

# Practices and history of “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” in Italy: the case of cultural production and music education in Trentino

Music  
education in  
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181

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to address the question of what coordination mechanism can be used for cultural production and, in particular, for the governance of music culture production. The authors locate their reflection within the specific institutional innovations introduced in Italy in 2017, focusing on the idea of shared administration and the public-private collaboration instituted in Trentino (a province located in northern Italy) in support of its cultural policy.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study focusses on the Trentino's music school system. This includes 13 organisations (musicians' cooperatives as well as associations of musicians and students, plus one municipal school which do not overlap with the public school system). To analyse shared administration features, the authors rely on selected information from 50 interviews with Trentino Music Schools (TMS) teachers and administrators, and on the proceedings of the 1994 music school conference organised by the schools at the time when this novel educational system was created.

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**Findings** – To offer an innovative educational service, the public actor (Provincia Autonoma di Trento [PAT]) and the schools (TMS) have developed a strong interdependence at the different levels of decision-making: PAT needs organisations that are sufficiently structured and organised to respect requirements of transparency and accountability, as well as educational standards, whereas TMS need public funding to maintain their service accessible for users, good labour conditions and be financially sustainable. Likewise, the success of TMS in educating thousands of students every year, including additional teaching programmes funded by PAT within general public schools, has contributed to decrease the exclusion from music education, raise interest in young people for music and enrolment in TMS as well as in the public schools related to the conservatoire filière. Conclusions emphasise the existence of a polycentric system of music culture production which needs to acknowledge the risk of being trapped in a static disequilibrium, while recognising change and the need to support and promote a culture of cooperation among schools and across layered institutional levels over time.

**Research limitations/implications** – Further research can observe this system of cultural production over time, to appreciate changes and organisational transformations, while introducing comparative analysis with other systems in different regions.

**Practical implications** – The relationship between the public and private sectors to design, organise and manage activities of collective interest (in the social, cultural, sporting and other fields) can increasingly become an effective and efficient alternative to the traditional bureaucratic as well as to the competitive method. For this to happen, however, all actors involved must be aware not only of areas of efficiency but also of inefficiency. To remedy the latter, corrective measures will have to be introduced. For example, fostering and improving “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” means giving all stakeholders involved the opportunity to actively participate. Should the number of participants increase, more discussion fora could be set up because one alone may not be sufficient to foster maximum involvement, to enhance different points of view, to allow for intersectoral and multidisciplinary interpretations and responses.

**Social implications** – The system governance based on co-programming and co-design has allowed – despite limitations – to pursue educational purposes and thus well-being for the users, as well as for the teachers and the community as a whole. The continuity of this educational and cultural action has been guaranteed by the economic and financial sustainability of the schools, which is highly dependent on the public actor funding personnel costs, and in turn tied to the number of students (demand) attending each school. Actors embedded in the system need to build awareness of industry and cultural changes and knowledge of how to introduce more adaptive capacity. This points towards the need for strengthening networking capacity and collaboration among schools and other relevant stakeholders.

**Originality/value** – The case presented is a unique system of music culture production in Italy, and its governance has never been addressed by previous studies. It provides an application of shared administration to which public administrations and communities can learn to improve access to music culture and education. For public and private organisations to take advantage of the method of “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione”, to make the production of a meritorious good more efficient and to favour its maximum accessibility, this study considers the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, or the areas of efficiency and inefficiency, for which new measures will have to be introduced.

**Keywords** Public-private collaboration, Merit goods, Music schools, Shared administration, Social economy organisations, Trentino Alto-Adige

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

One of the pillars of the Next Generation EU – the public expenditure program funded by the European Union’s economies following the pandemic crisis – concerns the cultural sector. The plan has been argued to go beyond the Keynesian public investment idea, as it represents at the same time a massive opportunity to reform entire sectors of our societies and economies, including the way in which the public sector provides its services and coordinates with private organisations. In Italy, the national plan for reconstruction and recovery includes €6.68bn for “tourism and culture”, with the aim to address the pitfalls suffered by the sector during the Covid-19 spread.

One of the challenges for the sector, as well as for others included in the recovery plan, is its actual implementation, finding those coordination solutions that can identify: who are the relevant publics, or stakeholders and how they can access and contribute to the reform project by developing innovative solutions with public aims and with the public administration. In this paper, we suggest to look at the experience started in the Trentino province of Italy back in the 1980s. This experience is not only relevant at the national level but also suggests – alongside other European experiences of co-production in education, health care and social services (Pestoff, 2006; Pestoff and Saito, 2021; Durose *et al.*, 2013) – how culture production, and music culture in particular, can be achieved using a combination of coordination solutions that bring together the public actor, social economy organisations and market coordination. Our study challenges the idea that cultural production is a prerogative either of the public actor or of private organisations and offers an illustration of a networked system where governance connects multiple levels of choice and activates different stakeholders at each nested level of the cultural production system. We locate our reflection within a historical account of the specific institutional innovations introduced in Italy. We interpret this evolution by analysing the governance nature of public–private collaboration and apply it to the experience of a public–private system of music schools aimed at the production of diffused music culture through music education. We address public–private collaboration from a strategic decision-making approach and pre-sent an original framework to analyse systemic governance based on Hymer (1972), Cowling and Sugden (1998), Sacchetti and Sugden (2003).

It is not in the scope of this work to analyse the meaning of cultural production, which we however consider a relevant point of departure. We just mention that sociological accounts, as the work of Adorno and Horkheimer (1969) has considered cultural production for the masses, with a negative connotation that relates cultural production with its commodification. In political economy, the production of cultural services is very much associated with educational and empowering development aims and, as such, has an intrinsic and normative value in many countries and certainly in the European area. It is regarded as a meritorious good. The positive externalities created by culture production are a specific form of public good, and are subject to market failure, leaving space to other forms of coordination than the price mechanism (Santos, 2012; Sacchetti and Borzaga, 2021). In fact, its production can be coordinated either by the state, by the market or through social cooperation, that is by associations of co-operators who join together to explicitly produce social value for stakeholders and communities (Ostrom, 1990; Sacchetti, 2023). In the first case, the public sector can produce the cultural service directly, owning the means of production. Differently, the public sector can subsidise cultural production by transfers to the private sector, or by means of fiscal policies (including tax incentives, credit and financial mechanisms), public–private partnerships and other collaborative agreements or infrastructural investments for instance in the creation of services supporting cultural clusters (see also Malshina and Firsova, 2018). In parallel, market mechanisms can combine with public policy when the financing operated by the public administration includes the use of vouchers which are used by individuals to buy the service from private firms that produce and sell cultural services. Complementary, the aims of modalities based on social cooperation are associated with those of social economy organisations, which include a variety of forms (cooperatives, mutuals, foundations, associations and social enterprises, according to the European Social Economy Action Plan, European Commission, 2021). Social economy organisations in particular can be the beneficiaries of fiscal policies as well as of private donations, including for-profit firms by virtue of corporate social responsibility strategies. Overall, public authority, social cooperation and market exchange are three

solutions which, if combined in different ways, can generate a variety of governance systems (Borzaga and Tortia, 2017; Sacchetti and Catturani, 2021), production costs and profit allocation (Brooks, 2006; Sacchetti and Borzaga, 2021), as well as outcomes for communities and their stakeholders (Sacchetti, 2023). Here, we focus on a specific coordination modality for the production of meritorious goods, which combines public funding and public regulation with a shared collaborative approach with the private sector, cooperation at organisational level and market exchange with service prices lower than unsubsidised market prices.

The 2017 reform of the “third sector” in Italy has paved the way for public–private collaboration, explicitly involving social economy organisations in the “co-programmazione” (co-planning) and “co-progettazione” (co-design) of services. The reform talks a context-specific language Hence – to be understood by the international audience – here we consider the international debate related to the social economy, which typically includes a variety of enterprises and organisations, including cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, social enterprises, associations and non-profit institutions across sectors. In doing this, we mean to highlight the cooperative relation between the public sector and those organisations of the private sector that aim not only at economic sustainability and worker protection but also at creating net public value. The only aspect that we stress here is that reference to the third sector in the Italian law has some overlaps with non-profit organisations but should not be used as a synonym, as not all the non-profit organisations (for instance trade unions, bank foundations) can be considered, by the Italian law, third sector organisations.

“Co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” are a joint practice that allow to define the services of collective interest to be provided through relationships based more on cooperation and shared decision-making than on competition – which is instead the prevailing mechanism when public administrations chose to produce services by means of competitive bids. The form of public–private partnership intended in this specific reform (called “shared administration”, Cf. Sacchetti and Salvatori, 2023 for a critical perspective) implies a cooperative relationship between organisations of the social economy and between them and the public sector, where the cooperative pact is aimed at identifying socially and mutually beneficial goals and the ways to achieve them. It is hence different from the more general public-private partnership idea, which focusses on the benefits generated for the parties involved and does not include explicitly the social aims. In this vein, we investigate some existing public-private collaboration practices which are also at the hearth of the reform, in the field of cultural music production. The most recent debate has had the merit of recalling some practices already tested in the recent past for the production of other meritorious goods, such as the social services [1].

In the field of cultural services, between the 1990s and early 2000s, a good practice of public–private collaboration is represented by the particular management of the cultural policy set by Trentino, an autonomous province (Provincia Autonoma di Trento [PAT]), which for historical reasons enjoys special powers of self-government. This area has given itself an innovative system for the production of cultural services to reach thousands of people in urban as well as remote rural areas. It did so by developing a number of thematic platforms (including museums, theatres, libraries, music schools, and all the cultural voluntaristic sector where choirs, brass bands, folk groups find a home, festivals, as well as cultural heritage assets) all of which supporting cultural production for communities. For each of these platforms, cultural production is coordinated with a unique combination of public–private solutions. The approach, which was developed prior to the national legislation, placed a strong emphasis on the idea of “sharing” the cultural project with community constituencies, thus interacting with private social economy organisations. At the time, the approach was innovative with respect to

the dominant one, which focused on public bids or on service production entirely administered by the public authorities. To illustrate, we will focus on one of the cultural platforms promoted by PAT: a system of 13 music schools, known as “Scuole Musicali Trentine” (Trentino Music Schools [TMS]). The TMS do not overlap with the public school system and conservatory education. It includes musicians’ cooperatives and musicians’ and students’ associations, as well as one civic school.

The TMS system emerged from existing but rather unstructured experiences, and was legitimised by the institution, in 1987, of a provincial register, a regulation and shared educational standards (Table 1). Registration was subordinated to the capacity of the school to meet the regulation and apply the educational standards. Registered schools were then eligible to receive public transfers. The collaboration was aimed to maximise access to music culture and education, without age limitations, entry requirements and by offering a wide array of teaching and learning possibilities. The provincial funding overall ensured a more equitable access to the service, especially in the age group up to 14 years, with about 70% of the individual annual fee financed by the provincial contribution (Sacchetti and Marchesin, 2020). Because of its timing, the 1980s, and the combination of public and private features, this represents, in our view, one interesting example of innovation in the field of public–private collaboration for cultural production. It tapped into localised assets and stakeholders’ aspirations.

We proceed by introducing a historical account of the private–public collaboration solutions in Italy. We then move on to the approach that PAT has developed around cultural production, to then focus on music education, its organisations and public–private governance solutions. The conclusions point to the need for a polycentric system of cultural production, to avoid becoming trapped in a static disequilibrium where the public actor becomes the exclusive regulator and organisations are too sunk to initiate change. On the contrary, production systems and the TSM system in particular must not only acknowledge change but also support and promote a culture of cooperation among schools and between the various stratified institutional levels.

## 2. Public–private collaborations with social economy organisations in Italy

As mentioned, the public–private collaboration in the cultural sector, as well as in welfare services, involves a specific focus on net public value creation. Moreover, it offers a specific

Time	Events
Pre-existing and concomitant to the institution of formal public education and the TMS system	Associationism, cultural voluntary organisations within communities: brass bands, choirs, parish choirs and musicians
1980	Institution of the conservatory
1987	Provincial law nr. 12/1987 on the development of cultural activities, and institution of the provincial register for music schools
1990	First proposal for shared educational standards from the schools, amendments and final disposition of the standards by the Province
1994	Public conference on the TMS system
1995–1997	Changes to the shared educational standards
2008–2018	Further changes to the educational standards

Source: Authors’ own creation

**Table 1.**  
The milestones of the  
TMS system

endeavour to social innovation, as it is conceived with the aim of responding to a societal challenge and, at the same time, it includes multiple stakeholders by means of the partnership. It is therefore “social in both [...] ends and [...] means” and “enhance[s] society’s capacity to act” (Hubert and BEPA, 2010, p. 24).

### *2.1 History and turning points*

In Italy, there is broad agreement that two factors paved the way for a radical change in the relationship between public administration and social economy organisations. The first element concerns Article 55 of the code approved in 2017. This provision of the law, entitled “Involvement of Third Sector entities”, introduces the possibility of active participation by the social economy, allowing them to collaborate with public administrations in order to better pursue their solidarity and general interest purposes and to pool their wealth of skills and experiential knowledge (Arena, 2020). According to Scalvini (2018), it is precisely in this provision of the law that the principle of horizontal subsidiarity, as laid down in Article 118 (4) of the Italian constitution, finds its expression [2].

To reinforce an approach more inclined to solidarity than to conflict, a second factor also intervened: a pronouncement of the Constitutional Court. With its ruling 131 of 26 June 2020 – “a landmark ruling” according to Marocchi (2020) – the court definitively clarified the provisions of Article 55, ruling that there is no incompatibility between it and European Union law. The judicial authority has therefore set a new milestone in terms of “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione”: relationships inspired by collaboration rather than competition may exist between public and social economy entities.

The result is an unprecedented centrality for the social economy organisations, which can participate in the collaborative process with equal dignity and at the same level as the public administration, according to criteria of transparency in pursuit of social goals (Pizzolato, 2020; Gori, 2020; Sacchetti and Salvatori, 2023). Competition and collaboration then become two possible options. The public authority can activate the former when it needs to “simply” purchase a service, or it can choose the latter to put into circulation ideas, resources and skills to be translated into programmes and projects capable of providing answers to common needs.

In recent times there has therefore been a radical overhaul in the relations between the social economy and the public administration, facilitated – despite some ambiguities of interpretation – by the reform itself. There are, however, those who, on the point of law, speak more appropriately of “forgotten co-programming”, then rediscovered (Frediani, 2021, pp. 172–173). By this he means that these collaborative relations, albeit in a minor form, were already present and regulated since the early 1990s (Gori, 2021). The reference here is to the law on social services (no. 328 of 2000), the law on voluntary associations (no. 266 of 1991) and others that followed, all part of the same journey that goes by the name of “shared administration”, according to Gregorio Arena’s definition.

The roots of “shared administration” must be searched in the limitations encountered by the public sector in producing meritorious goods since the 1970s (Ianes, 2020). It is in this context that social economy organisations took central stage. At first these seek to provide responses to the new needs autonomously, then they are supported and funded by the public body, but in a fragmented and unstable way. A more structured collaboration occurs starting in the 1980s, when in northern Italy (i.e. in Brescia for the provision of social services) public–private relationships are established governed by a contract called “convention” (Ianes, 2020). Impetus to the use of this partnership formula was given by the approval of a number of national laws, such as 266/91 on voluntary organisations, 381/91 on social cooperation, and even earlier 241/90 and especially 142/90, which gave shape to the

possibility of establishing solid and lasting relations between private social organisations and local administrations. They also provided for the explicit possibility of entrusting third parties, including private ones, with the organisation and provision of local public services, including social and health services.

The public authority's attitude also changed. If it had initially been a few citizens who had organised themselves autonomously and to whom the public authority had paid some aid to partially cover costs, it was now the public authority itself that recognised the importance of permanently providing the service, and its relevance to the entire community. There was hence the need to overcome the partial logic of periodic and occasional contributions, and hence the need to initiate a cultural change in the planning of cultural services, which was capable of introducing new logics, based on the culture of deliberation between the public and the private social economy sector, to reduce uncertainty for social economy actors and continuity to their work. A culture of deliberation facilitates joint planning, as it is based on a shared intention to build choices on reason and argument, rather than on power asymmetries or pre-judgments. It implies the voice and listening of reciprocal perspectives, aimed at creating new understanding and knowledge. It is from this type of communication that a shared decision emerges (Dewey, 1927; Sacchetti and Sugden, 2009; Sacchetti, 2015; Sacchetti, 2023).

By entering into shared agreements, in fact, the two contracting bodies had jointly established well-defined aims and conditions of collaboration. Following deliberation, the public body undertook a commitment to transfer resources which was conditional on the results achieved and the time coverage of services. This criterion was used to guarantee continuous, coordinated and non-episodic funding. The organisation, on the other hand, preserved its autonomy and responsibility in the management of the service but committed to be accountable for the activity performed.

This type of collaboration consolidated the social economy sector: having a solid agreement with a public body was the best guarantee of being able to strengthen its organisational and operational structure, remunerate the productive factors involved and start a process of capital accumulation. In addition, the presence of an increasingly structured demand asked that the provider organisation adapted its resources, both human and entrepreneurial, to the new requirements.

At this early stage, the number of actors involved was rather small. Many of them also had the intuition of the initial intervention and were the ones who first started the experimentation; for this reason, they possessed and held all the necessary skills and competences to organise that service. In this context, the public administration was inclined to directly commission the organisation that had first given impetus to the initiative and proposed it. It certainly did not resort to an extended competition procedure. In other words, the organisation that most demonstrated a marked capacity for innovation, a willingness to broaden its horizons and experiment with new activities, was the one with which the administration initiated a direct discussion, or a sort of "co-programmazione" and "co-progettazione", and drew up an agreement.

### *2.2 From "co-programmazione" to competition*

This way of entrusting the provision of social services, by private contracts and agreement, became a constant throughout the 1980s and much of the 1990s. Arguably, it was not without limitations. There were no clear and shared rules in quantifying the economic commitment. Moreover, "co-programmazione" rather than a practiced terrain ended up becoming a mere wishful thinking. More often than not, there was little sharing of the path taken. The intention was undoubtedly positive: the use of the convention would have

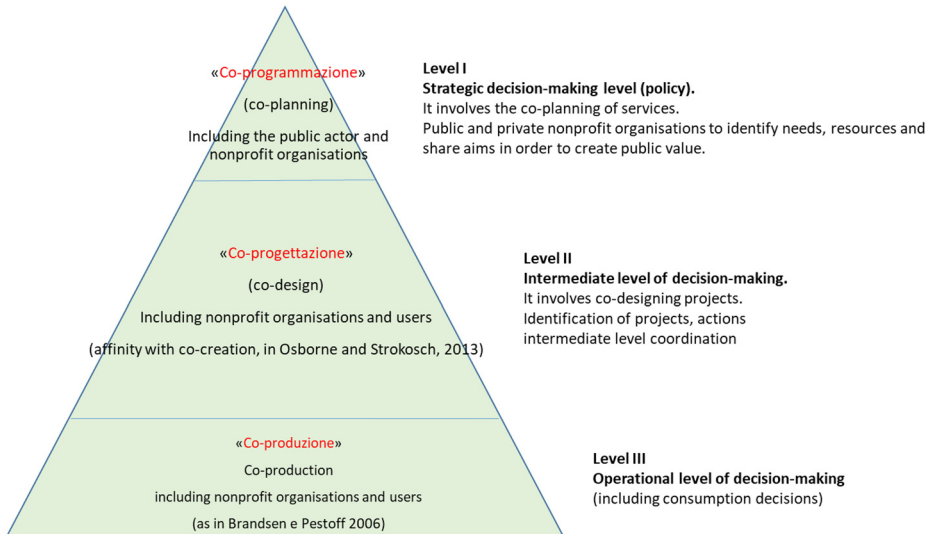
fostered mutual interaction between public bodies and social economy actors. However, on the practical side, a fruitful interchange did not always occur. It was difficult to glimpse a common construction path for social policies: there was a lack of mutual involvement in the definition of the project, in the subsequent implementation phase and in the coordination and control phase. Therefore, corrective measures had to be introduced precisely to make the collaboration between the public and the private social sector effective.

However, with the European Community Directive 92/50 of 18 June 1992 and the regulations that followed, the European Community demanded that the public administration adopt a less discretionary approach in its policies for awarding social services. It was from that moment that the mechanism of the tender, often conducted according to the criterion of maximum cost reductions, became more and more established. It was a system that introduced elements of competition into the process of selecting the body to be entrusted with the management of a given social service (Centro Studi Cgm, 1997).

### 2.3 “Co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” explained

How come public–private collaborative experiences, such as the one presented here, were put in place despite the fact that the reform that introduces this practice was released in 2017? We start from the epilogue. The aforementioned Third Sector Reform created the conditions for a new public–private collaboration based on “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione”. In the Italian context the two terms refer to different activities (Fazzi, 2021). The first has more to do with a policy-making activity, whereas the second represents its application into concrete and implementable projects. From a strategic governance perspective (Hymer, 1972; Cowling and Sugden, 1998; Sacchetti and Sugden, 2003; Sacchetti, 2015), “co-programmazione” pertains strategic activities and defines the broad direction undertaken by the organisations (public and private) involved in the partnership. The closest translation could be co-planning. Complementarily, “co-progettazione” pertains

**Figure 1.** The governance of “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione”: multi-level cooperation across levels of decision-making for the production of meritorious goods



Source: Authors’ own work

coordination activities to implement projects, at intermediate level. The closest translation could be co-design. Operational activities are then those deemed to actually perform each step necessary to the projects selected. For this third level it would be appropriate to refer to co-production. The distribution of these three levels (strategic, intermediate coordination, operational) across different organisations represents the governance of the production system. Graphically we represent the hierarchy of activities at systemic level as a pyramid (Figure 1).

More generally, the combination of the two activities is a practice that connects the public actor with expressions of civil society by relying more on the logic of collaboration than on competition and the aim is the production of net public value, including positive external effects that impact on publics beyond the direct users of services. Hence, “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” mean something different from co-production (Alford, 2014), the latter being discussed in the literature especially in the field of management. Co-production can be voluntary (Bovaird, 2007) or mandatory for the production of public services (Osborne and Strokosch, 2013; Osborne *et al.*, 2015). In each case, co-production concerns the active role that the citizen-user can or does play while accessing a public service. In this case, the consumer has an important role as co-producer because the consumption of a service (e.g. social, cultural, educational) occurs at the same time as its production. This is not the case, for example, in manufacturing, where a good is made in a factory, sold in a store, and consumed in a different place at a later time. Osborne and Strokosch (2013, p. 37) explain the contribution that the user makes to co-production because “the act of service consumption is the cornerstone of co-production, as it is this this action that results in the consumers’ contribution to production at the operational level – their expectations and experiences are central to effective service delivery and to the outcomes of the service”.

Co-production then differs from “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” for three reasons:

- (1) First, the combination of joint planning and design is aimed at producing meritorious goods to which positive external effects for the collectivity are associated. Hence, the implications are not confined to the producer–user relation but involve the much wider public sphere.
- (2) Second, co-production concerns the involvement of the individual person–user, rather than an organisation entering into a relationship with the public administration.
- (3) Third, the user need not be involved in the more strategic process of service design, which is defined by Osborne and Strokosch (2013, p. 37) as *co-creation*. According to the same authors, while co-production is essential, co-creation is not necessary: it is just one more chance given to the user to participate in the service innovation process. In this case co-creation closely resembles what the Italian law calls “co-progettazione”.

Brandesen and Pestoff (2006), on the other hand, give the concept of co-production a character of sharing the production process with both individual citizens and social economy organisations. In this way “the involvement of citizens transforms the service, but they are themselves transformed by the service. Likewise, the involvement of the social economy allows it to deliver services differently, but in doing so it is itself incorporated into the institutionalised system of provision” (Brandesen and Pestoff, 2006). This implies that it is necessary to move beyond a one-way relationship between the state and the organisation as the principal and the agent, or the provider and the recipient. In other words, Brandesen and Pestoff give the concept of co-

production a meaning similar to that of “co-progettazione”, although they make a further distinction in *co-governance* (the social economy participates in the planning and delivery of public services, coming close to the meaning of “co-programmazione”) in *co-management* (social economy organisations produce services in collaboration with the state) and in *co-production* (the citizens produce their own services at least in part).

### 3. Public–private collaboration in the organisation of culture: the Trentino Music Schools system

#### 3.1 *The Trentino case: context and methodology*

An innovative approach of public–private collaboration has been initiated by PAT in the cultural field. PAT is located in the northeast of Italy and has a special status which allows it to design laws with a primary role, which for ordinary regions belongs to the central state. This peculiarity – which exists for historical reasons – enables PAT to design development strategies sometimes anticipating the central government, as it happened with respect to social services and cultural services. With respect to the latter, in particular, it is interesting to observe how culture was conceived and promoted as a unitary system, using an innovative approach with respect to other national experiences.

To describe it, we rely on two extended interviews occurred between 2020 and 2021 with the director of PAT’s cultural services who has coordinated the service for the past 30 years. The focus on TMS was further reinforced by 50 interviews with TMS teachers and administrators, and by the proceedings of the 1994 music school conference organised by the schools at the time this novel educational system was created. Interviews addressed several themes, and depending on the role of the interviewees, focused on the history of the cultural approach to policy, the history of the partnership, the nature of music schools and the relation between music teachers and the music education system jointly coordinated by PAT and TMS. They were fully transcribed and labelled to extract contents that we present here as a unitary narrative.

The socio-economic challenge – for the public actor – was not confined to the production of a highly meritorious good with its material and immaterial traits but was aimed at building a solid basis for a sector characterised by a high degree of precariousness. The development of the cultural sector was approached by identifying its main actors (the “platforms”), which were deemed to sustain the ever-changing fluctuations of the “cultural sea”. The platform system was aimed at creating stability in supply and hence for cultural workers. It included the integrated library system (86 libraries), volunteering associations (about 3,000 through their federations, including community brass bands, choirs, philodramatic associations, association for cultural recreational activities more generally, dance associations), community music schools (13 schools), museums, theatres, festivals and their coordinating organisations, buildings and sites of historical heritage.

As quality services build on certainty (rather than uncertainty) and long-term horizons, especially when cultural and educational aims are at stake, the guiding principle of PAT’s cultural policy, for all platforms and for music schools in particular, was the construction of a solid relationship with the actors producing the service. Focussing on the specific music school platform, the PAT’s strategy was to create a solid context by building on existing music educational experiences. These territorial assets represented a pool of competences and relationships that – being brought into a larger cooperative pact with the public actor – could create opportunities for musicians (in terms of better contractual conditions) and the users of their services. PAT’s role was “to build cultural processes” and unearth capabilities, such as the managerial ability to organise for cultural production, to enable (rather than constrain) actors (musicians) to produce services.

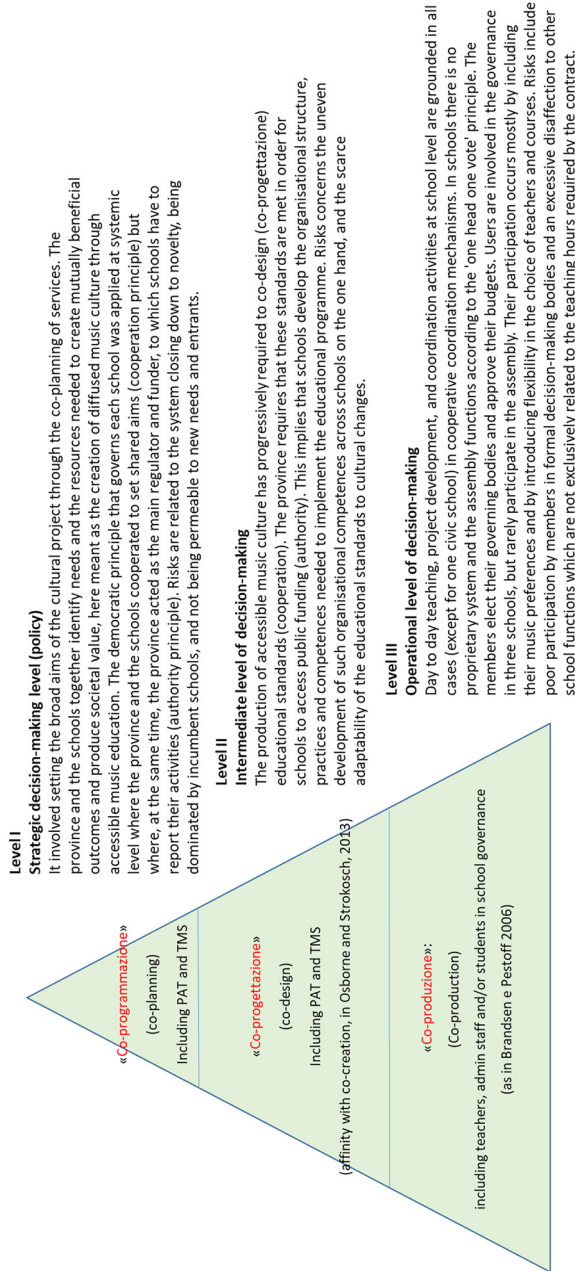
Overall the efficiency of the system was meant to improve, by sharing the construction of the processes dialogically with its main stakeholders. There are advantages in the inclusion of stakeholders using dialogical practices, not least the activation of knowledge and other material and immaterial resources, the identification of unresolved issues, the improvement of the service provided (Sacchetti and Borzaga, 2021), as well as the formation of deliberative and democratic preferences among participants (Sacchetti and Sugden, 2009). These represent an asset that exceeds or may exceed the costs of involving and coordinating heterogeneous categories of actors. On the other hand, however, the constraints posed by the costs of inclusion have long caused economic theory to focus on single-stakeholder structures that maximise the homogeneity of shareholders (Sacchetti and Borzaga, 2021). The effective involvement of stakeholders presents management costs, e.g. in terms of coordination, learning and training time for those who want to participate in decision-making processes or costs to be incurred to change build the structures (e.g. stakeholder committees and roundtables) and processes where the production of the music education service is reorganised in a way that is compatible with a greater involvement of participants. Finally, the costs related to the presence of conflict and its management should not be excluded (see Williamson, 1998). Conflict may be present both in cases where the stakeholder is excluded and in cases where the participants do not share a basis of common goals.

### *3.2 The Trentino Music Schools system: a precursor of co-programmazione and co-progettazione*

Historically, some of the TMS originated as municipal civic schools (only the Zandonai civic school remained as such), while the others turned into worker cooperatives at the beginning of the 1990s, with the explicit aim of creating music education for the community. Others were born as civic school within municipalities or from the bottom up, mainly as associations supporting local traditional brass bands or from the initiative of young musicians who in the late 1980s were already working as professionals or had completed their music education. Such education did not necessarily or exclusively take place within the conservatoire (the local one was instituted in 1980) but also within brass band schools, local parishes, or for some with alternative or complementary educational paths which included periods of study abroad or in American-style schools. Prior to the establishment of the TMS system, co-operation between teachers also involved teaching brass band volunteers. This was done again using a cooperative organisation (“musica artista”, now disappeared), but with great uncertainties for teachers who could not have a stable job and income. The existence of these experiences met the political will to create a common system of music education in the province.

The stabilisation of this system, which was born spontaneously as a vital impulse from community needs (feeding brass bands was one) and from the professional aspirations of the musicians of the time, took place in 1987 with the establishment of the provincial register (Law 12/1987). This instituted an administrative criterion for selecting the organisations that were entitled to access public funding. Public funding aimed at covering the personnel costs of the schools according to criteria regulated by PAT. This policy choice (Level I of decision-making in Figure 2) was consistently agreed with schools and maintained over time with the intent to provide good working conditions for teachers and access to music education to people. Between 2008 and 2019, provincial funding for TMS increased from four and a half million to over five and a half million.

The next ten years, following the institution of the register, were dedicated to the development of shared educational standards. In 1994 the schools, together with PAT, agreed on shared and common educational standards and student curriculum (called “orientamenti didattici”), which were subject to adaptations in the following years. This



**Source:** Authors' own work

**Figure 2.**

Music culture production governance: multi-level cooperation across levels of decision-making

involves Level II of decision-making in our analytic framework. It entailed elements of novelty with respect to the conservatoire's curriculum and way of teaching, as well as elements of continuity (which were and still are a source of debate and criticism). There have been changes and reforms since, the last one in 2018. The aim was to offer an accessible and diversified service, useful to the multiple needs of a varied user base, creating opportunities to access music and music culture that were not possible by relying only on public music schools (music vocational junior schools) and the local conservatoire.

Consistently, the administrative boards of TMS, specifically, have the mandate to pursue educational purposes and thus well-being for the users, as well as for their workers (all the more so since 9 out of 13 organisations are based on the cooperative bond between teachers, while 3 schools are associations of teachers and or students) and the community as a whole through the production of widespread musical culture among people. It should also not be forgotten that the continuity of the educational and cultural action is guaranteed by the economic and financial sustainability of the schools, which is highly dependent on PAT funding personnel costs, which is in turn tied to the number of students attending each school. Building on the policy maker aims stated in the 1987 law on cultural development and on interviews, we can summarise the public value objectives of the TMS system as follows:

- accessible and quality music education;
- creation of a widespread musical culture in the territory;
- increasing the cultural offer on the territory;
- employment opportunities for musicians;
- professional growth for teachers;
- friendly and professional relationships between people;
- civic values (inclusion, solidarity, justice, diversity, interaction and openness to others); and
- financial sustainability or positive profits to reinvest in educational and artistic activities.

To offer this innovative educational service, PAT and TMS have developed a strong interdependence at the three levels of decision-making: PAT needs organisations that are sufficiently structured and organised to respect requirements of transparency and accountability, as well as educational standards, while TMS need public funding to maintain their service accessible for users, good labour conditions and be financially sustainable. Likewise, the success of TMS in educating thousands of students every year, including additional teaching programmes funded by PAT within general public schools, has contributed to decrease the exclusion from music education, raise interest in young people for music, and fed enrolment in TMS as well as in the public schools related to the conservatoire filière [3].

The policymaker's idea, which most schools shared, was centred on a democratic principle, or rather on an idea of distributive justice that guaranteed widespread access to a public good. It therefore relied, and still relies, on existing or emerging local resources. As recalled, during the 1990s most of the schools took the form of worker cooperative and in some cases associations, underlining the four intended souls of this system and coordination modes, which we recall from the analysis developed in [Sacchetti and Borzaga \(2017\)](#):

- (1) the public one, of general direction and distribution of resources operated by PAT;
- (2) the cooperative one, which relies on the interdependencies and co-production between PAT and the schools;

- (3) the musicians' ability to cooperate within an organisational framework (the school) and give themselves shared rules and structures that enabled them to offer the service; and
- (4) the ability of TMS to cooperate between them.

At the end of the 1980s and because of its uniqueness and innovative character, the TMS system did not change as a result of a shift in European regulation towards greater competition and use of tenders. The collaboration between PAT and music schools also avoided the phenomenon of deterritorialization of the interventions which instead occurred in other sectors, such as social services.

It was perhaps by flanking this new system to the direct production of music education through the conservatoire filière, as well as by overcoming the instrument of competitive tendering and fierce competition that it was possible, at least in the early years, to ensure a larger stakeholder involvement and greater sharing on how to organise the provision of music culture. The conference organised by schools in 1997 to discuss the results of the educational standards defined a few years earlier. It was also meant at renewing reflexivity on the meaning of music education, and provide a context, through shared standards, for educational innovations, in a context dominated by the more traditional system embedded in conservatoire education and its filière.

However, over the years, music schools have designed their educational project and structured to meet the PAT's requirements; the incentive clearly being access to funding and survival. Schools have kept their distinctive points (with respect to music genres taught, age of their students, engagement with cultural and artistic projects). But they have also accentuated a number of functional rigidities to conform to the regulator's requirements, which is typical of the public sector. At the same time, TMS are market organisations, as they sell their services to students and their families (perhaps not profit maximising, but income maximizing) (Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006). As a consequence, competition dynamics have emerged between schools, especially those located in close catchment areas.

Over time, the number of schools accountable for public funding did not change. However, in eight cases new schools entered by a process of acquisition by incumbent schools. The reasons for these acquisitions are partly related to the possibility of access organisational resources with adequate teaching and organisational capacities for provincial funding. These events give us a more precise idea of the structural dynamic of the TMS system. In fact, it suggests that the entry of other schools into the system occurred through processes of acquisition of external schools, while in the 35 years since the creation of the provincial system, no other schools have been added from scratch. On the one hand, this has ensured the continuity of stable funding flows for schools, whose catchment area was until a few years ago rather stable, also for demographic reasons and preferences. On the other hand, the current policy approach of the PAT is to rethink incentives to decrease the dependence of TMS on public funding, pushing them to innovate. This is expected to change the market structure, perhaps leading to further mergers among organisations or greater cooperation among schools, not only at the strategic level but also at the operational level, with joint educational projects.

So far, collaborations among TMS, these developed mainly between 1987 and 1997. During this time schools worked together and with PAT to define and redefine the approach to music education and the contents of the rules regulating their activities. However, attempts to create a formal level of coordination for all schools have failed. The attempt to create a second-tier level of cooperation by forming a consortium drifted in 2004. Collaborations now regards self-selected relationships forming groups of two or three

schools that are particularly close in terms of approach and/or geographically. More recently, moreover, TMS have been more and more concerned with contractual issues for teachers and issues of generational change for both teachers and management. In general, at the moment, one of the limitations regards the need to develop more coherent communication and collaboration among schools, to build as in the very start, a (new) common view, which reflects the current needs of potential users, teachers, and local cultural development.

Finally, in terms of legal form, even today TMS are established either as worker cooperatives or as associations. However, these organisations could not take the form of the social cooperative. The recent reform defined what the third sector is today and the activities that each organisation can carry out. Simplifying a great deal, today the reformed Italian third sector consists of associations, social cooperatives and social enterprises. The latter can take the form of the association-social enterprise, the foundation-social enterprise, and investor-owned companies (S.r.l. limited liability companies, S.p.a. joint stock companies), and the cooperative-social enterprise. Now – according to the law – cultural activity, and therefore music, is one of the activities, under the Third Sector Reform Act, which can be managed either by non-enterprises or by social enterprises. Social cooperatives, on the contrary, cannot deal with cultural activities. Therefore, when the reform will be fully implemented, music schools will be able to decide whether to keep their current cooperative and association forms, or whether to register in the Third Sector Register as “voluntary organisation”, “association of social promotion”, or “philanthropic body”. If, on the other hand, music schools want to make the most of the business dimension and at the same time foster inclusive governance, they can transform themselves into work cooperatives-social enterprises.

#### 4. Conclusions: areas of efficiency and inefficiency

With the recent Third Sector Reform and in particular with Article 55 of the Third Sector Code (Legislative Decree No. 117/2017), the method of “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” is institutionalised as a possible method through which the social economy can enter into relations with the public administration. The law has thus normalised the collaborative method as an alternative option to the competitive one based on the awarding of a service or provision by tender. Moreover, in keeping with the context of the reform, the use of the collaborative method does not only concern local welfare policies but affects the entire range of activities of collective interest envisaged by the third sector code, e.g. youth and cultural policies (Marocchi, 2019). Thus, today the response to a social need, a cultural proposal or more specifically, as illustrated, music education can be pursued either by resorting to the usual system of tendering or of direct public provision, or by setting up a “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” solution between the public and the social economy, managing these same instances according to the collaborative method.

As the TSM case indicates, “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” practices were activated well before the reform. However, it is not enough to change the public-private relationship instrument to have an improvement in the management and delivery of services of collective interest. For public and private organisations to take advantage of the method of “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” to make the production of a meritorious good more efficient and to favour its maximum accessibility, it is necessary to consider the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, or the areas of efficiency, leading to inclusion and inefficiency, leading to exclusion, for which corrective measures may be appropriate. Possible areas of efficiency are as follows:

- The method of “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione”, if activated from the outset, may foster a better proactive climate on the part of the actors involved, of collaboration and mutual sharing. This is not so obvious, on the contrary, in a competitive context, where diverging interests emerge in the dynamic between public purchaser and social economy supplier and obviously between social economy actors competing with each other for the assignment of a task. In the case of TMS this problem was overcome by assigning catchment areas to schools, and by fostering self-managed coordination among schools, which however has remained underdeveloped.
- The collaborative approach, starting from a deliberative frame of mind of the actors taking part in the process, can allow – thanks to communication and exchange of different ideas – to identify more innovative and creative solutions to meet needs, and thus to get out of the routine (Sacchetti, 2015).
- The involvement of several stakeholders, from different backgrounds and with different skills, gives the participatory process a more unified and overall vision, capable of activating various resources and various channels to guarantee a greater possible coverage of a service, being able to satisfy the demands of a varied user base. This aspect has occurred in the case of the TMS, where the co-presence of several players in the local music scene allows access to musical training to diverse types of users, in terms of age and social background and preferences. This is made possible thanks to the service activated by social economy organisations outside the official channels of the public school and conservatoire.
- In contexts characterised by information asymmetry, the cooperation approach seems more effective than the competitive one in reducing or containing the negative effects of an asymmetric relationship: for example, a service offered to the recipient that is inferior to the one agreed upon. In this case, a service activated through a “co-progettazione” process could guarantee cost savings compared to one entrusted through a tender, which requires additional bureaucratic and control costs to try to reduce opportunistic behaviour as much as possible.
- “Co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” realise the principle of horizontal subsidiarity, understood as recognition of the autonomous initiative of citizens and social economy entities to self-organise to carry out activities of common interest in collaboration with the public administration. This, too, represents an area of efficiency, since the social economy organisation guarantees coverage of a service on a larger scale, also in favour of users who would otherwise be excluded.

Alongside areas of efficiency, the joint planning and design method can also complain of areas of inefficiency, leading to exclusion, which must be considered:

- There is first of all the problem of accessibility to “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” solutions. The problem does not arise so much when the number of stakeholders is limited, but especially when social economy entities increase in number. Here, it becomes a problem to give oneself an objective and non-discriminatory criterion to decide which stakeholders to involve in the participatory process and which ones to exclude. Moreover, it is not easy to establish which party can be entitled to take on such a responsibility. The participatory experiences that have been experimented in the past, especially in the field of local welfare, highlight the shortcomings that can emerge if one does not operate within well-defined boundaries and criteria that guard against discretionary choices. Otherwise, the risk is that only the major stakeholders will sit at the table, while representatives of smaller bodies and users will be excluded. If public

administration direction prevails in any case, emerging social economy bodies or those less in line with the policymaker's approach run the risk of being excluded. The TMS case indicates that the group of incumbent schools have persisted over time, although new entries have occurred by means of acquisitions, typically of schools outside the system without the organisational capabilities to meet the regulatory and educational standard required for accessing funding.

- It is not enough to replace the competitive method with the cooperative method to obtain better and more appreciable results in the dynamics that lead to organising an activity of general interest. A great deal of energy must be invested in “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione”. A change of mentality is needed. For collaboration to be effective, the actors involved must be willing to put themselves at the same level, they must compare ideas and proposals, supplement and replace them if needed, following the deliberative process. In other words, the participatory process is complex work that requires time, dialogue skills and mutual understanding. The difficulty lies not so much in the start-up phase, but above all in the ability to maintain these necessary preconditions over time for the participatory process to be fruitful. The study of public-private collaborations has been facing issues of defining the multiple ways in which collaborations may occur, whether using tight and looser financial arrangements and their overall performance (Hodge and Greve, 2007). Literature has over time addressed mainly financial aspects of performance (related to public expenditure reduction) and accountability and monitoring aspects of privatised services. In the case we have analysed here, the collaboration was not based on the privatisation of public services, but by the institution of a new service. The aims initially envisaged were pursued using a partnership that presented a mix of top-down and bottom-up modalities, for which a cultural shift was needed from both the public and the private sector (in line with Osborne, 2001).
- There is not always a correct awareness of the meaning of “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione”. Sometimes the process is misunderstood and mistaken as a consultancy service offered by the stakeholders involved on the basis of a framework defined by the public administration. In truth, this collaborative practice must be activated even before the conception of the activity to be implemented occurs. “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” in fact have the typical features of deliberation, meaning co-ideating, sharing a path starting from the analysis of the context and needs, even before thinking of any concrete action.
- Finally, it does not seem easy to maintain the will to collaborate. Over time, as for TMS, the initial energy may weaken, it may lose strength and enthusiasm, it may lapse into misunderstandings, it may become a routine activity that is neither productive nor innovative.

Some indications on how to overcome inefficiencies and keep cooperation and deliberation across networks of social economy organisations come for instance by the experience of Senscot, in Scotland, which contributed to the creation of common values and shared understanding for Scottish social enterprises by creating stable regional and thematic networks of discussion and deliberation (Campbell and Sacchetti, 2014). TMS could build on their experience and form thematic and local networks to discuss aspects of music education on the one hand and local development issues on the other, including all those involved in music education such as public schools, vocational public schools (SMIM and music lyceums) and other private schools which are not part of the provincial register but also

musicians and people working or researchers studying the music sector who are interested in joining the debate.

In conclusion, the relationship between the public and private sectors to design, organise and manage activities of collective interest (in the social, cultural, sporting and other fields), can increasingly become an effective and efficient alternative to the traditional bureaucratic and competitive method. For this to happen, however, all actors involved must be aware of areas of efficiency but also of inefficiency. To remedy the latter, corrective measures will have to be introduced. For example, fostering and improving “co-programmazione” and “co-progettazione” means giving all stakeholders involved the opportunity to actively participate. Should the number of participants increase, more discussion fora could be set up because one alone may not be sufficient to foster maximum involvement, to enhance different points of view, to allow for intersectoral and multidisciplinary interpretations and responses.

### Notes

1. In the field of social services, in the same years, there was “the season of conventions”. The conventions were a first attempt to co-plan and co-programme.
2. The principle of horizontal subsidiarity means that citizens and third-sector entities can self-organize to carry out an activity of collective interest, either independently or in cooperation with the public administration.
3. By “conservatoire filière” we mean the system that use to connect three levels of music education in the public sector: junior schools with music as a major, called SMIM “Scuola Media a Indirizzo Musicale” (11–14 years old), the music lyceum (14–19 years old), the conservatory. Students who undertake the first two levels at junior and high school between 11 and 19 are then expected to access the conservatory, but they may as well choose another study career path. Data on the number of students who move from the first level of music education (junior school) to the next (music lyceum) to the conservatoire were not available from the schools or the conservatory.

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