NEW PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURAL WELL-BEING: THE ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR IN CULTURAL HERITAGE[1]

NOVAS PERSPECTIVAS DO BEM-ESTAR CULTURAL: O PAPEL DO TERCEIRO SETOR NO PATRIMÔNIO CULTURAL

NUEVAS PERSPECTIVAS SOBRE EL BIENESTAR CULTURAL: LA FUNCIÓN DEL TERCER SECTOR EN EL PATRIMONIO CULTURAL

Roberta PALTRINIERI[*]
Giulia ALLEGRINI[**]

ABSTRACT: This essay is based on research carried out in 2021-2022 by the Foundation School of Cultural Assets and Activities of the Italian Ministry of Culture. The data obtained provides an interesting overview of an emerging reality in the Italian third sector, "heritage communities" – formal or informal groups capable of enhancing and preserving the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Italy. This article defines these heritage communities as pathways towards cultural well-being. It proposes to identify in heritage communities innovative mechanisms in terms of practices and policies of cultural well-being, a new form of well-being inspired by the World Health Organization's recognition in 2019 of the fundamental relationship between care and culture.

KEYWORDS: Collective Entrepreneurship. Cultural Well-Being. Heritage Community. Social Economy. Support for Emerging Entreprises.

[*] Full Professor of Sociology of Culture, Department of the Arts, University of Bologna. https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6991-2487. Contact: roberta.paltrinieri@unibo.it

[**] Associate Professor of Sociology of Culture, Department of the Arts, University of Bologna. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9157-152. Contact: giulia.allegrini2@unibo.it.

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RESUMO: *Este ensaio baseia-se em uma pesquisa realizada em 2021-2022 pela Fundação Escola de Bens e Atividades Culturais do Ministério da Cultura da Itália. Os dados obtidos fornecem uma visão geral interessante de uma realidade emergente no terceiro setor italiano, as "comunidades de patrimônio" – grupos formais ou informais capazes de aprimorar e preservar o patrimônio cultural tangível e intangível da Itália. Este artigo define essas comunidades de patrimônio como caminhos para o bem-estar cultural. Ele propõe identificar nas comunidades do patrimônio mecanismos inovadores em termos de práticas e políticas de bem-estar cultural, uma nova forma de bem-estar inspirada pelo reconhecimento da Organização Mundial da Saúde, em 2019, da relação fundamental entre cuidado e cultura.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Empreendedorismo Coletivo. Bem-Estar Cultural. Comunidade De Patrimônio. Economia Social.*

RESUMEN: *Este ensayo se basa en una investigación realizada en 2021-2022 por la Fundación Escuela de Bienes y Actividades Culturales del Ministerio de Cultura italiano. Los datos obtenidos ofrecen una interesante visión general de una realidad emergente en el tercer sector italiano: las «comunidades patrimoniales», grupos formales o informales capaces de valorizar y preservar el patrimonio cultural tangible e intangible de Italia. Este artículo define estas comunidades patrimoniales como vías hacia el bienestar cultural. Propone identificar en ellas mecanismos innovadores en cuanto a prácticas y políticas de bienestar cultural, una nueva forma de bienestar inspirada en el reconocimiento, por parte de la Organización Mundial de la Salud en 2019, de la relación fundamental entre el cuidado y la cultura.*

PALABRAS-CLAVE: *Emprendimiento Colectivo. Bienestar Cultural. Comunidad Patrimonial. Economía Social. Apoyo a Empresas Emergentes.*

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to reintroduce into the international debate the data from a study conducted by the *Fondazione Scuola Beni Attività Culturali* of the Italian Ministry of Culture in 2021 and 2022, following the implementation of the European Faro Convention, which originated in 2005 but was only implemented in Italy in 2020. The research data provide an interesting portrait of an emerging reality within the Italian third sector: "heritage communities" – formally or informally associated groups capable of enhancing and preserving the immense tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Italy, with the goal of passing it on to future generations.

The purpose of these heritage communities is to valorize Italy's rich cultural heritage, as evidenced by its immeasurable cultural value and UNESCO recognitions – currently, there are 60 recognized sites – giving the Italian third sector the opportunity to expand its impact into a new realm, that of culture, beyond its traditional scope, making it a global reference point for practices and policies.

However, the goals of this essay go well beyond merely providing a snapshot of existing realities. In fact, it aims to define "heritage communities" as genuine tools for activating pathways toward cultural well-being. Today, we speak of mixed well-being, second-level well-being, horizontal subsidiarity, and collaborative governance. Our proposal is thus to identify heritage communities as devices for innovating cultural well-being practices and policies – considered one of the frontiers of emerging models of well-being, especially following the World Health Organization's 2019 recognition and the pandemic crisis that highlighted the vital link between care and culture.

If it is true that contemporary challenges include processes of individualization, loneliness, the gradual erosion of social bonds, and the sense of community – and that well-being, beyond basic needs, must also address the notion of *buen vivir*, as shown by the experiences of South American populations in Brazil and Colombia – then it becomes important to understand the dialogical relationship between cultural heritage, culture, artistic languages, cultural inheritance, and community.

Therefore, heritage communities can become the intersection point where a bidirectional dialogical relationship is activated between the community and cultural heritage as both a resource and a foundation for building the community itself. At the same time, they can play a role in regenerating cultural heritage as a common good.

From this perspective, our focus on cultural well-being turns fully toward a collective dimension – that is, the redistribution of cultural competencies within and in support of communities – a fundamental process for achieving more inclusive, sustainable, and less unequal societies. We are convinced that, within this value chain, third-sector actors have a vitally important role to play. We are indeed aware that cultural capital is one of the most important assets of the upper classes and that democratizing access to culture, through social participation, can contribute to this redistribution process.

The Faro Convention as a Policy of Cultural Participation: Its Implementation in Italy

The recent study conducted by the *Fondazione Scuola Beni Attività Culturali* of the Italian Ministry of Culture on the implementation of the Faro Convention

in Italy (Ferrighi; Pelosi, 2024) analyzed the scope and characteristics of heritage communities and demonstrated the third sector's significant role in revitalizing these communities.

The Faro Convention – a framework convention of the Council of Europe on the value of cultural heritage for society – focuses on the aspects of cultural heritage linked to human rights and democracy. It promotes a broader understanding of cultural heritage and its relationship with communities and society at large. The Convention encourages the recognition of cultural objects and sites not so much for their intrinsic value, but for the meanings and uses people attribute to them and the values they represent.

The Convention was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on October 13, 2005, and opened for signature by member states in Faro, Portugal, on October 27 of the same year. It entered into force on June 1, 2011. To date, twenty-four Council of Europe member states have ratified the Convention, and five have signed it. Italy ratified it in 2020. The Convention's core principles include: fostering democratic participation and social responsibility; improving the environment and quality of life; promoting cultural diversity and mutual understanding; and enhancing social cohesion through the valorization of cultural heritage. According to the Faro Convention, cultural heritage is defined as a group of resources inherited from the past that people identify, regardless of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, customs, and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction over time between people and places. The Convention particularly encourages citizens' cultural participation, whether organized or not, by promoting the creation of heritage communities.

The Italian Ministry's research defines a heritage community as a group of people, formally or informally united by shared values and interests, who identify and value specific cultural heritage elements they wish to see acknowledged and who are committed, through public action, to supporting and transmitting elements of cultural heritage to future generations. Belonging to a community is thus linked to the fact that its members attribute value to the cultural heritage they themselves have helped to reveal and protect.

The Foundation's study on heritage communities clearly showed that their role is not limited to preserving the "right to cultural heritage" – that is, maintenance and conservation – but extends to promoting the "right to cultural heritage," meaning the ability to broaden public engagement by fostering social responsibility among heritage communities and their leaders, encouraging cultural participation, and enhancing and safeguarding cultural heritage so that citizens can more fully benefit from cultural places, spaces, and objects. The goal of this intervention is to maintain "common goods," particularly through the restitution of archaeological,

architectural, or urban artifacts – as well as gardens, parks, and historical sites – to the territories and the people who inhabit them.

The research presented and discussed here, conducted within the context of Italy's ratification of the Convention in 2021–2022, describes the state of the art in Italy, mapping out policies and best practices in the field of participation. The mapping conducted by the Foundation represents the first exploratory study of heritage communities in Italy, as no other official sources or registries exist. It is an initial research project that enabled us to catalog Italian heritage communities and understand their legal status, activities, goals of intervention, and the main challenges they face within the Italian context. From a theoretical and systematic standpoint, it is clear that the purpose of heritage communities is to strengthen the community through shared stewardship processes, manage cultural heritage in a broad sense – including landscapes and the environment – and promote social and cultural participation.

To carry out this research, the Ministry's Foundation launched a call to action entitled *"The Map of Communities: Participation Experiences."* This call was disseminated via the social media channels of the *Fundação Scuola Beni Attività Culturali* and Facebook groups interested in the topic of participation, as well as in the Foundation's monthly newsletter. Following the initial dissemination of the call to action, communities were invited to complete a short questionnaire about their organizational structure and the types of properties they manage. As of May 4, 2023, 255 communities had responded to the call. These communities make up the reference group for our study and compose what the Foundation has called the Map of Heritage Communities in Italy.

From the 255 communities mapped under the call, a scientific committee selected a sample of 119 that fully matched the definition of "heritage community" mentioned above. These communities were invited to complete a second questionnaire regarding their experience of participation in managing cultural heritage. This questionnaire focused on their activities, their relationships with institutions or actors in their territories, the skills and mechanisms that enabled them to adopt good practices, and the major challenges they face. Finally, online focus groups were organized, bringing together researchers from the Foundation and the communities to compare different realities and identify various perspectives on specific issues, in order to better understand the participants' concerns.

With regard to participation experiences, the analysis of the research data highlights the influence of the third sector, which alone accounts for over 60% of the sample. In fact, 48% of heritage communities are voluntary associations, 12% are cooperatives, and 8% are foundations.

The private sector represents only 10%, while approximately 15% of heritage communities were created within public institutions. It is noteworthy that all of

these communities have emerged in the past 25 years, mainly after 2010, with a peak in 2015. At the operational level, heritage communities adopt a collaborative governance model based on co-design and the recognition of local, national, and European realities. Among the legal mechanisms used, 22% of the surveyed communities prefer collaboration pacts, 19% concessions, 5% civic use recognition, and 10% other forms of public agreements.

We can also highlight the use of properties that are not necessarily privately owned. From a territorial perspective, about 40% of the studied heritage communities are located in southern Italy and on the islands, especially in Apulia and Sicily, which receive the majority of public funding. Among most heritage communities, 62% rely exclusively on public sector funding, typically in the range of €5,000 to €10,000.

Some heritage communities manage to secure larger funding, exceeding €50,000. These communities are mainly involved in urban regeneration efforts. In terms of timeframe, all heritage communities were established after 2000, with peaks in 2010 (following the 2008 crisis) and 2015. These are mainly communities that operate thanks to the commitment of volunteer citizens who dedicate their time to maintaining common goods.

Their work revolves mainly around community-owned sites belonging to the State (palaces, churches, abandoned buildings, excavation sites, ruins, parks, and gardens), where they focus on regeneration, reuse, and recovery – both in urban and rural areas – making them accessible once again to the broader community.

One heritage community surveyed in Italy and recognized for its good practices is the *Bolzanism Museum*, the first museum in Italy dedicated to public housing. Since 2020, the museum has introduced residents, visitors, and tourists to the history of neighborhood development in peripheral areas, their spaces, social housing architecture, and the lives of their inhabitants. The museum has turned Bolzano's suburbs into its permanent exhibition, its heritage – and by deconstructing the logic behind the city's urban planning, it promotes wonder as a generative principle for creativity, culture, and diversity, offering a platform for imagining and rethinking the city's future, where citizen awareness and participation are key.

The research shows that these communities have understood the extent to which participation, management, and the valorization of cultural heritage impact their territories, particularly in terms of promoting heritage education. Among the key issues identified, the lack of awareness about the Faro Convention in Italy stood out most clearly. Although the Convention dates back to 2005, more than half of the communities that responded to the questionnaire (52%) already operate in line with the principles of heritage communities and exhibit their defining characteristics. The research carried out by the Ministry of Culture could, therefore, serve as a lever for reflection within the third sector.

The focus groups revealed the difficulties heritage communities face in sustainably operating in their territories – particularly the precariousness caused by uncertainty over continued funding and the need to rely on volunteers. These volunteers, as part of an inevitable rotation, require constant training, since they often lack the necessary skills in organization, management, or planning. Moreover, public administrations do not adequately listen to their training needs in order to equip them to work effectively for the well-being of the communities in which they live.

In conclusion, heritage communities represent a valuable opportunity for the community sector and nonprofit organizations.

The preservation or protection of cultural heritage and landscape is not so much the ultimate goal of collective action as it is a means to foster good practices aimed at promoting participation in knowledge and the development of innovative pathways to collective identities. These identities are as important as the dissemination of cultural heritage in Italy, as evidenced by UNESCO's recognition of 60 World Heritage sites in Italy as of 2024.

From this, two important conclusions can be drawn. The first is that the Faro Convention represents a significant opportunity for the third sector in Italy, allowing it to become an international reference for the promotion of heritage communities, given the country's wealth of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The second concerns the role of the third sector, which – thanks to its commitment to local communities in preserving cultural heritage and defending the right to culture – contributes to the contemporary debate on well-being processes in Western societies.

There is also an active debate in Italy on the concept of "second welfare," which is especially relevant as it proposes that, alongside "first welfare" – the traditional public welfare system comprising all state interventions and measures – there should be a "second welfare" consisting of non-state measures and interventions provided by nonprofit entities. As stated in the Italian Third Sector Manifesto, drafted in 2023 in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic:

> The current welfare system is still overly focused on 'protecting' individuals. But the reality is that it continues to prove ineffective. It is a system that must gradually be replaced by an inclusive model based on the recognition of rights and aimed at supporting a comprehensive approach to change – starting from awareness of both long-standing and emerging issues, but also by valuing the many good and promising practices that the third sector has been able to express, even in the most critical situations (Forum Terzo Settore, 2023, p. 17, our translation).

The Manifesto also states:

> It is also fundamentally important to base programming on an approach that aims to support and enhance people's potential […] ensuring that there is an increasingly robust and competent system capable of promoting citizen participation networks in the territory, combining well-being and the development of democracy based on equity of opportunity, accessibility, and the fight against inequality (Forum Terzo Settore, 2023, p. 19, our translation).

In light of these considerations, we believe that cultural well-being – already widely recognized in the Anglo-Saxon world – can rightly be considered part of the second welfare paradigm. However, our key argument is that heritage communities and the broader application of the Faro Convention, with the involvement of third-sector actors, can lead, in our view, to innovation in already consolidated practices and policies.

More specifically, we believe that rethinking cultural well-being as a tool to combat inequality can contribute to wider access to, and enjoyment of, cultural goods by society as a whole – goods that traditionally belong to the cultural capital of the upper classes, as studied by Pierre Bourdieu in the context of "distinction" processes (1979).

As demonstrated in a study funded by the Ministry of Universities (Paltrinieri, 2022), we argue that cultural well-being, if established as a true public policy, could democratize access to culture by expanding participation among those with less cultural capital and fostering inclusion currently denied to culturally underserved populations – both in terms of education and training, and in terms of cultural consumption and awareness of cultural styles and tastes.

How can heritage communities be used to develop cultural well-being?

Since 2019, cultural well-being has become a key topic in the debate surrounding welfare, healthcare, and care policies in Europe. Indeed, in 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledged that arts and culture play a decisive role in promoting the well-being of individuals and communities. The WHO recognized the added value of engagement in the arts for health, encouraged arts and cultural organizations to make health and well-being a strategic priority in their work, and emphasized the importance of intersectoral collaboration between the arts and healthcare.

In Italy, the CCW – Center for Cultural Well-being – a third-sector association established in 2020 by the San Paolo Banking Foundation, defined cultural well-being in the following terms:

> The definition of cultural well-being refers to a new integrated model for promoting the well-being and health of individuals and communities, through practices based on the visual and performing arts and cultural heritage. Cultural well-being is based on the recognition, also endorsed by the WHO, of the effectiveness of certain cultural, artistic, and creative activities (Cicerchia, Rossi Ghiglione, Seia, 2020, our translation).

At the core of this approach, developed in Italy, lies a biopsychosocial and salutogenic perspective, focused on adaptive skills and the development of life competencies. The salutogenic approach is attributed to medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky, who, as early as 1979, argued that prevention should focus more on people's resources and capacity to generate health than on the classical approach centered on risks and diseases.

The objective of cultural well-being, in this perspective – which emphasizes the relationship between care and culture – is not only individual health, but also increased cultural participation aimed at improving the quality of life of physically and psychologically vulnerable people, such as those with mental health disorders, children with disabilities, and elderly individuals with dementia. According to this understanding of cultural well-being, individual care depends on a systemic and systematic collaborative relationship between professionals from different disciplines – and, above all, on the integration of objectives among institutional systems of health, social policy, and art and culture.

It is in this spirit that the *Arts on Prescription* program has operated in the United Kingdom since 1994. The program is based on the belief that engaging in creative activities can promote health and well-being. It falls under the broader category of social prescriptions that healthcare professionals and social workers can offer their patients. In this case, cultural activities such as dance, painting, and visits to heritage sites are experiences where artists or museum curators act as mediators and introduce individuals to pathways to well-being within their communities (Bungay, 2010).

From this perspective, one can consider art therapy, also of Anglo-Saxon origin, which combines dance and movement therapy with a psychoanalytic and psychodynamic approach, initially developed by Judith Rubin (2016). In the 1980s, a partnership was established between the association representing Italian art therapy and Goldsmiths (University of London) to recognize a certificate in art psychotherapy. The *Arts on Prescription* approach and Art Therapy, which share a common matrix in Anglo-Saxon culture, are based on the assumption that health promotion through artistic language can foster people's mental well-being and thus have a positive impact on their quality of life.

If engaging in creative activities can reduce anxiety, stress, and mood disorders, these same activities can become excellent tools to lower social welfare costs while improving quality of life. The proposed conceptual approach encompasses best practices that promote empowerment, subjective well-being, and individual social capital linked to relational aspects; it also aims to tackle health inequalities and access to resources, and to support active aging by combating psychophysical decline.

In our view, the Faro Convention and the recognition of heritage communities – which, as we have seen, encourage cultural care and participation – expand the perspective of cultural well-being from an individual dimension to a collective and community dimension, including broader processes of social and cultural innovation (Andersen; Grønbæk Pors, 2016) capable of generating new governance models (Paltrinieri; Allegrini, 2020).

The research also highlights the possibility that participatory management can foster meaningful dialogue between heritage and the community at the local level, enabling greater social cohesion and forms of collective agency. In this sense, community-led heritage management appears to be an important mechanism for cultural well-being.

To better understand what has just been stated, it is important to focus on the type of procedure and relationship promoted between cultural heritage and the community, and on the outcomes generated by this relationship. Data related to the horizons of meaning that drive the activities of heritage communities, as well as those related to governance methods and the promotion of access to heritage, show that the generation and regeneration of communities are at the heart of this relationship (Ostron, 1990). As Donolo notes:

> Commons are a set of goods that must necessarily be shared. They are goods because they allow social life to develop, collective problems to be solved, and human subsistence in relation to the ecosystems to which they belong to be ensured. They are shared in the sense that, although the exclusion of individuals or groups from access to them is often possible, they are better and offer their best qualities when they are treated and thus also governed and regulated as goods "in common," accessible to all, at least in principle. They are also shared in a stronger sense, since only sharing ensures their expanded reproduction over time […] (Donolo, 2010, p.1, our translation).

A common good becomes such when the community recognizes it as such, giving it a new identity as a good that belongs to all, through an action that must last over time, so that the good continues to be a common good (Arena, 2006).

The research also shows that the mapped and analyzed heritage initiatives are fully aligned with this perspective of regenerating (cultural) commons, which is at the core of the Faro Convention itself. These actions are, therefore, not only "community-based" practices but also a genuine process of commoning (Chatterton, 2010; Dellenbaugh et al., 2015), understood as a set of sharing-oriented practices that allow cultural heritage to become a common good.

To understand the value of the relationship between communities and cultural heritage, we must also focus on the cultural dimension at the center of the very process of heritage "construction," also understood as "intangible heritage" (Nicolini; Andreoli, 2023), which is the central theme of the two UNESCO Conventions adopted in Paris on December 3, 2003 ("Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage") and on October 20, 2005 ("Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions"), ratified in Italy by Law No. 167/2007 and Law No. 19/2007.

At the heart of this construction is an important process of meaning-making related to the construction of shared meanings, which affects the creation of a bond – a sense of belonging – between heritage, territories, and communities. It is a meaning-making process that integrates norms, value orientations, and practices, but also the creation of imaginaries, as we referred to in the first part of our article.

The various activities identified in the research and carried out by the communities act precisely in this direction, as mediation activities – not merely as the facilitation of access to a good, but as the facilitation of meaning-making, so that this good is recognized as part of one's own social and cultural living environment.

It is, therefore, a two-way (dialogical and recursive) relationship, in which cultural heritage becomes a relational and community-building device, and participatory communities play a role in the regeneration of cultural heritage as a common good. The right questions to ask, therefore, are: What can people do for heritage? What can heritage do for people? Another important question is: What elements of a cultural well-being ecosystem can act as enabling factors?

From the words of decision-makers, academics, and professionals involved in the various stages of the research – who shared that, in recent years, they have engaged in community care processes – emerged elements of great relevance in this regard. In particular, the research highlights, in our view, three dimensions that together chart a path for future reflections. The first concerns partnerships for the care and management of cultural heritage and the role that legal provisions and regulations play in their implementation. It should be emphasized that these mechanisms can not only help implement the Faro Convention but also define the value framework within which the relationship between heritage communities, institutions, and heritage bodies is established.

This public dimension lies at the core of mechanisms such as collaboration pacts, which, as previously mentioned, are among the most widely used tools.

It is worth remembering that collaborative pacts, even in their various forms, place collaborative governance at the center – based on the idea of shared administration and, therefore, horizontal and circular subsidiarity – which recognizes the principles of trust, reciprocity, collaboration, and also civic autonomy aimed at caring for the common good. In this sense, they serve as a tool to support the dialogical relationship between heritage and communities described above, one centered on the regeneration of common goods. From this point of view, heritage communities can be interpreted as true communities of practice: "they are groups of people who share an interest, a problem, or a passion for a subject and deepen their knowledge and skills by interacting and evolving together" (Wenger, 1998, our translation). These are groups of people, whether formally associated or not, who, in the spirit of collaborative governance, spontaneously come together around specific topics and develop phenomena of organizational solidarity when problems arise. Members share goals, practical knowledge, meanings, and language, and in doing so, create organizational forms with particular and distinctive characteristics.

A second dimension concerns the specific role of public institutions, which is proving fundamental in reconstituting a paradigm of cultural well-being, grounded in and renewed by the Faro Convention.

Public cultural institutions themselves – such as theaters, libraries, and museums – can act as facilitators, mediators, and regulators between heritage and communities. Following the international debate launched by Eric Klinenberg (2018), an interesting discussion has developed on how social infrastructures, like cultural ecosystems, can help combat inequalities and foster civic engagement or social capital, as understood by political scientist Robert Putnam (1998). Museums and libraries, beyond being "repositories of culture and documents," are increasingly becoming spaces where communities can acquire competencies, encouraging participation from groups and individuals who thereby generate social capital – especially qualitative social capital – in response to the processes of individualization in contemporary society. The definition of "heritage community" proposed by the Faro Convention enables a resemanticization of the use and function of cultural institutions in this direction.

Seen in this way, institutions respond innovatively to social needs, whether new or longstanding and become places where, from the paradigmatic perspective of subsidiarity, co-design and territorial co-programming can locally experiment. Around this theme, a debate has recently opened in Italy concerning the issue of collaborative public services, defined as follows:

> Collaborative public services are a new generation of services that combine the delivery of services provided by specialized operators with empowerment platforms, allowing citizens to collaborate with each other and with other social actors such as public bodies, universities, and third-sector organizations in order to generate social value (Manzini; Dalena, 2024, p. 15, our translation).

Based on good practices in social innovation and new cultures rooted in the principle of proximity and care – a concept that places this article within a broader international debate, as exemplified by the work of Martha C. Nussbaum (2017) and The Care Collective (2020) – a shift may indeed emerge, one that moves beyond the traditional public/private social divide, toward a participatory model of well-being that is no longer solely focused on assistance but is generative and transformative. Through the proposal of collaborative public services, the collaborative paradigm is being implemented, introducing a new fundamental right in the definition of citizenship: the right to collaborate, the right to imagine and realize shared projects, in which the individual dimension is combined with the collective one.

The third and final element concerns the various ways in which communities become activated, which we can view from the standpoint of redistributing cultural capabilities, giving rise to the territorial cultural infrastructure previously mentioned. There are practices that emerge from the bottom up, often not part of any formal planning, and that challenge public administration, whose role is to incorporate them into a broader project that recognizes their function as a common good. With this in mind, many experiences are leading to the activation of "new hybrid spaces" restored to the city through culturally driven regeneration processes that place community building at the heart of their actions.

As Roberta Franceschinelli (2021) argues, despite the fact that urban regeneration processes generally take place in publicly owned properties and must always relate to urban planning and existing regulatory tools, these are experiences that struggle to be categorized because their innovative nature raises issues and challenges that bureaucracy is not always prepared to handle. These "hybrid cultural ecosystems" can play a crucial role in processes of innovation within administrative culture by enabling the institutionalization of the goods they produce. Clearly, policies are needed that go beyond traditional sectoral distinctions, involving different levels and areas (culture, urban planning and quality, social and economic development, etc.).

Culture as a process of collective empowerment

In conclusion, the research conducted by the Foundation of the Italian Ministry of Culture presented in this article – as well as the issues we have iden-

tified – demonstrates how, at the heart of cultural well-being, lies the enabling of community-building processes; that is, the reproduction and production of collective social and cultural capital, the regeneration of common goods, and the redistribution of cultural capabilities. At the center of cultural well-being, from a more purely collective perspective – as we have already pointed out – are the themes of agency and the cultural capabilities of communities, that is, the capacity to generate alternative landscapes, following the theory of imagination by Appadurai (1996) and Ingold (2020), in order to promote culturally oriented social action that is, therefore, transformative. This implies a form of thinking and acting – both individually and collectively – that is creative, collaborative, responsible, and capable of virtuously impacting the ways we live, dwell, produce, consume, and organize in line with the communities of practice proposed by Etienne Wenger, as mentioned above.

What distinguishes cultural well-being from all other forms of well-being is the fact that the cultural dimension lies at the center of well-being processes. The acts of planning, producing, distributing and/or redistributing, and consuming culture create a value chain with profound social impact. This means moving beyond – without denying the challenge – the singular artistic dimension of artistic languages in favor of an institutional value that makes the creative and artistic act part of a social value chain (Paltrinieri; 2022), which does not diminish the quality of the artistic product but enhances the processes in which it is embedded.

However, if culture is a space where cultural capabilities are developed, these capabilities are not equally distributed, as we pointed out above by referring to Bourdieu, according to whom cultural capital – like social and economic capital – remains in the hands of the upper classes. In the dissemination of culture and the promotion of cultural participation, inequalities in material, cognitive, and social resources persist as barriers to access. These, in turn, affect the ability to "navigate" a complex set of norms, from which one might accurately reclaim a way of envisioning the future.

Nevertheless, while it is true that Pierre Bourdieu (1979), in his reflections on social classes, speaks of cultural capital as belonging to individuals, we want to emphasize in this article that heritage communities and the participation of the third sector in the cultural field must turn toward the production of collective cultural capital, which is both the prerequisite and the outcome of the transformative action of third-sector actors. Moreover, more specifically, it is important to highlight that cultural heritage itself – its care and enhancement – is a "process" in which three dimensions are combined (Sokka et al. 2004): the creation of a desired image of the world one wants to live in; the generation of values as a result of this creation, which also becomes drivers of reflection, recognition, and the shaping of desires and choices; and finally, the creation of identities and new social structures that embody these values.

Finally, the dialogical relationship between the community and heritage, often mediated by institutions, takes place within the context of a variety of experiences across different territories, where the dimensions of space and time appear as central – particularly from the perspective of commons and community practices. Thus, cultural heritage becomes a device for creating shared rules and meanings for the communities that manage it, but also for citizenship in a broader sense, becoming an important mechanism in the creation of cultural well-being ecosystems.

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