

Civic engagement or philanthropic support? Exploring the determinants and role of Friends of Museums organizations in Italy

Enrico E. Bertacchini*, Giovanna Segre⁺, Vittorio Falletti[#]

*Assistant Professor, Department of Economics and Statistics “Cognetti De Martiis”, University of Turin. Email: enrico.bertacchini@unito.it

⁺ Associate Professor, Department of Economics and Statistics “Cognetti De Martiis”, University of Turin.

[#] Researcher, Centro Studi Silvia Santagata-Ebla.

ABSTRACT

The article attempts a preliminary exploration of the determinants and role of “friends of museums” organizations in Italy. Using data from the official survey of Italian museums, our analysis suggests that, being a form of prosocial behavior, the establishment of friends’ organizations depends not only on demand side arguments of prosocial behavior (e.g. members’ motivations based on the level of social and cultural capital), but also on supply side factors peculiar to recipient institutions. Further, through a dedicated survey to the members of Italian Federation of Friends of Museums (FIDAM, associate member of WFFM-World Federation of Friends of Museums) we lend insights into the structure and activities of such groups in supporting cultural heritage institutions. In particular, our findings suggest that friends’ of museums perform and organize their operations along two quite distinct, and sometimes conflicting, missions: a cultural heritage stewardship model based on civic engagement and a museum membership approach where philanthropic support is the most relevant objective.

Keywords: Friends of museums, museums, philanthropic support, civic engagement.

JEL Codes: Z11, L31

Introduction

The article attempts a preliminary exploration of the determinants and role of “friends of museums” organizations in Italy.

Although friends of museums are recognized as a widespread phenomenon at the international level which has been operating for a long time in the museums world, it has not generated much interest by academic scholars and professionals as a form of support to cultural institutions. Attention has been given prominently to audience development strategies or other more established fundraising mechanisms, such as charitable giving and corporate philanthropy. The literature is also fragmented across sociology, museology and business journals, mainly focusing on research issues concerning members’ behavior and the nature of friends’ organizations.

One possible reason for this minor interest is the difficulty scholars face in defining and delineating the phenomenon due to the very high heterogeneity of the nature, scope and activities undertaken by such organizations. Many groups of friends have different organizational structures and fall under several definitions (e.g. “friends”, “membership schemes”, “societies”, and “associations”). Further, such organizations are engaged in several supporting activities. They may fundraise for the organization or be a potential source of volunteers and advocates. In return they receive a range of benefits that might include free admission, information mailings, private views, discounts, use of museums’ facilities, privileged treatment, and social activities. In some cases, they are special interest groups whose support to a cultural institution is the result of furthering their own interest on a cultural topic.

The article contributes to the cultural policy and arts management literature by addressing “friends of museums” organizations in Italy along two main analytical dimensions. Firstly, using data from the official survey of Italian museums, we provide a macro perspective on the factors which determine support to cultural heritage institutions by friends’ organizations. Our results suggest that, being a form of prosocial behavior, the establishment of friends’ organizations depends not only on demand side arguments of prosocial behavior (e.g. members’ motivations based on the level of social and cultural capital), but also on supply side factors peculiar to recipient institutions. In particular, the governance structure of a museum and its proactive attitude toward audience development and the creation of ties with local communities are explanatory factors for having support through the formal establishment of friends’ organizations.

Secondly, through a dedicated survey to the members of Italian Federation of Friends of Museums (FIDAM, associate member of WFFM-World Federation of Friends of Museums) we lend insights into the role and activities of such groups in supporting cultural heritage institutions. In particular, our findings suggest that friends’ of museums perform and organize their operations along two quite distinct, and sometimes conflicting, missions. On one hand, a first typology of friends contribute to recipient institutions only indirectly or in non-pecuniary terms through practices of civic engagement which involve volunteering or the generation, sharing and dissemination of knowledge related to a specific cultural heritage. Further, these groups tend to have a light organizational structure and managerial capacity but represent a source of relational capital for the recipient institution. On the other hand, a second typology of friends’ organizations is actively engaged in the philanthropic support to museums. Such organizations are more oriented to sustain the strategic objectives of the museum through charitable giving and more integrated membership schemes with the recipient institution.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature and provide an analytical framework for understanding friends of museums. Section 3 describes the methodology of the study. Section 4 presents the econometric results unveiling the determinants of friends organizations’ support to Italian museums. Section 5 provides insights on the activities of Italian friends of museums while Section 6 concludes.

Understanding Friends of Museum

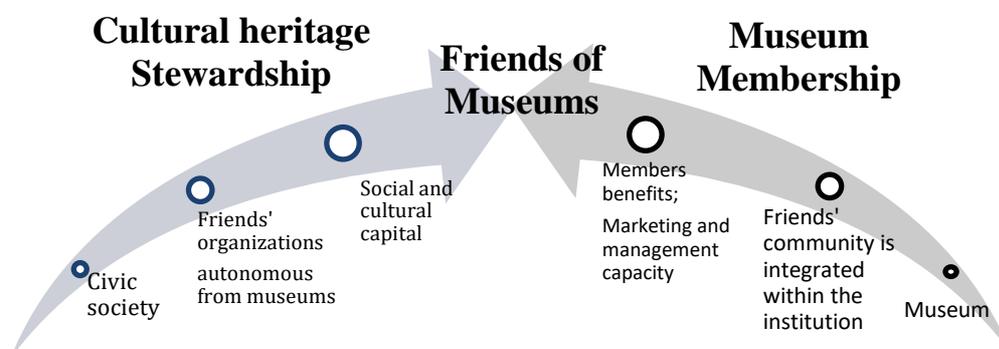
Although the academic literature on Friends schemes remains fragmented across sociology, economics, museology and management journals, it is possible to identify three main areas of research that are relevant for this topic. The first attempts to analyze the nature of friends' organizations (i.e., Raymond 1992; Hayes and Slater 2003). The research in this field is useful to define different typologies of schemes according to their organizational characteristics and understand whether and how the structure affect the management and the organizational performance to support museums and galleries' collections. The main conditions identified in the literature refer to the degree of autonomy/integration with the supported institution, numbers of members, fundraising approaches, promotional strategies, extent of professionalism and business planning.

A second group of works investigate the motivations of members of friends' organizations to engage in such form of prosocial behavior. The main drivers identified in the literature (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Slater, 2003; Paswan and Troy, 2004; Slater e Armstrong, 2010; Bertacchini et al. 2011; Camarero e Garrido, 2011) generally refer to a mix of intrinsic motivations, extrinsic benefits, social interactions and reputational concerns.

A third line of inquiry finally addresses the multifaceted forms of involvement provided by members of friends' organizations and aims at explaining the conditions that promote prosocial contributions either in the form of financial support, voluntary work or gifts in kind. While donations through money or in kind are usually regarded as the main source of support to cultural institutions (Bertacchini et al. 2011), donations of time through voluntary work represent an equally important type of contribution provided by members of friends' organizations. In this context, the reasons behind the choice to volunteer for some scholars follow a model of allocative choice whereby time and money are interdependent resources and substitutes (Bauer et al., 2013). According to others, other factors prevails such as recreational motives or involvement in the community (Holmes, 2003). These three fields of inquiry are strictly intertwined and shape the spectrum of analysis of friends' schemes. However, their separate focus on different aspects of the phenomenon hardly helps to capture in a more comprehensive interpretative framework the determinants and role of friends organizations in supporting cultural heritage.

To address this issue, we argue it is possible to identify two main models of emergence and development of friends organizations which rely on different conditions and settings, namely a *Cultural heritage stewardship approach* and a *Museum membership model*. At first glance the two alternatives do not seem in apparent contradiction, and indeed they can coexist in the pursuit of the same goal of supporting the cultural heritage. However, these two models define different paths of development of Friends of Museums, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Two models of Friends of Museums



In the *Cultural heritage Stewardship* model, friends' organizations emerge as a form of civic engagement and are formed by like-minded people motivated by the interest and willingness to support and advocate for cultural heritage. This driver can be read in many cases as a request to share with museums their mission of stewardship of cultural heritage for the benefit of the audiences and the community (Anderson, 2004). Friends of a museum are configured in this model as a group of supporters that arises spontaneously, autonomous from the recipient institution and normally led by intrinsic motivations and reciprocal ties among its members. Social capital, cultural identity and cohesion of a community (Putnam et al., 1994) are thus the relevant conditions to trigger organized forms of support and enhancement of the cultural heritage. However, the effectiveness of this model in supporting the museums will depend heavily on the organizational capacity and the degree of integration and involvement that these groups are able to have with the museum.

In the *Museum membership* model, it is up to the cultural institution to build a community of supporters through initiatives to enhance the involvement and engagement of the visitors. This strategy is usually associated with the creation of loyalty schemes: the individual becomes part of a community where the link with the museum, its collections and the possibilities of relationship with the other members are regulated by the museum itself through initiatives and benefits modulated according to different types of contribution. Potential parties to a scheme membership museum moved initially from the calculation of the benefits that derive according to the expectation of future attendance of the museum and only then will emerge their sense of belonging based on the strategies implemented by the institution museum. The prestige of the collection or the reputation, accountability, management capacity and cultural marketing strategies of the museum are the main factors to trigger a broad base of members and turn them into active supporters (Bhattacharya et al. 1995; Kotler and Kotler, 2000; Kotler, 2001).

Methodology

Italy is rich in cultural heritage sites, boasting more than 3,500 museums. While most of these institutions (63%) are owned or managed by the State or local authorities, there is a substantial share of privately owned and managed museums. The geographical distribution of museums is particularly spread all over the country, with only 24% concentrated in the main metropolitan areas or municipalities. Further, membership schemes have been very underdeveloped with only few experiences undertaken by new private museums in recent years. As a result, the vast majority of friends of museums have been established as autonomous organizations.

To investigate the determinants of "friends of museums" we use the rich information collected by ISTAT in 2011 through a Museums' Census covering all 4.588 Italian museums, monuments and archeological areas. The survey asked to each cultural heritage institution whether it has an established group of supporter or friends organizations. This allows us to test specific hypotheses on the conditions which influence the presence in a given institution of an organized group of friends. To give some preliminary details, 1206 museums and archeological areas (28%) have responded to be supported by friends' organizations. Figure 2 and 3 shows the regional distribution of museums with friends organizations bot in absolute and relative terms.

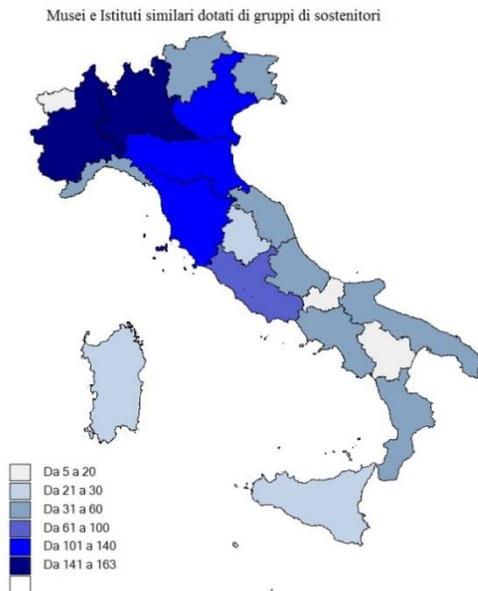


Figure 2 – Museums supported by Friends, absolute values

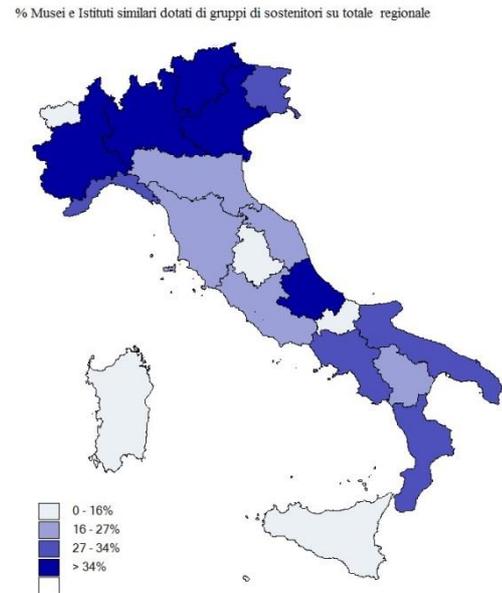


Figure 3 – Museums supported by Friends, %

As the survey on museums does not provide detailed information on friends organizations, to analyze their role and characteristics we prepared a dedicated survey to the members of Italian Federation of Friends of Museums (FIDAM, associate member of WFFM-World Federation of Friends of Museums). Following Hayes and Slater (2003), we constructed a questionnaire aimed to understand the type of activities, the degree of organizational development and integration with the operations of the recipient institution. With 104 organizations belonging to FIDAM, 62 returned the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 63%. The sample of the museums supported by the respondent organizations does not differ significantly from the Italian museum population in terms of geographical distribution and ownership type. Conversely, the group of museums supported by the respondents are more likely to be located in the main metropolitan areas or municipalities and show a relatively higher number of admissions than the population average.

The determinants of Friends of Museums

What determines the support to Italian museums by friends' organizations? To answer this question we use the data from the official survey of Italian museums 2011. The variable of interest is whether the cultural institution reports to be supported by a Friends' organization or not and it is therefore binary coded.

As for the explanatory variables we consider two sets of controls which address both the demand-side and supply-side factors of such form of prosocial behavior. The demand side arguments relate to the *Cultural Heritage Stewardship* model and may be expressed with measures of cultural and social capital in a given community. The larger the cultural capital, the more likely individuals are expected to care about the cultural heritage. Similarly, the larger the social capital in a given community, the more likely the capacity of groups to implement organized support to cultural heritage. As a proxy for cultural capital we use a measure of cultural participation expressing the % of individuals in a region having visited a museum, exhibition or art gallery in the last 12 months. As a proxy of social capital, following Putnam et al. (1994) we include the % of people in a region which have been involved in volunteering activities or have donated financial resources to non-profit organizations.

The supply side factors refer to characteristics of the recipient cultural institutions which may be loosely related to the *Museum membership* model. In this case, we first use proxies of the governance structure of the museum coding binary variables according to whether the organization is private or not and if it is managed with financial autonomy. Although the governance structure may not directly

influence the establishment of a friends' organization in support of a museum, it is commonly acknowledge in the Italian context that private cultural institutions or those public ones enjoying greater financial autonomy may develop more effective strategies in engaging their audiences. Likewise, we capture the proactive attitude toward audience development and the creation of ties with the local community with a dummy variable indicating whether the museum has undertaken dedicated promotional campaigns with this respect in the last 12 months. We consider also the number of admissions to the museum. Although endogeneity problems may be at stake using the number of visitors as an explanatory variable for the presence of a friends' organization, in our cross-section setting, this information is mainly used as a proxy of the attractiveness and prestige of the museum collection, which should be unrelated from potential effect of audience development influenced by the activity of friends' schemes.

Finally to account for social and demographic differences in the Italian territory, we add as a control a dummy variable accounting for the presence of the museum in the 106 Italian cities that serve as provincial administrative centers. These municipalities are the most populous cities in their respective geographical areas and the main repository of largest cultural heritage institutions.

Using a probit estimation strategy, Table 1 shows the results of the determinants of the support to museums by friends organizations. Such findings confirm our expectations that being a form of prosocial behavior, the establishment of friends' organizations depends not only on demand side arguments of prosocial behavior, but also on supply side factors peculiar to recipient institutions.

Table 1 – Probit estimation of the determinants of having a friends' organization supporting a museum

| VARIABLES | (1) Museum Characteristics | (2) Cultural and Social capital | (3) Full Model |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Private Museum | 0.0393** (0.0165) | | 0.0377** (0.0165) |
| Financial Autonomy | 0.0988*** (0.0180) | | 0.0994*** (0.0181) |
| Audience Development initiatives | 0.130*** (0.0164) | | 0.138*** (0.0165) |
| Admissions (100,000) | 0.0501*** (0.0106) | | 0.0573*** (0.0116) |
| Cultural participation | | 0.00676*** (0.00202) | 0.00758*** (0.00206) |
| Volunteering | | 0.0144*** (0.00489) | 0.0133*** (0.00493) |
| Donations | | -0.0109*** (0.00278) | -0.0122*** (0.00281) |
| Provincial administrative centers | | -0.0220 (0.0178) | -0.0581*** (0.0184) |
| Observations | 3,526 | 3,578 | 3,526 |
| Log Pseudo-likelihood | -2072 | -2165 | -2053 |
| Wald | 151 | 30.57 | 187.4 |
| Prob > chi | 0 | 3.74e-06 | 0 |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.0345 | 0.00692 | 0.0433 |
| Area Under ROC Curve | 0.619 | 0.564 | 0.640 |

Marginal effects displayed.

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

In particular, being a private museum or having financial autonomy increase the probability of being supported by a friends' organization by 3% and 9%, respectively. The proactive attitude by museum institutions towards audience development is significantly and positively related to the establishment of a friends' group to support the museum (with a marginal effect of 13%). The coefficient of the variable Admissions is significant and positive. This suggests that the attractiveness and visibility of a museum collection (in terms of admissions) may be positively related with the capacity to attract organized support by friends. However, as expressed by marginal effects, this influence is minimal.

Looking at the social and cultural capital determinants, most of the coefficients are significant and have the expected sign. However, their impact on the likelihood of having a museum supported by friends organizations is lower compared to the museum-specific regressors. Regions where the rates of cultural participation and volunteering activities are higher are those where museums are more likely to receive the support by friends' organizations. Interestingly the rate of individual financial giving to non-profit organization is negatively related to the presence of a group of supporters in a museum. We suggest to interpret this result as potential signal of substitution effect between prosocial behavior based on financial contributions and that relying on a greater involvement of individuals in time consuming activities.

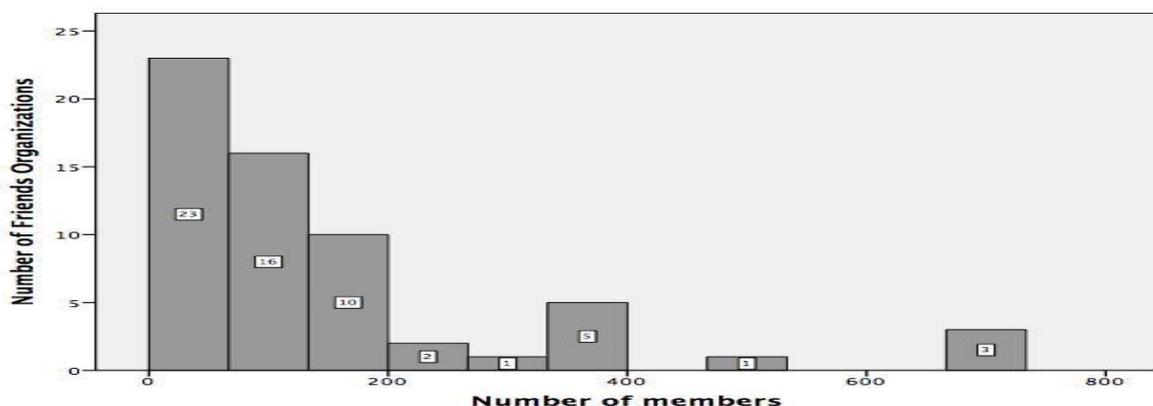
The role and characteristics of Friends organizations in Italy

To better understand the structure and activities of Friends of Museum organizations in Italy we focus on a sample of 62 organizations affiliated to the Italian Federation of Friends of Museums (FIDAM).

As previously discussed, these organizations are always autonomous entities, with the majority being established as an non-profit association and in rare cases as a foundation. The sample is also quite heterogeneous as for of the type of cultural heritage institutions supported. In several cases the friends organization supports individual or a group of museums which usually are clustered in the same ownership structure. In other cases, the friends' organizations have in their mission not only the support to museums but also to monuments and cultural heritage in a specific geographic area.

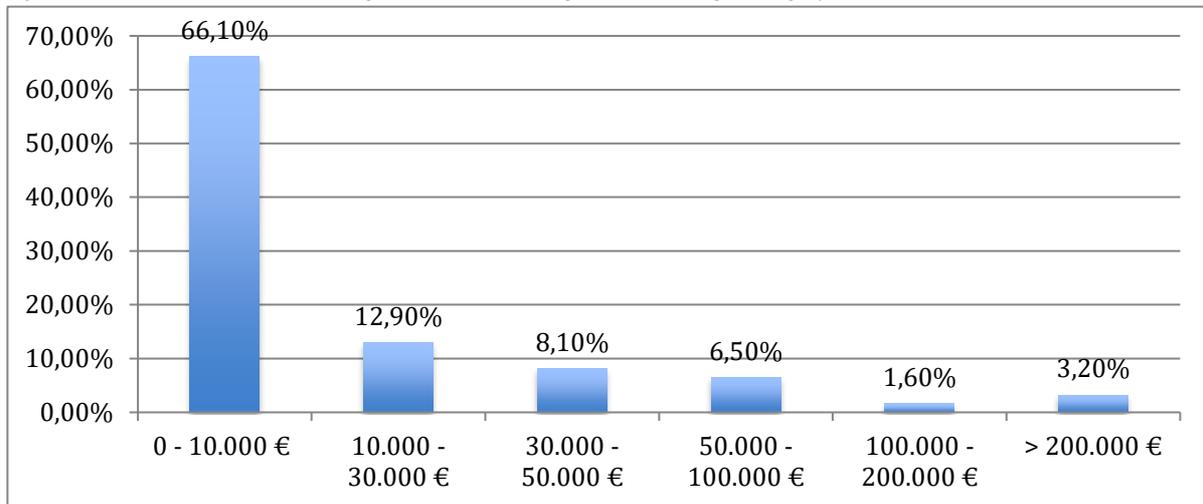
According to the information provided by the respondents in the sample, it emerges how friends of museums in Italy can be considered a quite long lasting phenomenon. For instance, the average age of the organizations is 25 years, with some groups being established after the WWII. The size of the organizations provides an additional insight into their structure. On average, each organization has about 150 members, with a slight majority of female supporters (60%) and only 11% of young adults (below 35 years old). However, the distribution of the number of members is highly skewed. As shown in Figure 4, about 30% of organizations has less than 70 members and about 80% has a maximum of 200 members.

Figure 4 – Distribution of Friends' organizations according to number of members



Membership size arguably influences also the economic resources available by the friends organizations, as shown in Figure 5. This is mainly because the main source of funds for these organizations comes from members annual fees. On average each friends' group has an annual budget of about 50.000 €, but the 66% of groups reports an annual budget of less than 10.000 €.

Figure 5 – Distribution of Friends' organizations according to annual budget category



The analysis of the activities undertaken by “friends of museums” organizations in Italy lends useful insights on the type of support provided by those groups to cultural heritage. The survey provides detailed information for each organizations of three main typologies of supporting activities.

A first group refers to social and leisure initiatives which enhance the production and dissemination of knowledge related to cultural heritage, such as the organization of conferences, study travels and visits to exhibitions and museums. A second type of activities encompasses various forms of direct support, either pecuniary or in-kind, to the museums' collections, such as donation of artworks or financial contribution for artworks acquisition, restoration, maintenance or the organization of exhibitions. Finally, a third category relates to activities which require to a greater extent the involvement of supporters to museum activities, such as the organization of educational programs, fundraising campaigns or volunteering.

Figure 6 – Frequency and correlation map of activities by friends' of museums organizations

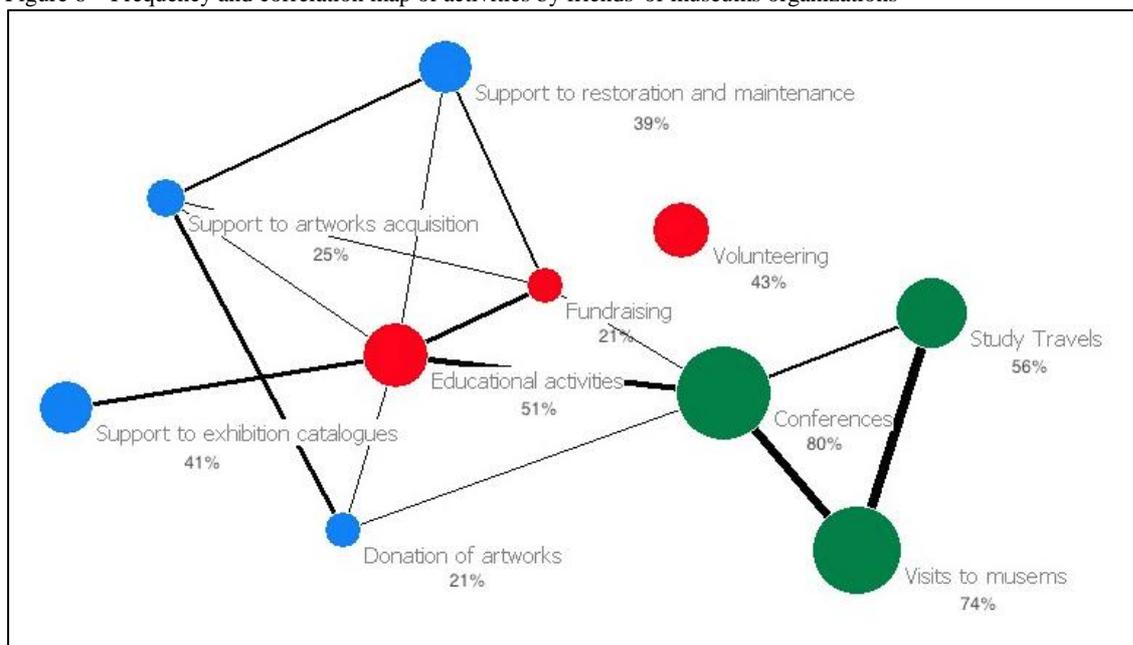


Figure 6 provides a graphical representation of the frequency of the various activities performed by the friends' organizations (expressed by the size of the nodes). Further the ties between the nodes are constructed using significant values of the correlation matrix between different activities, expressing how often they occur simultaneously within the same group of supporters.

Social and leisure initiatives (green nodes) are the most frequent and correlated activities performed by Friends' organizations, followed by the organization of educational activities and volunteering. Interestingly, while 43% of friends groups in the sample do volunteering, this practice is not significantly linked with any other form of support to cultural heritage institutions. Direct support to museum's collections rank generally lower (with a frequency ranging from 21 to 41%) and the activities falling in this category are strongly and significantly associated with the organization of educational activities. Further, it emerges quite neatly how the organization of fundraising campaigns is one of the least undertaken activities by friends' organizations in the sample. These patterns suggest that friends' of museums perform and organize their operations along two main dimensions. On one hand, a first typology of contribution to cultural heritage institutions occurs mainly indirectly or in non-pecuniary terms through practices of civic engagement which involve the generation, sharing and dissemination of knowledge related to cultural heritage. On the other hand, a second typology of contribution is more related to philanthropic support to museums' collections.

Turning on the structure and organization of Italian Friends of Museums, the information collected through the survey allows for investigating issues related to the organizational performance and the degree of integration with the supported institution. Following Hayes and Slater (2003), in order to assess these two dimensions we constructed two indexes based on friends organizations characteristics and responses. A scale from 1-3 was attached to statement of criteria for each characteristic (Table 2)

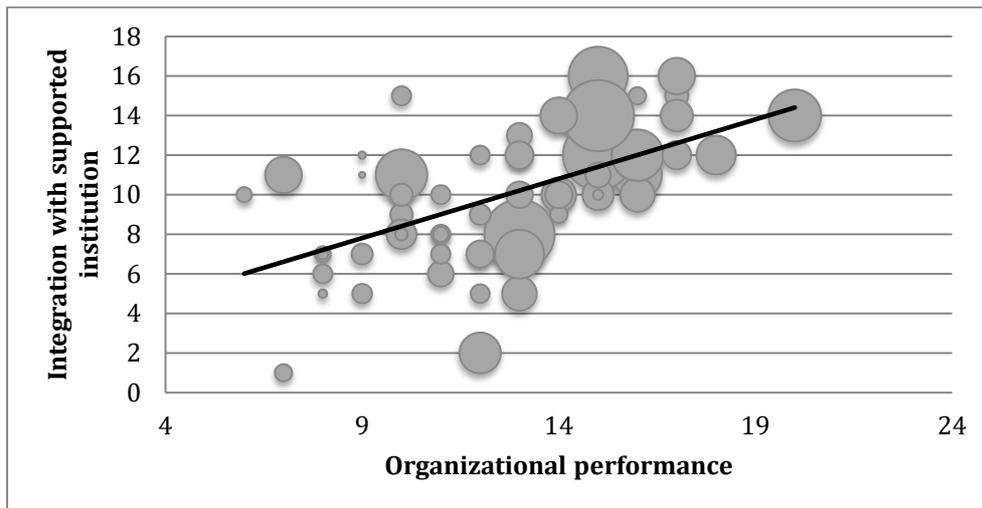
Table 2 – Characteristics and criteria for defining Organizational Performance and Integration

| | <i>Criteria</i> | | |
|--|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | <i>1 (low)</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3 (high)</i> |
| Organizational Performance | | | |
| Number and stratification of membership categories | One category | Two categories | 3 or more categories |
| The number of members in the last 3 years | Decreased | Constant | Increased |
| Corporate membership | No | | Yes |
| Channels to attract new members | Social relations and word of mouth | | Promotional campaigns |
| The current president of the organization is in charge for more than one mandate | Yes | | No |
| Extent of professionalism | Run by amateurs and volunteers | Run by volunteers and paid staff | Mainlyrun by paid internal staff |
| Attitude toward Fundraising (<i>opinion</i>) | Low | Moderate | High |
| Intergation with the supported institution | | | |
| % of budget dedicated to support Museum activities | 0-33% | 34-66% | 67-100% |
| Representatives of the museum are in the friends' organization board | No | | Yes |
| Involvement in museum programmatic decisions | No | Only in specific cases | Yes |
| Museum promotes friends' organization membership | No | | Yes |
| Friends organizations office is | in own spaces | hosted in non exclusive spaces in the museum buildings | hosted in dedicated spaces in the museum buildings |
| Perception of integration with the museum (<i>opinion</i>) | Low | Moderate | High |

Figure 7 presents the relationship between organizational performance and degree of integration with the supported institution of the sample of Italian friends' of museums. Each friends' organization is represented in the scatter plot according to the membership size.

As can be noted, there exist a positive relationship between the two dimensions, suggesting that friends' group which rank higher in the organizational performance score are also those more integrated with the recipient institutions. Interestingly, the size of the friends group is not strictly connected with the degree of integration (correlation value of about 0.2).

Figure 7 – Scores of organizational performance and degree of integration



Conclusion

The article has provided a preliminary exploration of the determinants and role of “friends of museums” organizations in Italy. Our analysis suggests that, being a form of prosocial behavior, the establishment of friends' organizations depends not only on demand side arguments of prosocial behavior (e.g. members' motivations based on the level of social and cultural capital), but also on supply side factors peculiar to recipient institutions. At the same time, focusing on a sample of 62 Friends of Museums organizations in Italy we lend insights into the structure and activities of such groups in supporting cultural heritage institutions. In particular, our findings suggest that friends' of museums perform and organize their operations along two main dimensions. On one hand, a first typology of contribution to cultural heritage institutions occurs mainly indirectly or in non-pecuniary terms through practices of civic engagement which involve the generation, sharing and dissemination of knowledge related to cultural heritage. On the other hand, a second typology of contribution is more related to philanthropic support to museums' collections. Further, we find a positive relationship between the organizational performance of the friends' group and its degree of integration with the supported institution.

Acknowledgements

The research has been supported by Compagnia di Sanpaolo, Torino.

References

- Anderson, G. (Ed.). (2004). *Reinventing the museum: Historical and contemporary perspectives on the paradigm shift*. Rowman Altamira.
- Bauer, T. K., Bredtmann, J., & Schmidt, C. M. (2013). Time vs. money—The supply of voluntary labor and charitable donations across Europe. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 32, 80-94.
- Bertacchini, E., Santagata, W., & Signorello, G. (2011). Individual giving to support cultural heritage. *International Journal of Arts Management*, 13(3).
- Bhattacharya, C. B., Rao, H., & Glynn, M. A. (1995). Understanding the bond of identification: An investigation of its correlates among art museum members. *The Journal of Marketing*, 46-57.
- Bussell, H., & Forbes, D. (2006). " Friends" Schemes in Arts Marketing: Developing Relationships in British Provincial Theatres. *International Journal of Arts Management*, 38-49.
- Camarero, C.; Garrido, M. J. (2011): Incentives, organisational identification, and relationship quality among members of fine arts museums, in: *Journal of Service Management*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 266-287.
- Hayes, D. and Slater, A. (2003) *From 'Social Club' to 'Integrated Membership Scheme': Developing your Membership Scheme Strategically*. *International Journal of Non-Profit & Voluntary Sector Marketing*, vol. 8, no 1, pp. 59-75.
- Holmes, K. (2003). Volunteers in the heritage sector: a neglected audience?. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 9(4), 341-355.
- Kotler, N., & Kotler, P. (2000). Can museums be all things to all people?: Missions, goals, and marketing's role. *Museum management and curatorship*, 18(3), 271-287.
- Kotler, N. (2001). New ways of experiencing culture: the role of museums and marketing implications. *Museum management and curatorship*, 19(4), 417-425.
- Orr, N. (2006). Museum volunteering: Heritage as 'serious leisure'. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12(2), 194-210.
- Paswan, A. K., & Troy, L. C. (2004). Non-profit organization and membership motivation: an exploration in the museum industry. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 1-15.
- Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R. Y. (1994). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton university press.
- Raymond, C. (1992). Members Matter. *Making the Most of Membership Schemes in the Arts* London: Arts Council of Great Britain.
- Slater, A. (2003). Users or supporters? Understanding motivations and behaviors of museum members. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 46(2), 182-207.
- Slater, A.; Armstrong, K. (2010): Involvement, Tate, and me, in: *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 26, No. 7-8, pp. 727-748.