Museum Systems in Italy: the Case of Tuscany*

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Abstract
The present research was meant to respond to the need of exploring the reality of Tuscan museums, and to define the framework of its systems. Our priority was to focus on the concept of museum system, on the assumption that there does not exist a theoretical background of reference to use as a model on which a single institution can give a self-assessment of its performance.
In the context of our research, we drew up an ad hoc questionnaire and submitted it to the whole universe of museums and museum-like institutions of Tuscany. By this way, we managed to carry out an in-depth analysis of the region's actual situation, and to study the Tuscan museum systems, as shown in the personal interviews we asked to several operators of museum institutions.

1. Introduction

In recent years, museums have been the objects of many studies and investigations, which undoubtedly add more information and throw new light on their specific features. This animated attention on the part of different subject-matters led to the affirmation of innovative notions, particularly to that of "museum system", which now represents one of the central points of view of cultural policies for many Italian regions. Despite the significance taken up by this model, there is still a substantial lack of clarity on what the "museum system" really designates. The use of this term, in fact, includes aggregations of museums, or museums and other institutions (occasionally, only one museum institution) among which there exist agreements and collaborative relations of various character, length and territorial extent.

In this context, we contemplate a concept of "museum system" as it is conveyed by empirical evidences. Therefore, we do not focus on theoretical literature addressing the issue from a theoretical point of view, in which, we believe, there is a certain lack of definition and a frequent arbitrary use of dissimilar terms that refer to the same conceptual context, such as network, system and district. This state of art, and the consequent lack of homogeneous criteria for field research, can be explained by the fact that the attempt at "definition" is mostly made in reports of public actors, rather than in scientific texts and publications[1].

Basically, our analysis focused on the experience of museum systems to understand, in point of fact, how the concept is employed and implemented from the point of view of the participating

institutions. Thus, we proceeded to the drawing up of an ad hoc questionnaire that allowed collecting on-the-spot information. Our fundamental aim was to study the "systems" as they were actually put into being; because of this, we examined the actors and their relationships, rather than the decision-making "centre". This approach allowed for a "participating" concept of system, against the general view that take into account only leaders and co-ordinators.

2. The Experience of Tuscany

At the end of the 1990s, the Tuscan Regional Authority introduced among the priorities of cultural planning the support to the establishment of forms of collaboration and association among museums, the development of networks and the constitution of museum systems. This policy was to be particularly appreciated in Tuscany, because of its high concentration of museums, also increased in the previous decade.

The "Policy Plan for Culture 1999-2000" uses the term "museum system" and give some distinctive guidelines for its creation. In spite of the assumption that the Regional Authority does not give any pre-defined concept, there is an underlying idea of museum system, seen as an association for the co-ordinated and integrated management of museum services and/or activities, through the sharing of human, technical, economic and organizational resources. Summing up, the guidelines presented in this plan are intended «to favour the constitution of territorial and/or thematic museum systems that involve the co-ordinated administration of seats, facilities, properties and services, also in view of reaching economies of scale through the cooperation of museums, and the pattern of relations they entertain, in concert with the diffuse heritage and other cultural institutions, with the area's diverse subjects, by means of inter-institutional agreements» (Baldin 2000: 87).

3. The Plan of Research

Because of the lack of a definition or a set of rules for "museum system", the acquisition of on-the-spot information is strongly recommendable in order to obtain a right and proper representation of both the museum systems and the systems of agreements among museum-like institutions.

To this purpose, our analysis concentrated on the formal or informal, systemic or non-systemic relations existing among the different subjects, and on the matters and activities covered by such relations. The first step was to verify the availability of the information that was already present, or accessible from other local information flows. The archive at our disposal for the identification of the units of observation is that deriving from the "Annual survey of museum and museum-like institutions with ruled fruition" carried out by the Office for Libraries, Museums and Cultural Assets of the Tuscan Region.

The unit of observation is thus represented by the "museum or museum-like institution that declares to have drawn up agreements with other institutions in the context of museum or non-museum systems."

The survey covered the whole population of institutions (amounting to 473).[2] A detailed analysis was carried out in order to detect particular cases (for instance, agreements in course of foundation) or situations in which the existence of systems or agreements was acknowledged

but not by direct information. Thus, we came to the definition of a sample calling for personal interview, which included 203 institutions. The residual 270 institutions filled the same questionnaire, which was delivered them by post, and replied either by post or via computer (a copy of the questionnaire was available on the internet site of the Region).

The coverage obtained shows different percentages in the two modalities of survey: 200 out of 203 institutions called for interview answered (coverage of 99.5%), but only 151 out of 272 organizations concerned by postal survey replied (coverage of 58.3%). 10 institutions were added to the repertory, because of new constitution or not previously surveyed. In total, the responding institutions were 361 (total coverage of 76.8%).

The formulation of the questionnaire kept to the main features underlined in "Techno-scientific criteria, well-functioning and improvement standards for museums" (approved with Decree of the Ministry for Cultural Assets and Activities dated 10/05/2001). The tests were meant to investigate on the structural characteristics of the institutions that declared they belonged to systems and/or had drawn up agreements, and to identify the activities and functions more widely performed together.

The survey led to the constitution of a new detailed repertory (of the responding institutions), by which we tried and verified whether, and to what extent, the model of museum system adopted by the Tuscan Regional Authority is rooted in the territory; in other words, whether Tuscan museum systems truly exist or are only on paper and, the case being, whether they work or not. A first stage of the analysis was to compare the regional archive with the repertory that resulted from the survey, in order to find out the correspondences (and the discrepancies).

Later on, we went deep into the heart of the problem, and closely examined the aspects that better corroborate the dynamics of museum systems. We lingered on the degree to which systems are used by single institutions so as to determine whether their management accomplish the effective sharing of resources. In this perspective, the main objects of analysis were the performed activities and the offered services.

4. An Account of Museum Systems in Tuscany

A first significant outcome is represented by the updated and expanded repertory of museum systems, resulting from the answers given by individuals to the section of the questionnaire that inquires into the mere belonging to a system, and proving us with a first map of Tuscan systems.

The regional archive, previous to the survey, registered 27 museum systems (for a total of 157 joining institutions) of various extensions, but never crossing the regional boundaries; 9 of them were constituted only by one institution. The survey revealed a richer and more complex situation, as it recorded 52 museum systems (for a total of 225 joining institutions)[3], three of which have a national and one an international extent; apart from these supra-regional systems, thirteen turned out to be constituted by one institution. 37.7% of the responding institutions declared they did not belong to any museum system, and 52.4% that they belonged to at least one system (see figure 1).

Figure 1:
Institutions by Number of Systems of Belonging
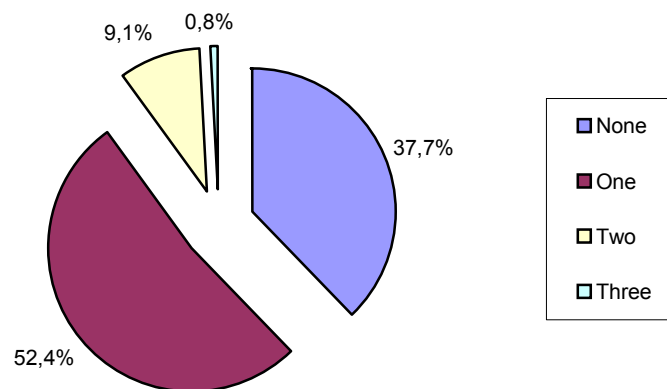
A first line of demarcation among museum systems can be drawn as to their typology: 30 are territorial, 13 thematic, and 9 territorial-thematic.

Thematic systems mainly develop at a municipal, regional or national level, and are liable of changing from municipal to regional; territorial systems have a predominant district extent, or eventually a municipal and provincial one; the extent of territorial-thematic systems is for the most part provincial.

The latter case basically consists of systems or associations of museums that possess the same sort of collections, and consequently have the same kind of needs; for instance archaeological or science-nature collections. These institutions set up a system in order to develop joint projects that may concern from cataloguing to general enhancement. Otherwise, like in the isolated example of the Children's Museum of Florence, the institutions own different types of collection but they stand as the witnesses of the same historical age and associate in view of offering an integrated cultural product; a new entity is thus created, a new "museum", with a legal status of recognized association, addressed to a particular segment of visitors (e.g. children/youth, schools and families).

We also found three thematic systems with a national extent and one with an international extent; these associations take in specific categories, such as the enterprise, or the science museums, or else specific typologies of museum-like institutions, such as the botanical gardens.

Table 1:
Museum Systems by Territorial Size and System Typology

Territorial size	Typology			
	Thematic	Territorial	Territorial-Thematic	Total
Municipal	4	7	–	11
Districtual	–	14	1	15
Provincial	2	6	5	13
Regional	3	3	3	9
National	3	–	–	3
International	1	–	–	1
Total	13	30	9	52

As regards the category, art dominates with 68 institutions, all members of territorial systems (territorial-thematic for a few of them); archaeology follows with 43 institutions, for the most part in territorial systems (378 of them) with a provincial or district extent, but also in thematic systems with a regional extent (in particular the Archaeological Museums of Tuscany Association). A remarkable case is that of contemporary art institutions: the most part of system museums (16 in total) are territorial (with only one case of territorial-thematic system); such disregard for thematic systems demonstrates a scarce integration for this category of museums, which prefer to stick to territorially-close institutions that belong to different groups and have dissimilar goals.

The most part of system-institutions[4] are of public property (206), while 45 are private, and 12 are private-public. As to the bodies owning the institutions, Municipality is by far the most recurrent one, followed by ecclesiastical/clerical bodies, State-bodies and Universities. Private ownership is mainly represented by ecclesiastical museums, and very rarely by cultural institutions, corporations, societies, associations or private citizens. Consequently, cooperation is typical of museums owned by local or locally-concerned bodies – such as the clerical ones –, unable to run and guarantee their fruition by themselves.[5] On the other hand, there is a small participation to systems of State museums, made save the case of the Florentine Museum Pole, which is perceived as their system by 12 museums/institutions; otherwise, the other responding institutions only offer but sporadic examples of State participation, thus confirming the difference in size and managerial requirements experienced by small local museums compared to State ones.

In fact, the Regional Authority's policy plan precisely mentions museums owned by local bodies or of local concern; also, and it should not be forgotten that the Legislative Decree no. 112 of 1998 provided for the transfer of competencies from State to Regions for a few State museums, properly identified by a special commission.

As regards the geographic distribution, the greatest number of systems was detected in the provinces of Florence (21% of the total), and Lucca (14%), followed by Siena and Pisa (12%). Each province is peculiar as to the adopted typology: the territory represents an element of strong impact in Arezzo and Prato, where only territorial systems can be recorded (100%), and also in Siena (94%), Lucca (87%), Florence (86%) and Pisa (81%); the same cannot be said of Massa where – without including the "territorial-thematic" category – there is no territorial system; thematic systems have a significant influence only in the provinces of Livorno (53%) and Massa (43%).

As to the entry year in which the institution joined a system, we considered at what time there was the formal adhesion by means of an agreement signed by both parties, or in the absence of it, the onset of the institution's participation to the system's activities. The institutions were divided into four intervals. The resulting trend is illustrated in figure 2.

A tendency of museums to aggregate has already shown since the beginning of the 1990s. The stronger advance took place in the period 1999–2002: new systems took shape and those that already existed widened. 84 institutions entered a museum system in the interval 1995–1999, and 137 (representing 52% of the total) in the following period.[6]

Figure 2:
System-institutions by Entry Year
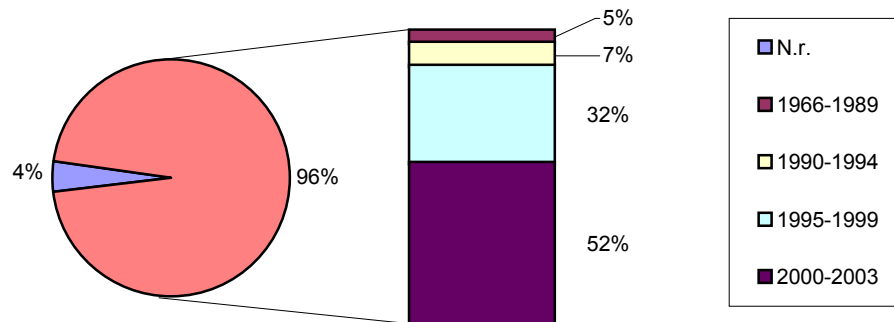
If we look at the detailed data for each year, we can see that the stronger progress took place in the period starting by the late 1990s until the first part of 2003. The systems in question did exist before that time, and many of them had been promoted since the mid-1990s, but the completion of the procedure for their constitution, and consequently the emergence of the first outcomes of the implemented projects, took a few more years.

The strong increase in the adhesion to systems takes place concurrently with the start of the regional project supporting them, later advanced in the policy plans for 1999-2000 and 2000-2003. In particular, we observe that several of the recorded museum systems were projected or agreed upon just following the above-said public notice issued by the Region in 1998.

This fact is only partly supported by the examination of the main motivations[7] that induced the museum, or museum-like institution – at any rate, the owning body – to enter one or more systems.

One of the given motivations – as shown in the table below – is the admittance to funds: the system was perceived by some (4.4% of responding institutions) as the easiest way to get economic support, following the guidelines determined by the Region. Nevertheless, the prevailing motivation is the possibility to put into action a joint and co-ordinated promotion (34.7%); in fact, as we will see in the following section, promotion and dissemination are the most recurring activities carried out on a system basis.

Institutional reasons were specified by all those institutions (17.3%) that entered the systems because they were already part of the same institutional organization (like the Special Office for the Florentine Museum Pole), or administration (Municipality or Province); this seems to prove the fact that many systems were sought by municipal and provincial administrations without a bottom-up participation. Museums, and the like, do not actually ask to enter a system, but they are urged by administrations to do so: the constitution of the system is thus fashioned and developed through a top-down process.

The third specified motivation is the common involvement in cultural projects and activities (14.2%), and next the attainment of economies of scale (11.1%), the issuing of a single ticket or the creation of museum circuits (9.3%), and the improvement of the services (9.3%).

We can say that motivations associated with scientific and/or cultural activity alternate with those connected to the goals of management and to the reaching of quality standards in the services to public. At all events, the underlying principle is always to enhance the museum from either a strictly cultural or a managerial point of view: in fact, some institutions merely associate in view of cultural collaboration, and keep the administration in-house, others just want to better run the services to public, while others manage to create an integrated offer of culture and services.

Table 2:
Institutions by Motivation to Enter a Museum System

Motivations	Percentage of institutions
Joint and co-ordinated promotion	34,7
Institutional reasons	17,3
Common involvement in cultural projects and activities	14,2
Attainment of economies of scale	11,1
Issuing of a single ticket or creation of museum circuits	9,3
Improvement of services	9,3
Socio-cultural and/or moral-civic motivations	8,0
Integrated management	7,6
Increase in the number of visitors	6,7
Exchange of information and/or scientific cooperation	5,3
Access to funds	4,4
Co-ordinated educational offer	3,6
Collaboration between the public and the private	0,9
No reply	6,7

Nearly all the institutions declared that there is a responsible body for the system, which turns out to be the promoting body, or a body holding the ownership of one of the participants: therefore, a Province, a project-leading Municipality, a Mountain consortium or, more rarely, a museum. In a few cases, a committee made up of the bodies' representatives, or an outside subject, are charged with the function of directing the system.

Municipal and provincial systems usually have a single subject in charge, respectively the Municipality and the Province. As for district systems in which no mountain consortium is involved, the system's participants take up the role of leading body by turns, so as to guarantee equity among institutions, or else they identify a leading Municipality by virtue of its good ability to manage resources or to organize things.

Instead, were a managing body already exists, this is likely to coincide with the responsible subject, although we noticed a certain lack of consistency in the answers given on this issue by institutions belonging to the same system.

If we take into account the different modalities of admission and typologies of fruition adopted by institutions, we can see that the percentage of museums with admission free or a visitors' book is rather high (26.2%), and that only 85% guarantee a pre-determined opening time, while 11% only open on request.

Also, some systems have a great number of visitors, as they can take advantage from being, or being part of, tourist poles or centres: such is the case, for example, of the Florentine Museum Pole, San Gimignano as regard the System of Siena Museums, or the Children's Museum (which comprises institutions such as Palazzo Vecchio, that is an important destination also for visitors outside of that particular circuit).

The survey showed that 59% of visitors adopt a mixed modality of admission, though only 3% of system-institutions have a combined ticket. To introduce a single, combined ticket for each circuit in all systems is not easy, given that some institutions still have a free-ticket entrance (about 26%), and because of the geographical dispersion of many provincial and/or district systems.

Figure 3:
Institutions Belonging to a System by Modalities of Admission
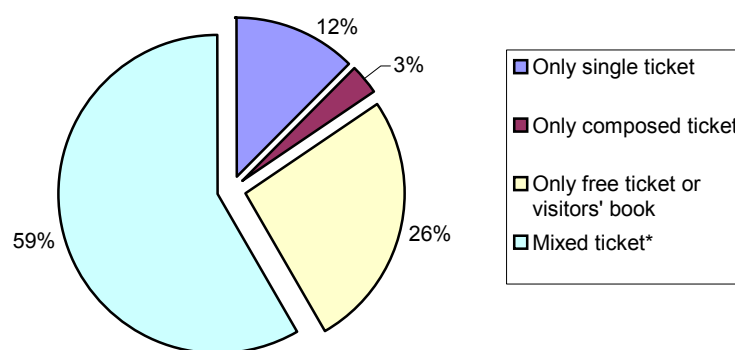
*The mixed ticket category includes the following options: single and free ticket; single and composed ticket; single, free and composed ticket.

5. Museums Systems in Tuscany: an Assessment

The questionnaire investigated on a series of situations associated with the mission and management of museums, and particularly: activities of registration and documentation, professional profiles of personnel, essential and accessory services to public, science-educational and functional facilities, promotion and dissemination, evaluation of the offer, safety, and specific activities implemented in the two-year period 2001-2002.

The aim was to verify whether museum systems are actually used by the institutions that entered them, also by comparison with the residual universe of institutions that did not and whose only alternative is that of running their activities and offering their services by themselves or by externalization.

In this occasion, we only report the most significant activities and services; our presentation will give an account of data in this order: firstly, the complex of museum institutions and secondly, the institutions that belong to systems.

a) Professional Profiles of Personnel

In most cases, there are no specialized staffs for museums or museum-like institutions, apart from the case of private museums or foundations and, in a few instances, of Government Offices[8]. For example, the administrative staffs of a civic museum generally also attends to promotion and didactics, although the latter function is more and more often entrusted to specialized co-operative societies.

The personnel in the local body's service has wide-ranging functions, that commonly cover a whole sector (e.g. Education, culture and sport); consequently, workers are scarcely specialized in museum organization and management, as they can devote little time to these activities.

The analysis, in fact, evidences a scarcity of qualified personnel, especially for activities directed to enhance the museum and the services to public: 71% of interviewed institutions have not a person in charge of the educational service, nor do 85.3% of them have a person in charge, or an expert of communication. As a result, a great majority of institutions, including State ones, has no satisfactory co-ordination in their educational and promotional activities.

The most frequent professional profile is the worker in charge of surveillance and vigilance, either as an external (32.4%) or an internal subject (20.2%); the assistant to public, or museum operator with a specific training in the office of giving information and guidance comes next (external: 29.6% of cases; internal: only 16%). More than 50% of institutions seem to have a director, who belongs to the internal staff (46.3% of cases) or he is instead an external subjects with a contract of collaboration (7.5%); on a system basis, this profile results only in 3% of cases, but it should not be forgotten that, especially in smaller museums, the office of director can very well correspond to that of curator.

A lesser amount is to be found for "technical" profiles, such as the curator (39%), or the technicians in charge of facilities and plants (35.7%), of collection (28.3%), and of safety (33.5%). These professional profiles are likely to be covered by people belonging to the internal staff and, for a lower percentage, by external subjects, as it is mainly the case for the persons in charge of collections, who are often under the direction of the competent Government Office.

If we observe the separate data for system- institutions, it seems that there has been little sharing of personnel so far. The general tendency, as already shown, is that of maintaining internal personnel or of externalizing functions; in this respect, there is little attempt at making the most of system's co-ordination.[9]

Also, if we look at the high percentage of system-institutions in which none of the above professional profiles is present, neither internally, externally, nor system-based, we reach the conclusion that, at least with regard to personnel, the system is not fully exploited as a means of fulfilling those minimal qualifications that the institution does not manage to get on its own.

b) Services to Public

The standardized relationship of museum-like institutions with the public constitutes one of the most interesting issues on this topic. We made a distinction according to the typologies of service and activity that are necessary for the museum to accomplish its task of conservation, enhancement and education.

An information point, which often corresponds to the ticket office itself, is present in 47.6% of responding institutions; basically no-one runs it on a system basis alone (2%), or both on an internal and a system basis (4.2%), while the most part of institutions rather choose to run it chiefly in-house (23.5%) and others externalize it completely (7.2%) or run it inside with external personnel (10.2%).

In case of system-institutions, the same situation is reproduced: only 3% of institutions organize and run the service exclusively in the context of the system, and 6.7% of them do it keeping an in-house decision-making centre.

As far as the remaining services are concerned, the percentage is lower, particularly in the cases of safe-keeping and cloak-rooms (80% do not offer this service), and of audio follow-up (86.7%); the percentage of institutions that are not furnished with telephone-points, first aid stations and audiovisual shows varies from 65% to 68%.

A comparison of system- and non system-institutions, in terms of their endowment in reception services, shows that these are more developed in the first group, with particular regard to the ticked office and the information point, although the system's impact explains but a rather low percentage (10% of institutions carrying out the service), and does not restrain the institution's decision-making autonomy. Conversely, there is a high amount of institutions that entrust external subjects with the decision-making and implementation activities related to these services (8%), or that apply to external subjects only for management activities, and keep the decisional functions in-house (12-20%)

As already said, one of the motivations for joining a system was the need to make museum-like institutions more usable for public and to guarantee services of higher quality so as to increase the amount of visitors. The extent to which these services are accomplished is still rather narrow, but in the course of our survey we observed how institutions are moving in this direction, aware – although they still keep them in-house – that the services to public are essential to the well-functioning and co-ordination of the system itself.

c) Fixed Endowments and Essential Services

The fixed endowments and essential services are more widespread compared to the facilities illustrated above, exception made for subtitles and panels in foreign languages, audio-guides and catalogues.[10]

Audio-guide, being a specialized and very expensive facility, is one of the least wide-spread museum services, especially in small-sized organizations.

Guided tours normally are carried out by single institutions in the context of ordinary business. These are also performed on a system basis for special initiatives or cultural events, according to a programmed schedule, usually commissioned to internal staff or to external experts that make them during the normal activity of the museum; occasionally, the same co-operative society is entrusted with the service for several museums.

On a first stage, a museum joining a system avails itself of a communal layout, consisting of a standardized outdoor sign system and of an identifiable logo present outside and inside the museum. More frequently, an explanatory brochure or a short guide is implemented for informative and promotional purposes: about 86% of system-institutions produced them, 48% on an internal basis, 13.3% on a system basis, and 19% on both. This service is very rarely

externalized (4%) while guided tours are (9.3% are out-commissioned and 20% both in and out).

Subtitles and panels in foreign languages are substantially omitted by system- (84% and 81% respectively) and non system-institutions (72.8% and 80.1%): then in a higher proportion for the first group, especially as far subtitles are concerned. This facility is notably perceived as an in-house qualification, even when the institution belongs to a system (in which case, the percentage is less than 1).

If we separate the single systems, we find that the catalogue is basically an in-house facility since only 6.2% of institutions produced them entirely on a system basis, and 5% on both an internal and a system basis.

d) Accessory Facilities

The existence of accessory facilities, such as cafés, restaurants, parking-lots, and entertainment rooms for children, is uncommon: the percentage of institutions that do not offer these services varies from 85 to nearly 100 per cent.

An exception is constituted by the presence of a bookshop or, more frequently, of a small sales point (51.8%): this service is mainly run by the internal staff (24.4%), although there is a tendency to externalize it completely (9.7%) or only partially (12%), in which case the decision-making centre remain inside.

Again, the system is only scarcely exploited: about 3% of institutions entrusted the system with the competence to run the bookshop, while a further 3% runs it both by itself and by means of the system.

The detailed data for system and non system-institutions confirm what we have already noticed.

e) Science-Educational and Functional Facilities

The presence of science-educational and functional facilities is even lower. On this point, the question was whether the decision-making centre was maintained inside or put on a system level, and whether the facility was open to public or used only by the staff.[11]

The overall data evidence a lack of satisfactory science-educational facilities: the most current being the library/centre of documentation (37.3%), which is open to public only in 14.4% of cases and is thus principally intended for internal use; only 28.5% of institutions have a historical archive, 7.8% of which available to the public, while 10% of them has a graphic archive, commonly for internal use only. A photo- and slide-library is present in 34.6% of cases, either only for internal use (23%), open to public (8.3%) or, for the remaining percentage, shared on a system level.

A photo-workroom does not recur much (5.8% of institutions for internal or system use) and is never open to public. This facility, due to the high cost and the occasional use of it, is usually externalized to experts; the Government Office makes an internal use of it, of course extended to all State institutions under its direction.

The same can be said of art restoration workroom, which is present in 18% of institutions, and only in 2.2% of cases on a system basis, and rarely open to public.

The percentage of institutions endowed with education-dissemination facilities is little more than 40: it is higher for conference and motion-picture rooms (40.2%) and study rooms (32.7), and lower for computer science facilities (25.5%); the amount of these facilities that are open to public or intended for its immediate use is still rather small (about one third for all three instances).

In the latter three cases, we observe a stronger difference of endowments between system- and non system-institutions: the system's influence accounts for a percentage of 5-7 points higher in the likelihood that educational and dissemination facilities are used or created by the single institution or on a system level. Also, these facilities are more likely to be for internal use in the case of non system-institutions, and open to public in the case of system-institutions (no matter if of internal or of system source), consistently with the dissemination and educational aims pursued by systems.

f) Promotion and Dissemination

As regards promotion and dissemination, the most exploited activity is the organization of thematic tours and cultural events (71.5%), while the introduction of a web site is still little practised (0.3%) at both an internal and a systemic level.[12] The decision-making centre is mainly internal for all the activities we took into account; this figure is confirmed by the fact that, even the activities that are carried out on a system level or externalized are anyhow connected to the internal ones.

In general, beside internal activities, the other activities are promoted by the museum system rather than by external subjects, especially for promotion and advertising, or cultural events and thematic tours. This not so much the case for temporary expositions, in which event the tendency is to maintain the decision-making centre inside the institution or the system, and bring into play the collaboration of external subjects, possibly more for running than for setting up the exposition.

The overall analysis also shows that the percentage of institutions that do not perform any of the activities specified in the questionnaire is very high, and particularly high for non system-institutions (of about a 20 additional percentage points for each entry, except for the web site) which eventually carry them out as individual institutions, and only in a few cases, through the collaboration with external subjects.

Considering only the system-institutions, the percentages of "not carried out" activities are still rather high, although lower than those of the corresponding entries relative to the totality of institutions.

The only figure that remains unchanged is that of the presence of a web site, a tool that is still little widespread among museums; the percentages for the organization of thematic tours and other cultural events (about 30%), and for promotional activities (about 40%) are still quite high. For the latter function, there are numerous institutions that entrust the system, or share with it, the decision-making centre of promotion and dissemination.

On the whole, there is a sort of balancing of the strictly cultural activities (organization of thematic tours and other cultural events, and of expositions) with those that are directed to the improvement of the museum's visibility, although the latter activities constitute the most substantial portion of the functions shared on a system level. Finally, we must notice how

museums largely employ traditional kind of channels for promotion and dissemination activities, while they resort to computer science and multimedia tools only occasionally.

g) Evaluation of the Offer

As regards the evaluation of the offer, we found a very limited attitude to carry out well thought-out surveys on the typology of public or on the evaluation of the educational activity; where practised, these assignments are mainly carried out on an internal, or even systemic level, and rarely externalized. All in all, the institutions confine this activity to the registration of attendances (81.7%), sometimes entrusting external people with the task, and to the annotation of complaints and visitors' commentaries (53.2%). Nevertheless, the surveys carried out are "unstructured", often dependant on the initiative of the staff charged with this duty, or restricted to particular events (e.g. the case of exhibitions).

The data regarding system-institutions do not really change, although we register a higher percentage for the activities shared with the system, particularly in the case of attendances' registration, which is made either individually or on an aggregate level, usually in the person of the responsible body.

h) Activities Implemented in the two-year Period 2001-2002

In 2001-2002, the most part of museum-like institutions devoted to science-cultural and education-dissemination activities. The activities of promotion are also quite substantial, and they are those that are most frequently carried out on a system level. Instead, the implementation of surveys of the potential public is quite rare, as it can be inferred by the fact that researches on actual visitors do not constitute a widespread practice.

Educational activities are quite often externalized and shared at both an internal and a systemic level, although their management remains of exclusive competence of the individual institution.

If we consider the single systems, we can see that the activities carried out on a system basis are predominantly those related to promotion, like the production of informative and promotional brochures. This confirms what we have already said about promotion and dissemination, educational activity and cultural events, although in this case internal control appears stronger. Instead, the activities associated with a more extensive recourse to external subjects are guided tours, educational, and study/research activities; the individual institution still represents the main decision-making centre, or the core giving inputs to the system, or to the external subjects. The same can be said of non system-institutions, in which case, there is an ampler externalization, and a more marked shift of the decision-making centre.

6. Conclusions

The collected data reveal a rather scarce interchange among museums and/or museum-like institutions belonging to systems, which do not show a real tendency to combine resources – in terms of knowledge, personnel and facilities – in a process of enhancement and association. Single institutions, in fact, do not share a common idea about the system and its goals, which are instead the outcome of policy plans or decisions made by territorial bodies, that leave out of consideration the actual potentialities and needs of institutions. In the course of the survey, it was not rare to find heterogeneous, if not incongruous, answers of institutions belonging to a same museum system about its distinct aspects and their conjoint activities.

The various models of museum network and/or system that have been constituted and put into practice in Tuscany since the early 1990s are now situated at an intermediate level of their development, in which a first verification and estimation is made of the achieved results, in comparison with the initial goals and motivations. At the moment, only a few realities are put on a sound basis from the point of view of integration of resources and activities. Such circumstance is also revealed by the small number of institutions that announced the intent of joining one or more systems in the immediate future. By observing our data, we find that institutions are still anchored to a primary form of collaboration that involves common initiatives – e.g. combined tickets, guided tours, and informative brochures – for improving the fruition from public and their attractive power, but they keep the educational and cultural offer on an individual level. The advantageous synergies that the creation of a network or system should entail do not seem to have occurred; for instance, the economy of scale in purchases and in services to public, the development of a refined system of offer, the improvement of infrastructures, or the introduction of technology, research and development, education and didactics.

The co-ordination among system-institutions is prevalently made in a marketing perspective; instead, a real sharing of resources and services, in view of a common management and a mutual enhancement of both, is almost irrelevant.

The implication is that, apart from the adoption of promotion tools and the execution of "occasional" activities, such a form of collaboration lacks continuity and, what is worse, does not represent a sharing of human, technological or of know-how resources. The system does have a nominal and formal existence, maybe promoted by means of a common logo or a combined ticket, but it does not take on a planning activity for middle-long term objectives. We might even state that the intense activity of promotion is not accompanied by an adequate offer of culture and services. Therefore, one of the restrains to the development of systems is the scarce far-sightedness of projects and objectives.

The contributing factors for the good implementation of a system are manifold, and related to the diverse proprieties of institutions, the programming and policy plans of territorial bodies, the accessibility to and methods for use of financial resources, the degree of homogeneity of the collections, the availability of the individual institution to get mixed with others and to give up its own resources and museum-specialized professionals. Hence, the situation we found is the outcome of a series of obstacles that add up in the passage from the stage of constitution to that of implementation of systems. Then, the main characteristics of the problem can be summarized as follows:

– The lack of a unique decision-making centre for all members of the system, invested with full powers of decision and organization. However, there are a few examples of best practices, such as the system "Parks of Val di Cornia", which is endowed with a self-governing administration (in the form of a joint-stock company) that allowed the "putting into system" of all personnel charged with the same duties for all organizations. This system operates from the standpoint of cultural enhancement, economic-administrative efficiency, and integration with the territory and the area's tourist circuits, and it also performs a significant activity of education in schools. In this case, the subject's determination and their commitment to administer the area's rich heritage as best as possible set in motion the participation and collaboration of different bodies with a force that induced the constitution of a private body for the running of all activities.

– The scarcity of available resources from single institutions, in particular in terms of personnel. This is one of the reasons for the great difficulties met particularly by small museums, which do not have a qualified stuff, and frequently, not even people to guarantee the opening to public.

– The different weight of single institutions belonging to a system (where the amount of visitors constitutes a clear indicator of such differences) and, at the same time, the lack of specific projects aimed at fulfilling the basic needs of the "weaker" organizations participating to the system. The latter maybe constitutes one of the main obstacles to the development of museum systems. In fact, the initial condition of disparity of smaller institutions does not advance because of co-operation, but remains uncharged, or even intensifies proportionally with the induced increase of visibility, so that in the end the system has a bad influence over its functioning. In other words, we can say that "stronger" museums and museum-like institutions gain still more force and attractive power, while the "weaker" ones sometimes cannot even find a condition of stability.

Acknowledgments

Notes

[1] From this point of view, significant efforts to give a conceptual framework were made by the Research Office of the Italian Touring Club (TCI 2000), which offers a wide sampling of available and forthcoming museum systems of Italy. See also Meneguzzo, and Bagdadli (2002); Salvemini, and Soda, (2001).

[2] The preliminary analysis recorded 185 institutions that affirmed they belonged to museum systems, while 172 had entered into agreements, including those leading to a system. On the whole, 238 institutions stated that they had entered a system or other agreements.

[3] If we also take into account the institutions that belong to more than one system, we obtain a total of 264 organizations.

[4] "System-institution" means "institution belonging to a system".

[5] On this point, consider that ecclesiastical museums can be found only in territorial systems.

[6] At this point, the total amounts to 264, and includes the institutions that gave no answer to the question regarding the entry year.

[7] The questionnaire asked to mention only two.

[8] They are decentralized territorial bodies of the "Ministry of Cultural Assets and Activities" in charge of State museums.

[9] The roles in which a stronger integration is accomplished are the following: person in charge of the educational service (8%), assistant to public/museum operator (5.8%), director (5%), and expert in communication (4.4%). These professional profiles are less frequently in-house, or they correspond to

"less traditional" roles, associated with the growing need, on the part of museums and the alike, of improving fruition and external visibility, and of offering didactic programs.

[10] These are present respectively in less than 20%, 10% and 40% of the interviewed institutions.

[11] That is, the modality "external" was not taken into consideration.

[12] The entry "web site" was not included among multiple-choice questions, and turned up from the re-codification of the entry "others", a fact that partly explains such low percentage, since several institutions might intend to include this tool of promotion in other more general entries.

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