

Cultural Heritage Valorization through Citizen Participation Evidence from Italy

Emanuela Conti, Tonino Pencarelli

Department of Economics, Social and Political Studies
University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Italy

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the role played by local residents in the development of the touristic offer for the main cultural heritage site of an art city. The literature underlines that the participation of residents is fundamental in the design and improvement the cultural and touristic offer of cultural institutions and cities. The active participation of cultural consumers is an important strategic goal of museums and of cultural institutions in general that aim to co-create value for cultural consumers and institutions. Today, the contribution of the citizenry is facilitated by emerging technological platforms. There are no in-depth qualitative studies which widely investigate the opinions of residents about the actual offer of the main cultural attraction of an art city and collect suggestions for its improvement.

The study was conducted on 320 Urbino residents in order to identify their level of knowledge about and enjoyment of the Ducal Palace of Urbino, the most important cultural attraction of this art city, and to elicit their suggestions for ways to improve the offer. The Ducal Palace is considered one of the most beautiful Renaissance style buildings in the world. It houses the National Gallery of the Marche Region, an important state-run museum in Italy that showcases masterpieces by Raphael, Piero della Francesca, and Titian. Today, Urbino is UNESCO World Heritage site.

The opinions and suggestions of local residents regarding the cultural offer of the Palace of Urbino are very important for the management of the heritage site. Their input contributes to finding ways to better satisfy the inhabitants' cultural needs and desires as well as to attract a greater number of cultural tourists and to improve their level of satisfaction.

Findings show that residents have a strong attachment to Urbino and to the Ducal Palace, and they have provided many suggestions to improve the cultural offer of their city and its main cultural institution. Furthermore, the local inhabitants have made many proposals to further enhance the cultural

site and have pointed out that certain specific initiatives should be addressed to residents.

Implications for museum management, policymakers and the local community are discussed.

Keywords: cultural consumption; cultural heritage management; residents' participation; the Ducal Palace of Urbino; UNESCO site.

Introduction

Active participation and involvement of citizens in the enjoyment of cultural heritage is a value-creating vector for cultural institutions whose reason for being can no longer be limited to the protection and preservation of cultural assets. They must also seek opportunities to expand their audience of cultural consumers, while enhancing and improving economic and financial performance (Kotler and Kotler, 1998; Chong, 2002; ICOM 2007, among others).

Museums and cultural institutions usually perform either directly, through the sale of tickets and services or indirectly, through public subsidies awarded for merit goods, that is, public goods able to attract significant numbers of visitors. In this way, the concept of cultural heritage enhancement is further applied evidenced by the capacity of cultural institutions to create social value for the community, by enabling education and awareness-raising processes through the arts, history and, more generally, culture for the resident population.

The social value of museums is increased as the involvement of local citizens promotes forms of learning and cultural contamination or sharing with other visitors. This makes the resident actors more aware that their encounters with guests can be a significant tool to improve tourist reception, which is an important factor of attraction and competitiveness of territories and touristic destinations. Citizen engagement, especially if it focuses on the academic and university worlds, also facilitates the designing of innovative forms of teaching in the history of the art and culture of places, making learning enjoyable in edutainment contexts that are completely in line with the needs of the experience economy (Holbrook and Hirshmann, 1982; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Pencarelli, Conti and Splendiani, 2017).

The involvement and active participation of ordinary citizens also have a place in the designing of new cultural proposals. Moreover, local citizens are important in both word-of-mouth and off-line communication processes, becoming important vehicles for enhancing the brand of the cultural institution and promoting the events that are hosted there. In fact, we are

convinced that local residents are the main ambassadors of the cultural heritage of a city, in this case the Ducal Palace of Urbino, and of its cultural proposals for visitors. Furthermore, listening to residents and engaging them in future cultural projects (events, concerts, etc.) can help to strengthen the civic identity and learning processes of the different local target population segments (youths, senior citizens, etc.).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the local population's level of knowledge and enjoyment of the Ducal Palace in Urbino and to discern how they could contribute, through their ideas and suggestions, to improving the offer of the city's most important cultural heritage site, to creating value for visitors, both residents and tourists alike, and to increasing their engagement and loyalty.

Theoretical background

Studies have demonstrated that programs and projects in which more people are involved in the planning process (Arnstein, 1996) have had greater impact and success and that citizen participation should be linked to both the formal and informal scope of policy-making (Lane, 2005). The involvement of the local population and a socially inclusive approach (bottom up approach) has led to the enhanced value of cities, greater attraction of tourists from abroad, and considerable improvement in the quality of life and in the sustainable use of the local cultural heritage. There is evidence that an active involvement of area residents makes a difference, that socially inclusive policies are an essential component of viable heritage management models, and that the failure to integrate such aspects into the strategic approach may be a fatal flaw (Ferilli, Sacco and Noda, 2015). Studies on the perceptions and attitudes of local residents and visitors regarding cultural heritage have shown not only a strong social will to protect the good, by the former, but also high percentages of positive willingness to pay (WTP), by the latter (Gianna kopoulou and Kaliampakos, 2016). There is consensus in the CHM literature that cultural institutions, local authorities, government agencies, businesses, and host communities should collaborate and integrate their efforts to plan and manage cultural activities (Kotler and Kotler, 1998; Chong, 2002; Rispoli and Brunetti, 2009; Conti, 2015; Solima, 2017; Pencarelli, Conti and Splendiani, 2017; among others). As a consequence, the knowledge and fruition of cultural institutions by the local residents is fundamental in order for them to participate actively in the cultural planning and development process.

The interactions between people and communities in the places where they live exemplify the diverse ways in which a people-centered heritage builds identities and supports individual and collective memories. It encourages a

view of heritage as a process that contributes, through cultural sustainability, to human well-being and socially and culturally sensitive policy making (Auclair and Fairclough, 2015).

The Washington Charter stresses that the prosperity of urban heritage conservation programs is dependent on the presence and intervention of local residents in the planning process (ICOMOS, 1987, Article 3). The Burra Charter has also emphasized that sustainability of heritage conservation programs is significantly related to community participation (ICOMOS, 1999, Article 12).

Additionally, citizen participation is important in managing and resolving issues and conflicts within heritage programs (Siririsak, 2009); it can also contribute to presenting an appropriate context and definition of heritage in situations where the prevailing community values are commonly different (Kerr, 2000). It is now thought that public comments broadcast by ordinary citizens contribute more to improving the perception of heritage sites than do assessments by experts who are formally selected by specific appointment (Tweed and Sutherland, 2007).

Since the second half of the twentieth century, two factors have contributed to increased "urban heritage conservation", where participatory approaches are especially needed. On the one hand, there has been rapid urban development based on high-speed economic growth and a dramatic increase in the urban population; on the other hand, there have been increasing threats to cultural heritage due to changing lifestyles, loss of authenticity, and also improper management in the process of urban conservation (Habitat, 1999).

A special form of community participation in cultural institutions is evident in the eco museums which are museums designed to reflect the interests of the local population, to be a socially inclusive mechanism, to conserve cultural and heritage resources and construct and promote local cultural identities (Davies, 2010; Conti, 2015; among others).

Today, new technologies facilitate the participation of citizens in cultural planning. In fact, planners have recently begun to innovate *with* citizens instead of *for* citizens through online civic engagement platforms (Ertiö, 2015; Evans-Cowley and Hollander, 2010; Evans-Cowley and Manta Conroy, 2006; Krishnamurthy, Bhagwatwar, Johnston and Desouza, 2013). The critical role of everyday citizens in planning and policy-related issues in their city is enabled by the newly emerging technological platforms such as mobile-based applications and internet-based participatory platforms. The interest and capability of citizens to use and benefit from such online platforms that facilitate urban planning has grown in recent times (Ertiö and Bahgawatwar,

2017). The focus of planners today is not so much to plan but to build online platforms and environments where everyday citizens can plan for themselves. Planners need to take an active role in shaping online platforms and learn how to harness the collective intelligence process, and they need to setup online and offline canvases for citizen engagement and collaboration. While planners grapple to engage the citizens via social media, “the citizenry are looking to take it up to engage the planners” (Williamson and Parolin, 2012: 61).

Another important aspect of the active cultural participation of residents inside and outside the places of culture concerns its positive effects on the psycho-physical well being of people and societies, on professional skills (Sacco and Caliandro, 2011), and on health expenditure levels (Grossi, Sacco, Blessi and Cerruti 2011; Blessi, Grossi, Sacco, Pieretti and Ferilli, 2015). As culture is one element of tourism, there is a huge body of literature concerning local populations' attitudes toward tourism (Weaver and Lawton, 2001; Williams and Lawson 2001; Gursoy et al. 2002; Andriotis and Vaughan 2003; Sdrali and Chazapi 2007; Kim et al. 2013), sustainable tourism (Mowforth, Munt, 2003; Vernon, Essex, Pinder and Curry, 2005; Del Chiappa and Melis, 2015; among others) and area residents' engagement in participatory opportunities (Sdrali, Goussia-Rizou and Kiourtidou, 2015; among others). The level of support for tourism development is affected by local participation (Lee 2013) and this participation and involvement may play a prominent role in the success of decision-making processes for a tourism initiative (Hall, 2011; Moscardo, 2011; Vollero, Siano, Golinelli and Conte, 2016). These studies have stressed the importance of developing a new scheme where the local population actively participates in the decision-making process with the support of local authorities, one of the main factors affecting people's willingness to engage in participatory opportunities.

However, there are no studies in the literature that analyze the level of knowledge and enjoyment of an art city's cultural heritage on the part of its residents. Moreover, none have systematically gathered their suggestions for improving the cultural offer.

Objectives and methodology

The main purpose of the research is to understand the level of the *Urbinat*'s (Urbino residents) knowledge and fruition of the Ducal Palace, the city's main cultural attraction, and to gather suggestions for improving the offer of this cultural institution. In particular, the sub-objectives of the research are the following:

- the reasons why residents are proud of Urbino,
- the level of fruition and knowledge of the Ducal Palace,

- the most memorable aspects of the Ducal Palace,
- the most desired initiatives at the Ducal Palace,
- suggestions for improving the cultural offer of the Ducal Palace

In the explorative-descriptive study a qualitative-quantitative methodology and face-to-face interviews as a survey technique were adopted. In particular, the study was conducted on a sample of 320 *Urbinati* in the period from 20th December 2016 to 2nd March 2017. The direct interview was considered the most effective investigation technique to obtain the sought-after information (Molteni and Troilo, 2007), the reason being that self-compiled questionnaires are usually drafted in a hurry, are incomplete, and open questions are often skipped. Instead, the direct interview approach allowed us to get answers to all of the questions from all of the respondents.

As concerns the data analysis, the interviews were compiled using the Toluna Quick Surveys software, a good technological support which allowed effective data processing. The answers to the closed questions (dichotomic and multiple choice) were analyzed by the software which then produced the relative frequency graphs (in absolute values and percentages) of the different response options. The answers to the open questions (regarding suggestions and/or novelties to suggest to the management of the Ducal Palace) were handled according to the traditional ex-post "coding" method, used for analysis of qualitative research. The text portions, after careful reading, were coded manually and the frequency calculated for each code.

Empirical results

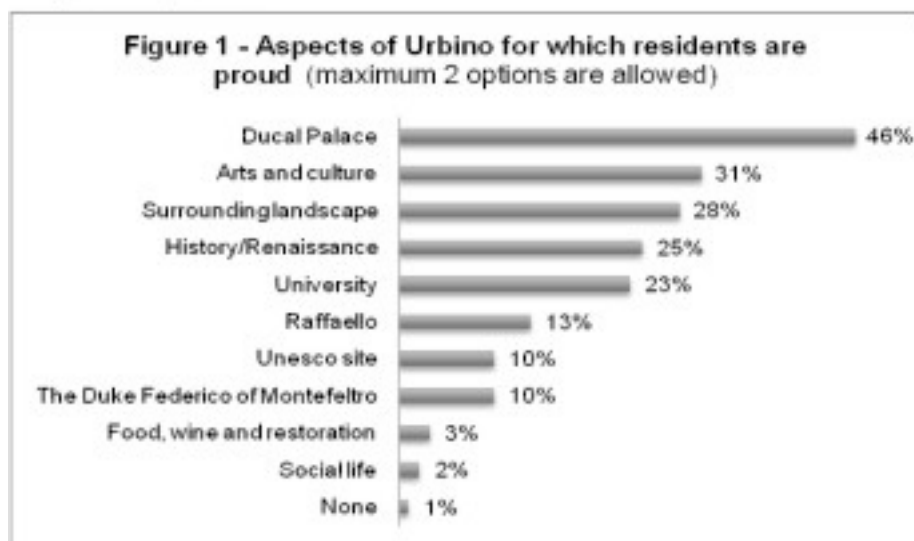
The characteristics of the sample of *Urbinati* interviewed is described in Table 1, below.

Gender		Age		Education		Job	
Male	49%	18-30	24%	Primary/middle school diploma	20%	Office worker	23%
Female	51%	31-45	25%	High school diploma	37%	Factory worker	9%
Total	100%	46-60	32%	Bachelor's/Master's degree	32%	Teacher	9%
		over 60	19%	Postgraduate degree	11%	Researcher/Professor	3%
		Total	100%	Total	100%	Entrepreneur	2%
						Manager	2%
						Housewife	3%
						Tradesman	6%
						Director	1%
						Freelance	10%
						Artist	1%
						Student	15%
						Retired	12%
						Unemployed	4%
						Total	100%

Table 1 – Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (N=320) – percentages(%)

1. In all the tables of this article, the percentage values do not use decimal places.

It is interesting to note that the Ducal Palace is considered by residents of Urbino to be the most important attraction of the city and the one of which they are most proud.



Nearly all of the interviewees had visited the Palace (93%) and only 7% stated that they had never seen the Palace. Furthermore, the majority of the sample (62%) had last visited the Palace in 2016, and the remaining fairly recently with 13% in 2011-2014, 12% in 2015. A small percentage of 8% had been in 2000-2010 and only 5% some time before 2000.

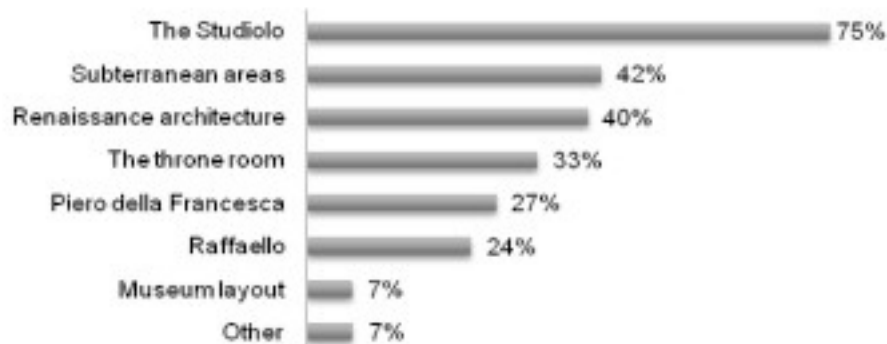
Of the sample, 58% had visited the Palace at least six times in their life. In particular, 25% between six and ten times, 18% eleven to twenty times, and 15% more than twenty times. Among the remaining respondents, 20% of the sample declared that they had been to the Palace four or five times and 20% two or three times, while 2% (6 persons) had only ever visited the Palace once. This data underlines the fact that *Urbinati* are very loyal to their main museum, and consider it a place where they can learn, escape from the routine of life, socialize, etc.

This consideration is confirmed by another result: in the last five years 15% of the sample has visited the Palace many times a year and 20% of the sample visit it regularly once a year, whereas 33% go two or three times a year, 20% rarely go (only once in five years). Only 12% have never visited it in the last five-year period. In addition, about half of the respondents freely added, when answering the questions, that they visited the museum on the first Sunday of the month when entrance is free.

As can be seen in Figure 2, residents of Urbino who have visited the Ducal Palace mainly remember (75%) the Duke's *studiolo*, which is the emblem of the Palace. It is a small room where the Duke would go to study and meditate. It is completely covered in wooden inlay which reproduces by means of perspective illusion, or *trompe l'œil*, the objects with which the Duke loved to be surrounded (books, musical instruments, armaments, etc.) as well as inspirational figures of ancient times such as Plato, Aristotle, Ptolemy, among others (Marchi 2015).

Other features of the Palace that fascinate the local residents are the subterranean rooms and passages (42%), the Renaissance-style architecture of the building (40%), and the throne room (33%). The next most memorable aspects the interviewees said they remember are two important artists who were present at the Duke's court: Piero della Francesca (27%) and Raffaello (or "Raphael", in English) (24%). Finally, a very low percentage of visitors said they value aspects such as the museum layout (7%) and "other" aspects (7%) such as captions under the paintings, temporary exhibitions, and the visit to the "small towers" called *i torricini*.

Figure 2 - The most memorable aspects of the Ducal Palace of Urbino from local residents' perspectives
(maximum 3 options are allowed)



According to the residents who have never visited the Palace and have formed an idea of the content of the Palace on the basis of newspaper articles, television and radio programs, and word of mouth, Raffaello's work is the most famous feature of this beautiful building, for 39% of respondents. The elements that follow, for about 33% of these people, are the architectural style of the Palace and Piero della Francesca, whereas the Studiolo and the

(78)

subterranean areas are tied at just over 22% for being among the most important and memorable aspects of this heritage site. Finally, the least known feature is the throne room and other unspecified aspects account for approximately 17% and 11%, respectively. These figures are presented in Figure 3, below.

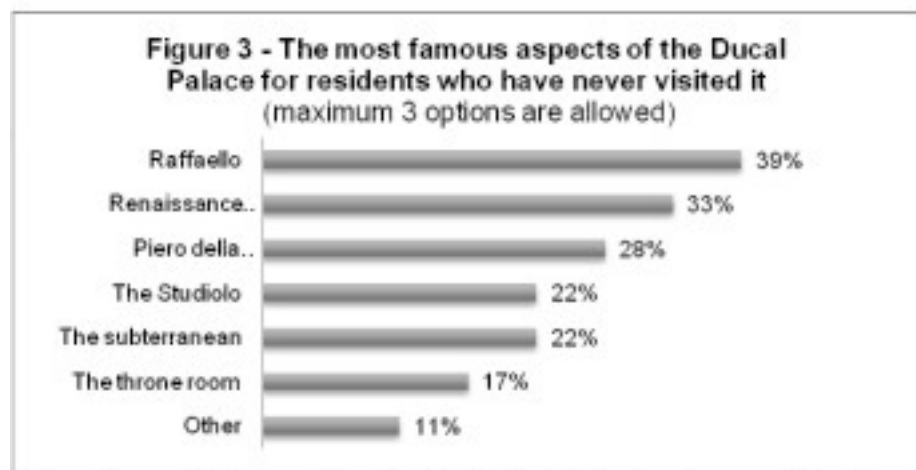
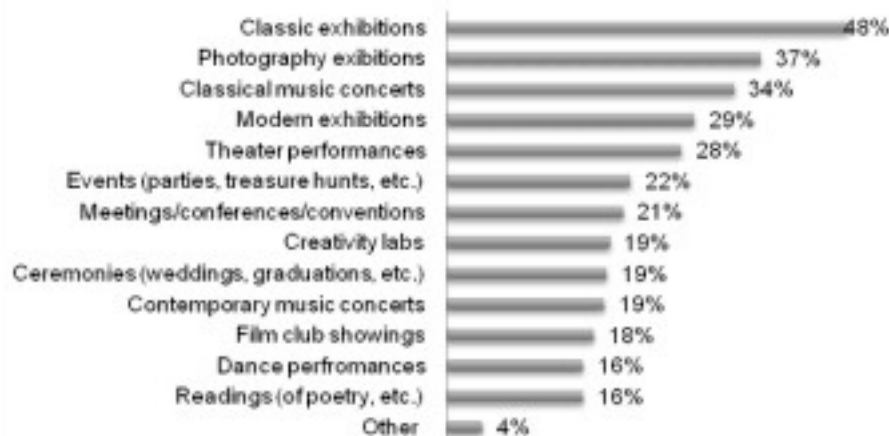


Figure 4 presents the most desired initiatives in the Renaissance style Palace. Topping the list are classic exhibitions (48%), photography exhibitions (37%), and classical music concerts (34%). Modern exhibitions (29%) and theater performances (28%) also figure fairly prominently on the "wish list". Except for classic exhibitions which are the most traditional and frequent events held at the Palace, all of these activities have been offered over the last two years.

All of the remaining desired initiatives, except for contemporary music concerts (19%), film club showings (18%) and graduations (among ceremonies), have occasionally been held in the Palace; these are: events (22%), meetings/conferences/conventions (21%), creativity labs (19%), ceremonies (19%), dance performances (16%), and readings (16%). Among the "other" initiatives suggested are jazz concerts, singing courses, a casino night, and heavy metal concerts. This data shows that area residents can provide useful suggestions to improve the portfolio of cultural products offered by a museum.

Figure 4 - Desired cultural initiatives for in the Ducal Palace
(maximum 4 options are allowed)



In the last open question, a key point in the interview, we asked residents to provide suggestions for improving and/or innovating the cultural offer of the museum, in terms of events, initiatives, and services. Out of a total of 320 interviewed people, 105 (26%) did not provide any further suggestions for Palazzo Ducale, claiming that they had already indicated the most welcome initiatives for the Palace in their response to the previous question. The remaining 215 respondents, which mainly included the most frequent visitors to the Palace, provided a total of 306 suggestions on the following aspects:

Palace and Gallery (23%)

Make the Palace more open and accessible, creating points of interaction with visitors, giving more information in the halls and in the ticket office also through new technologies (monitors, interactive stations); extend the summer hours (with more evening openings); enhance the gardens and the currently inaccessible areas, improve layout, and lighting; increase the number of works of art and include items of furniture and clothing from the Renaissance period.

Initiatives and events (15%)

Increase the number of engaging initiatives, in particular ad hoc initiatives for the *Urbinati* -for example, classic and modern exhibitions of substance, classical and rock music concerts, historical commemorations, art history and photography courses, scientific conferences, evening parties, classical theater, art markets, and film showings.

Exhibitions (9%)

Set up more classic and modern exhibitions of national and international importance, the first ones to be on Raffaello, Piero della Francesca, Barocci, Caravaggio, Botticelli, and subsequently, on modern artists, pop art, and photographers; also suggested were exhibits on Duke Federico da Montefeltro and on scientific matters.

Relationships with schools and the University of Urbino (7%)

Forge stronger relationships between the Ducal Palace and the area schools and the University with ad hoc initiatives (exhibitions, meetings, concerts, etc.) to raise young people's awareness of art; possibly make visits compulsory for all schools in the Marche Region.

Communication (7%)

Increase outside communication through advertising (local posters, TV and newspapers) and through the good word of mouth by residents; receive more information on the museum, geared toward local residents.

Price policy (6%)

Adopt an attractive pricing policy for residents (such as free Sunday entry) and a cost-effective annual card with unlimited inputs.

Museum staff (4%)

Strengthen the museum staff through the recruitment of highly motivated young people who speak different languages.

Guided tours (3%)

Improve the number of professional museum guides and audio self-guides; also provide more paper material in English.

Services of the city of Urbino (1%)

Increase the number of parking areas and provide a sustainable solution to pollution from car traffic by offering shuttle bus service to the city center and to important places like *La Fortezza* just outside the city center. Also, improve restaurants and hotels.

This data emphasizes the local population's desire for greater engagement and active participation, in general; therefore, there is a need for innovative ways to involve Urbino's citizens. This can also be extended to families living in the

neighborhood who would be encouraged to take part in innovative and interactive learning projects involving teachers, students, and families, among other initiatives.

Conclusions

The study first highlighted that there was strong enthusiasm for and extensive participation in the Residents of Urbino survey, showing the *Urbinati's* strong interest and involvement in their cultural heritage. Specifically, the study identified high levels of knowledge and enjoyment of the Ducal Palace of Urbino, which is considered the most important cultural attraction (to be proud of) in the city. It also highlighted a strong a strong willingness to suggest ways to improve the cultural offer of the main cultural attraction - the Ducal Palace - of an art city such as Urbino.

The study confirms the key points emphasized in the literature, in particular the strong interest of residents in the conservation and enhancement of their cultural heritage. Attention is also drawn to the fact that residents want to be physically and intellectually engaged and are interested in the sustainable development of tourism in the city of Urbino.

Differently from what has appeared in the literature thus far, another key element that emerged was that Urbino residents strongly wish to see targeted cultural activities introduced for them. It seems that they want to somehow feel like "privileged visitors", so much so as to propose that they be allowed to enter the Palace for free and to bring friends and then spread good word of mouth to encourage tourists to visit this focal point of the city. In addition, the study revealed that although online platforms can be used to favor some degree of participation, face-to-face meetings between cultural planners and residents should be initiated to ensure participation from all segments of the local population.

The study also brought to light the great creative and innovative capacity of Urbino residents. Moreover, it demonstrated that participation can also be achieved through surveys aimed at both understanding the level of knowledge and fruition of cultural activities in the city and gathering useful suggestions for the management of these activities.

Some preliminary managerial implications for the Ducal Palace are inherent in the following objectives:

- to continue doing surveys on *Urbinati* after the study, to involve them and try to understand how knowledge about, enjoyment of, and satisfaction

with the initiatives of Palazzo Ducale change over time; more generally, it is important to study cultural consumers as a whole, but especially local residents, who are the main ambassadors of the local cultural heritage;

- to develop a direct contact between Palace and residents through periodic meetings in the Palace, especially considering that Urbino is a small town where the meeting schedule is communicated by word of mouth; on the basis of greater knowledge than what emerged from the survey, there are suggestions to innovate, based on the *what* (bid portfolio) and the *how* (using new technologies, qualified personnel for guidance, young reception staff, etc.), the value proposition, as well as to focus attention on the target of young people;
- to develop on line relationships with younger residents and those who are more familiar with the Internet and social media by, for example, creating a Facebook group, organizing events, etc.;
- to co-design and co-create ad hoc cultural events for and with the different target groups of *Urbinati* (youths, adults, and the elderly), initiatives that would require strong engagement and active participation;
- to update all the traditional and technological material of the museum which would be useful for both residents and tourists to create more value for all visitors;
- to innovate the front line personnel with younger and more motivated people who can also speak different languages;
- to improve the communications of the Palace through traditional and online media.

In addition to these, some preliminary practical objectives for the municipal administration of Urbino and more generally for policy makers of the Region/Country are outlined as follows:

- to urge museum management to strengthen collaboration with both city and territorial administrations, because cultural heritage offers are perceived by residents, as well as by tourists, as integrated bidding packages where some service components are within the competence of municipalities;
- to facilitate the relationships between residents and cultural institutions through specific laws which incentivize this participation;

- to raise awareness about the importance of cultural participation of residents through local mass media (television and radio programs, newspapers) and local online media (e.g. local groups on Facebook, Internet sites, etc.);
- to raise awareness about the importance of cultural participation of residents through national mass media (television and radio advertising and programs and newspapers) and online media (e.g. online newspapers);
- to educate young people in schools about the importance of adopting a participative attitude towards cultural institutions.

In sum, the managerial implications span a broad range of applicability, from local to regional, and indeed, to national.

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About the Authors

Emanuela Conti is a research fellow at the Department of Economics, Society and Politics (DESP) at the University of Urbino "Carlo Bo" where she teaches Marketing and Economics and management of cultural enterprises. Her research interests include marketing and management of arts enterprises and of creative industries. Email- emanuela.conti@uniurb.it

Tonino Pencarelli is Professor in Department of Communication and Humanities Sciences, University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Italy