving support to Proposition 2. We specify the single indicators.

1. Efficiency and Effectiveness

Service system
Before the arrival of the new director, the main services were laboratories, guided visits, and some training courses for teachers. Nowadays this service system has been enlarged and it has been strictly related to well defined strategic objectives. The museum offer is now composed of:
- A bigger number of laboratories, whose layout and technical facilities have been improved;
- A complete training system dedicated both to teachers and internal employees;
- An events system, composed of: congresses, birthday parties for children, concerts, expositions, conferences, movies projections, temporary projects with schools.

This new service system produced positive effects both on visits and revenues development, as Figure 1 and 2 show.

Figure 1 - Visits increase
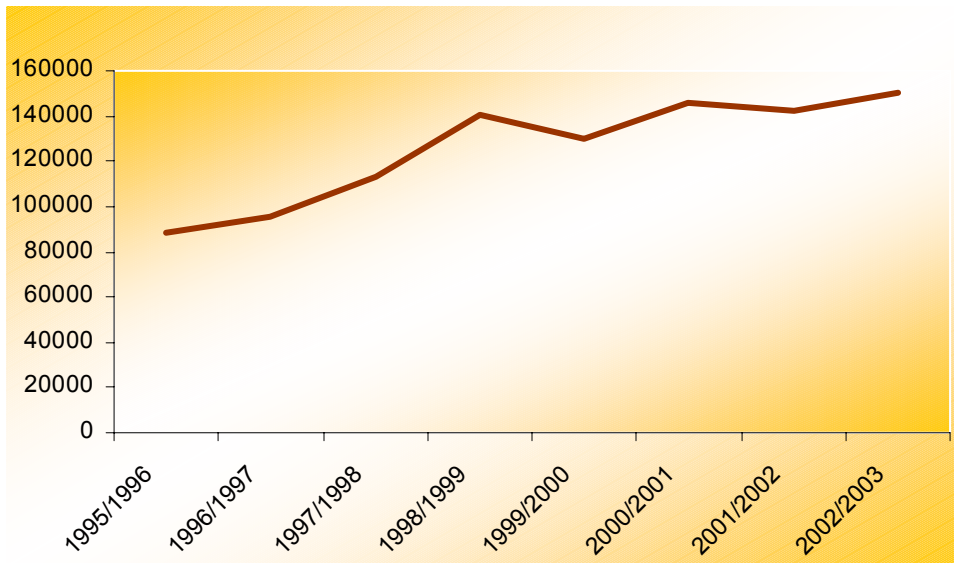

Figure 2 – Revenues increase
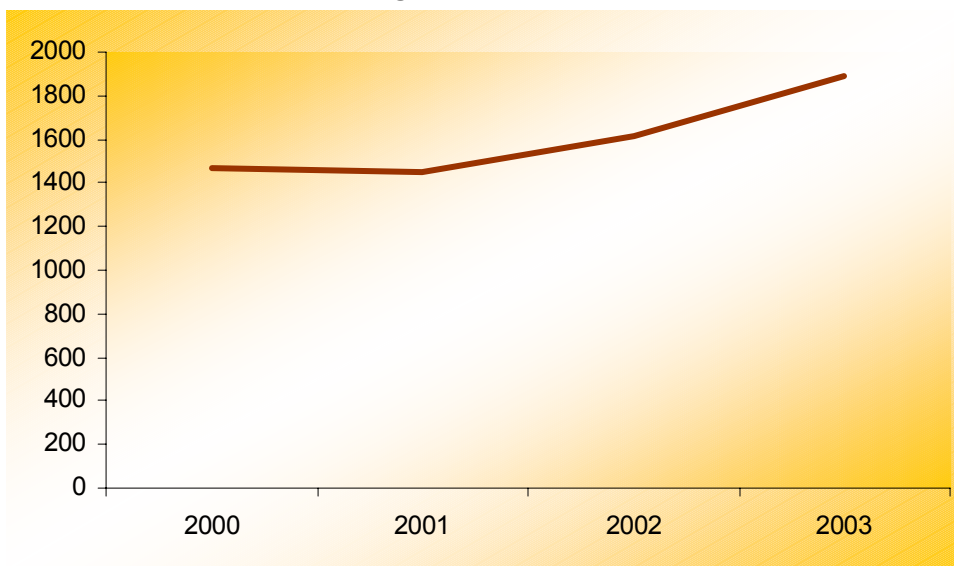
Investments in human capital

Before the new leader arrival in 2001, the NMST had 30 employees, and about 80 collaborators. Nowadays:

- The NMST has 60 employees and 103 external collaborators;
- Precarious contracts have been reduced: the 103 collaborators are mainly under a part time contract which is considered a good one for guides; precarious professionals were employed;
- Almost all employees subscribed a private employment contract; those who did not want the private contract decided to move to a different public organization;
- Employees' competencies development was achieved mainly through the involvement in more complex projects.

Figure 3 shows the increase of the investments in human capital

Figure 3 - Human capital investment increase
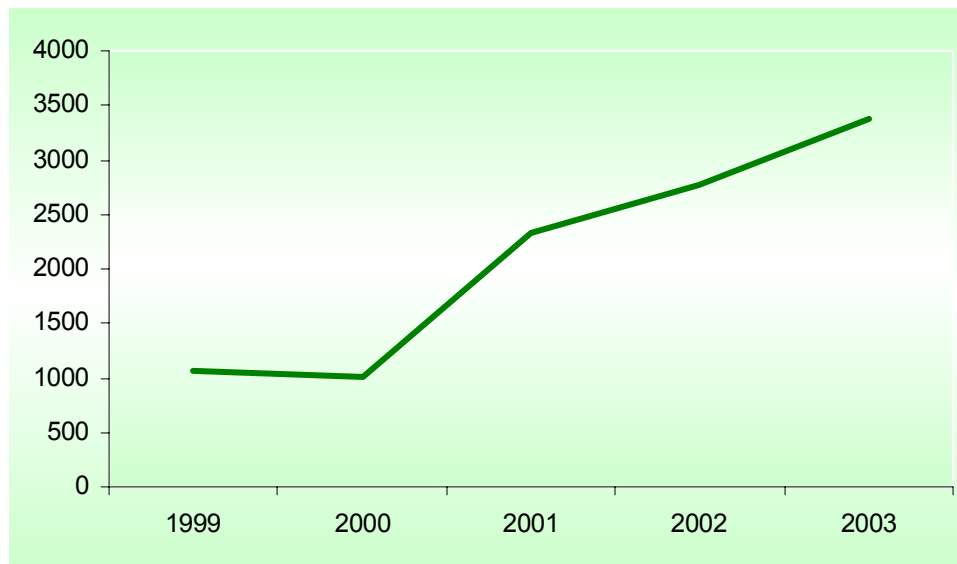

Collection and structures
Main activities concerning collection and structures were:
−   the creation of a procedure for collections' registration and cataloguing which allowed to finish the registration of all museum pieces and to increase the number of catalogued pieces;
−   the restoration of many ancient sectors and rooms, closed since many years, now used for conferences, congresses and other events;
−   the renewal of the laboratories;
−   the start of a complete maintenance process of the building;
−   the creation of a control process for electric plant and historic machines safe.

Financial asset
The NMST financial autonomy improved not only because of revenues increase from the new service system, but also because, after the new director arrival, a fundraising and a financial controlling function was created increasing the museum ability to attract private and public funds. The museum moved from almost 100% public financing to a budget composed by 40% private sources, mainly obtained for specific projects.

Figure 4 - Funds composition
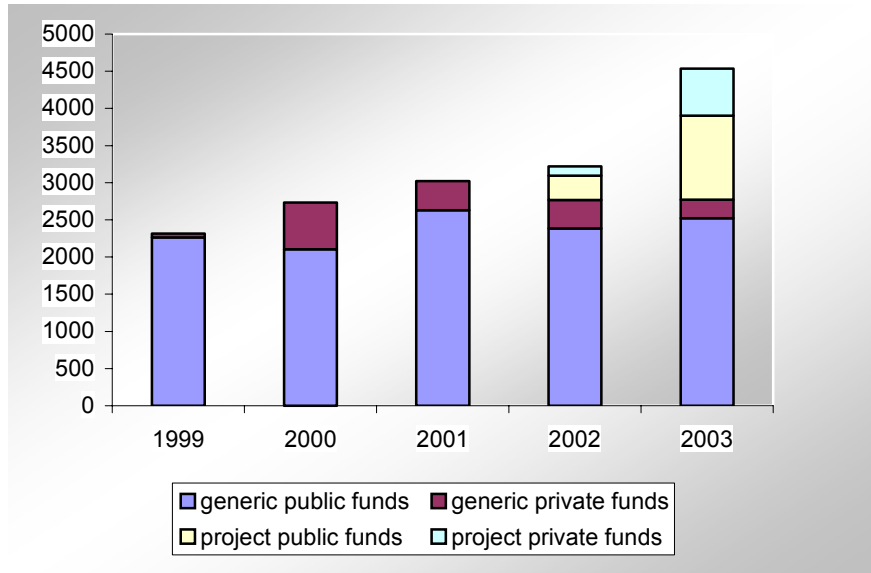
2. *Legitimacy*

Legitimacy indicators present mixed results.

<u>Ability to attract funds from the key public and private actors</u>
Figure 4 shows an increased ability to attract a bigger amount of both private and public funds. Moreover, between 1999 and 2003, the variety of financial partners increased, as shown in Table 1, due to NMST ability to attract private stakeholders proposing to each one a reciprocal interests' exchange.

TABLE 1

Financial partners	1999	%	2003	%
Public partners	Central government; Lombardia Region; Municipalità	97.9	Central Government; Lombardia Region; Municipality; Ue	60
Private partners	Sporadic sponsorships only	2.1	Fondazione Cariplo; Camera Commercio; Falk; Tdk; Fondazione Buzzati; Expo CTS; BASF; Comieco; Fondazione Accenture; St Microelectronics; Zincar; Bracco; Pirelli; Borissova	40

<u>Certifications</u>
NMST obtained the ISO 9001 Quality Certification [6] about its educational services. The museum submitted the request to receive the accreditation from Lombardia Region and although the process is not yet finished, it is very likeable that the museum will be accredited as the Region representatives describe the museum as an excellent management example.

<u>Social support from public opinion</u>
We used main press documents to analyze public opinion support. Media described the period preceding the transformation in a private subject as the "dust accumulation moment" for the museum, because of its almost complete inactivity and of the public institutions abandon [7]. In 2001 2002 and 2003 the appreciation for the new museum direction is largely spread, but not complete. About the 10% of the collected articles express a negative judgment about the museum, but most of them were related to the fail of the Toti submarine's arrival, an issue relative to the preceding museum direction. More important, the museum leader was criticized for his human resource management defined too private oriented, especially from left hand press informed by museum unions. Nevertheless, these articles are a limited number.

The business community and visitors' interviews show a great satisfaction about the new museum direction [8].

<u>Internal appreciation: relationship with human resource and board of trustees</u>
We verify internal legitimacy through the new museum orientation's appraisal level among human resources and in the board of trustees.

Internal conflicts with a small part of employees were the most critical side of the new museum management. The private employee contract, the selection of new professionals, usually younger and more trained than existing employees, the new organizational structure, and the relative new task and power distribution destroyed the old status positions and relationship system. Moreover, the introduction of a more meritocratic human resource approach was implemented with difficulties among the less "merit oriented" employees.

Part of the board of trustees was, especially at the beginning, in conflict with the new direction due to two opposite vision of the museum archetypes. The director's one, based on a mission able to integrate managerial and economical aspects, and the trustees' one (part of the board), based on a traditional, conservative and more static vision. The director's vision has been recently enforced, because trustees and personnel have realized its value for legitimacy improvement and hence for pursuing the traditional museum mission.

In synthesis, the effects of the new museum direction on legitimacy are not completely positive, especially in the internal organizational context, but they have become less significant.

Discussion: The Leader, Field and Strategy Consistency

In this research, we examined some critical new institutionalist issues. We formulated and tested some propositions using data on an exemplary case of museum change, the NMST. Our intent was twofold. On the one side, we wanted to test the adequacy of the early new-institutionalist frame, for explaining organizational behavior in a renewed sector, characterized by the emergence of managerial myths, whose effects are not yet well explored by new institutionalists themselves (Meyer, Scott and Deal 1992; Powell, 1985 and 1991). On the other side, we wanted to contribute to the "expansion" of the new institutionalism, developing the issues of institutional change. Empirical findings

conducted on this topic illustrated that the ceremonial isomorphism and the related de-coupling are only one of the strategies organizations may adopt towards institutional pressures (Oliver, 1991; Goodstein 1994; Kostova and Roth, 2002; Greenwood, Suddaby, Hinings, 2002). Moreover these studies clarified that organizational actors may have a critical role in influencing organizational responses to institutional demands (Kraatz and Moore, 2002; Townley, 2002; Johnson et al., 2000). Nevertheless, these studies have not still highlighted why and when organizational leaders prefer to adopt effectively institutional prescriptions instead of conforming to them ceremonially. Moreover, they neglected to evaluate the consequences of an effective change and tightly coupling on the organizational technical and social performance. In our research, we adopted an individual-centered and organization-specific perspective able to emphasize the contribution of leader's decisions and actions to institutionalization and to test the effect this process produced within the organization. In particular, we explored the conditions under which a leader could have an active role in responding to institutional pressures, avoid the decoupling and gain both legitimacy and efficiency.

According to the results of our research, early new institutional perspective is not completely adequate to account for most of the observed organizational behaviors. Early new institutionalism represents organizations facing societal expectations as passive, loosely coupled, legitimate but not concerned with task performance.

First, the NMST's change could not be explained as resulting from a process of isomorphism to the institutional pressures, (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) but it was the result of an active role of NMST's leader. We observed that the managerial practices adopted by the NMST were consistent with the general pressure toward efficiency, mainly produced by the Lombardia Region. Nevertheless, the practices adopted at NMST were more specific to the organizational context and their contents were more complex than those created at regional level. The difference in the depth and the complexity between the existing myths and the adopted practices showed that the myths could represent the main frame where the organizational leader could have an active role in adapting them to the organizational context and to his project. This issue confirmed that the institutions are not only the reign of constrains, but "they are first and foremost products of human actions" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991: 28). In addition, the NMST is not a de-coupled (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, Scott, 1992 a and b) but tightly coupled organization; the formal adoption of managerial practices did not let the backstage processes undisturbed, but had an effective impact on them. All the leader's declarations about his museums were aligned with corresponding actions in daily processes. Moreover, the mechanisms of control and coordination were effective, and the organization was ready to expose its backstage activities to external and internal evaluation. This behavior revealed that the NMST's conformity to managerial pressures was not only a "window dressing" (Covaleski and Dirsmith, 1988: 565), but represented a real organizational change.

Finally, about tightly coupling effects on efficiency and legitimacy, (Meyer, Scott and Deal, 1992; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) the museum was efficient, and it revealed a mainly positive effect on its legitimacy. The effective implementation of leader's declaration produced an improvement in museum's service system, visits and revenues development, and in the ability to attract public and private financial resource. However, the new museum direction met conflicts in the internal organizational context, among a part of the human resources and of the trustees. We observed that this legitimacy lack has become less significant the more the enactment of

managerial practices has shown its ability to increase external appreciation and to achieve the traditional museum aims. Hence, the more the managerial pressures are institutionalized within and outside the organization, the more internal conflicts become weak.

Our third proposition about the interaction between leader's background, the institutional pressures and strategy could be a useful pattern to interpret these results (Fligstein, 1985 and 1991; Powell, 1991; Greenwood and Hinings, 1996; Miller and Toulouse, 1986). The power of societal expectations by themselves is not a sufficient element to explain the phenomenon of change (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983 and 1991; Meyer and Rowan 1977). The NMST transformed in a private foundation in 1999. From 1999 to 2001, a director, with a humanities background, leaded it. During these years, the managerial myths did not take to any real change in the museum activities: only episodic sponsorships and some new employments were undertaken, and they were more symbolic acts than real implementation of a new organizational project. The managerial transformation was only a ceremonial change; we could not observe any consequences on daily museum's activities, and the organizational efficiency and legitimacy almost remained undisturbed. We could observe that until the museum's leader background was not consistent with the managerial myths, these peculiar institutional pressures produced almost the effects the early new-institutionalism forecast for institutionalized organizations. When, in 2001, the new director, able to interpret the new field pressures and to elaborate a consistent strategy due to his past managerial experience, arrived at the NMST, he implemented an active and effective change, with the observed positive effects on its efficiency, effectiveness, and partially on its legitimacy. The interviews to the other Lombardia museum directors confirmed this observation: only those museums headed by a director, whose values are coherent with the managerialism, have implemented some real and effective actions toward the managerial transformation. Without considering this consistency relationship, we could not explain why the same environmental pressures produced different effects on the organizational behavior under different directors' lead.

In synthesis, these results illustrate the conditions under which organizations in increasingly institutionalized environment are not unavoidably passive elements and they do not become irresistibly de-coupled: a match between the field demands, the leader's organization characteristics, and the strategy adopted has to occur. This interpretation highlights that the expanded new institutionalism is a more adequate framework than the early approach of this theory in analyzing change process because it introduced the active agency and illustrated the importance of the consistency between leader's characteristics, environment demands and strategy. However, our focus on the single organization permits to concentrate on the specific decisions and actions of the leader, to highlight how he could actively influence the implementation of new institutional pressures, and to evaluate the consequences of his behavior on the organizational performance.

There are clearly a number of limits to our work. First, when we mentioned crucial leader's characteristics in institutional dynamics, we referred to his experience and career background (Gunz and Jalland, 1996; Gupta, 1984), and self-interests and power (Powell, 1991, DiMaggio, 1991; Brint and Karabel, 1991). This issue needs more research in order to clarify how different characteristics could influence leader's choices and actions. Moreover, the legitimacy issue should be better investigated too; its mixed effects revealed that the institutionalization process could generate internal conflicts,

and, above all, that the disruption of the existing organizational routines could explain them more than the opposition between myths and daily activities.

Second, the institutionalization process of the museum's field has not yet completed. To test the adequacy of the consistency between leader background, myths and strategy as interpretation pattern, we need to reiterate analyses over time.

Finally, we investigated the NMST because now it represents an exemplary case; nevertheless, we need to analyze other cases, in order to understand better to which extent our conclusions could be generalized.

Notes

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at Egos Colloquium, Ljubljana, 2004.
[2] From official director declarations
[3] La Repubblica, September 16th, 2001.
[4] Il sole 24 Ore, January 11th, 2003.
[5] Il Sole 24 Ore, January 11th, 2003.
[6] This certification tests the ability of a service to meet clients' expectations, through a processes monitoring procedure. In Italy it not usual for a museum obtaining this certification which strengthens its legitimacy.
[7] La Repubblica; January 16th, 2001.
[8] La Repubblica, November 25th, 2002; and ViviMilano, November 13th, 2002.

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