

Oil, gold, stones: cultural value in Italian cultural policy

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to understand the concept of cultural value promoted by the Italian government between 2008 and 2018. Furthermore, it aims at setting the scope for further research and debate on the issue of cultural value in Italian cultural policy by questioning market-driven understanding of value.

Design/methodology/approach – In order to do so, it examines the rhetoric of Italian policymakers, with a particular focus on the people who have covered the role of Ministry for Cultural Assets and Activities over this 10-year span, and the policies they have implemented. The various nuances of the concept of valorizzazione are studied by analysing different pathways employed by the Italian government and the values underpinning them, with a particular focus on the abandonment of heritage sites.

Findings – What emerges from this research is the centrality of the economic value of culture; however, the economic impact of Italian cultural assets is always presented as a potential that has to be unlocked by implementing policies of valorizzazione, a term that has a double meaning of promotion and exploitation (Belfiore, 2006).

Originality/value – This paper presents an original approach to understanding the formation and promotion of cultural value at the level of governmental policy in the context of contemporary cultural policy in Italy. In particular, it evidences how the centrality of the economic value of culture has remained unscathed despite the rapid change of governments that has characterised Italian politics in the last 10 years.

Keywords Cultural value, Italy, Cultural policy, Valorizzazione

Paper type Research paper

Defining cultural value in cultural policy

This paper takes inspiration from Eleonora Belfiore's thesis *Ubi major, minor cessat*: A comparative study of the relation between changing cultural policy rationales and globalisation in post-1980s England and Italy (2006) and aims to continue the analysis of Italian cultural policy started by Belfiore in this work, with a focus on the rhetoric around the concept of cultural value used by Italian policymakers.

Cultural value and the way it is formed, interpreted and justified constitute a particularly relevant area of cultural policy studies. Indeed, justifying spending in the arts and culture is a crucial issue of cultural policy making. In his report "Capturing cultural value: How culture has become a tool of government policy", John Holden (2006) describes how culture has become an instrument to serve governments' social and economic agendas. Investment in culture is allocated on the ground of instrumental values, and the methods used to supply evidence of the social and economic impacts are not always fit for the purpose or sufficient to justify such expenditures (pp. 16-17). Holden identifies three types of cultural value: intrinsic, instrumental and institutional (p. 9): the interplay of these three different values that he calls "the value triangle" sets the framework to understand how the value of culture is determined in the context of cultural policy.

The concept of "culture as a resource" theorized by George Yudice (2003) is particularly useful to understand the progressive focus of cultural policy instrumental values and the disappearance of the intrinsic value of culture. According to the author, neoliberal and globalising forces have reduced the value of culture as a tool for economic and social advancement. In Yudice's (2003) analysis, cultural policy is the direct result of the alienation of intrinsic value of arts and culture, as "it is called a range of problems *for* community, which seems only to be able to recognise itself in culture, which in turn has lost its specificity (p. 25)". Culture, therefore, loses any intrinsic value and is just a resource for politics



(Yudice, 2003, p. 23). The metaphor of culture as resource, and more specifically as oil is one of the key threads of this paper and also lies at the core of Pénélope Plaza Azuaje's analysis of the relationship between oil, state and culture in Venezuela. Using Yúdice's concept of "culture as resource", she analyses how Venezuela has used oil extraction as "a parallel policy instrument to territory and culture (2019, p. 74)" and how the extractive logic of the oil industry has affected arts and culture. The concept of "extractive logic" will be of fundamental importance in the analysis of Italian cultural policy.

The idea of utility of culture, as it is to be understood in the context of contemporary cultural policy, is rooted Schumpeter's idea that "subjective valuation" of the individuals participating in a market determines a work of art's objective value (in Taylor, 2015, p. 58). Indeed, as stated by Gray (2007), the target of public policy is no longer society as a collective, but the individual. Furthermore, economic growth is the main rationale for public policies; economic value has substituted use value in assessing the usefulness of public policies.

According to Salvatore Settis (2002), in Italian cultural policy the push towards the maximisation of the economic value of culture is presented as a necessary move to modernise an otherwise obsolete relationship between state and culture. The metaphor of culture as oil, therefore, is to be understood as a symbol of modernity. As analysed by Plaza Azuaje (2019), in Venezuela, oil economy was perceived as a force that caused advancements and modernisation and, ultimately, cultural production (p. 71). The focus on "modernity" and "newness" is typical of the rhetoric of Italian politics, as analysed by journalist Damilano (2017); nevertheless, what is presented as "new" often lacks a specific project or direction, and eventually produces no tangible change (p. 128). As it will be later analysed in this paper, this also applies to the sphere of cultural policy because, despite the series of reforms implemented in the last 20 years, its key concerns and challenges remain the same. Indeed, as analysed by Settis (2002), the Italian state failed to carry out a meaningful reflection on Italy's cultural specificity and to design cultural policies that could respond to local challenges; instead, it followed international neoliberal trends which, despite being perceived as "innovative", were not able to resolve long-time issues and to bring new life to Italian cultural policy. Furthermore, according to Settis (2002), they were based on a monolithic understanding of cultural identity which does not take into account a multiplicity of influences and values.

The centrality of heritage and cultural assets in Italian cultural policy

Historically, Italian cultural policy has been always concerned with the preservation of the country's heritage. As analysed by Bianchini *et al.*, Italian cultural policy focuses on a narrow definition of culture which only encompasses "arts, heritage and the media (1996, p. 291)". In particular, even before Italy's unification, the first norms regulating Italian cultural policies were characterised by the centrality of heritage preservation (Belfiore, 2006, p. 240); this trend was consolidated when the newly unified state adopted a centralised approach to heritage policy, unifying the different modalities of heritage conservation of the pre-existing states (pp. 239-240). According to Pinna (2001, p. 63), this choice marked the beginning of the distinction between "heritage" and "cultural assets". If the term "heritage" stresses the symbolic and cultural relevance of artistically relevant artefacts from the past, "cultural assets", instead, emphasises their economic value. Pinna states that Italian cultural policy had an historical tendency to ignore the symbolic and cultural value that heritages sites had for the local communities, and instead placed emphasis on their material value; as a consequence, Italian cultural policy has focused more on the preservation of heritage sites and less on the access to them (Pinna, 2001).

The period between the post-war years and the 1970s was characterised by a "cultural assets boom" (Council of Europe, 1995, p. 30). The new Constitution introduced the safeguard

of cultural heritage among its fundamental principles. The word *tutela* (preservation) assumed a new meaning in the Republic: it did not only represent the superficial material conservation of heritage sites but also of the cultural and symbolic values they embodied (Cicerchia, 2002, p. 34). The term “cultural assets” became increasingly popular between the 1960s and the 1970s. The term indicates a specific way of understanding heritage, that focuses on its material aspect and not on the context it was produced (Pinna, 2001, p. 63).

As it is possible to understand from this brief history of the early years of Italian cultural policy outlined by Belfiore, it is clear that the preservation of heritage or, more specifically, cultural assets, have been its key concern. Indeed, the preservation of Italy’s large amount of culturally and historically relevant sites, which includes 49 cultural UNESCO World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2019), represents an important challenge that has to take into account different cultural and economic factors. The different approaches taken towards this issue reflect different ways of thinking about the relationship between heritage, culture and economics, and can therefore be considered a matter of cultural value.

The title of this paper refers to three metaphors that have characterised the discourse on Italian cultural value: culture and the arts as “Italy’s oil” or “Italy’s gold”, that is, a very remunerative source of profit that only needs to be properly excavated, packaged and marketed. On the other side of this discourse, there is the idea of the “four stones”, a depreciative description of a heritage site made by a regional governor in 2010. A concept popularised during the fourth Berlusconi government, the belief that culture and the arts “do not put food on the table” is a spurious quote that has been attributed to the former Minister for the Economy Giulio Tremonti, which has also appeared as “it’s not like people eat culture”; however, Tremonti has always denied saying it (Tremonti, 2017a, b). These two ideas on cultural value might be polar opposites, but they belong to the same belief that the value of culture equates to its economic value.

Oil and gold

According to Settis (2002), it is exactly in the 1980s that Italian cultural policies started using a rhetoric imbued with the language of economy, reflecting a change in the way the government understands cultural value: no longer as a crucial part of the collective identity of the Italians, but as a mine that needs to be exploited. As a matter of fact, Antonio Paolucci, who was Minister for Cultural and Environmental Assets[1] between 1995 and 1996, declared that it was in the 1980s that “threatening and glittering slogan of the cultural assets as ‘our oil’” was coined (Settis, 2002). From that point on, the accent on the economic value of heritage became more and more central to Italian cultural policy: some notable examples of this trend are the L. 4 of 1993, the L. 59 of 1997, the Testo Unico of 1999 and the L. 112 of 2002. However, in terms of rhetoric, the most interesting initiatives of those years were the *giacimenti culturali* (cultural deposits), established in 1986 the Ministry for Employment and Welfare. These funding schemes were destined to fund “heritage-related inventory, training and employment programmes that made use of new information technologies (Bianchini *et al.*, 1996, p. 299)”. At the core of these initiatives there is an oversimplified belief in the economic potential of Italian heritage, which overlooks not only its symbolic and cultural value, but also the limitations of such criteria for public funding. In particular, the word *giacimenti* has an economically charged meaning: it conveys the idea that heritage is just an endless, passive resource awaiting to be exploited; indeed, the word *giacimenti* in Italian can also be used to indicate oil fields (Settis, 2002; Montella, 2003).

In more recent years, one of the most enthusiastic supporters of this view was Dario Franceschini, who was nominated Minister for Cultural Assets and Activities in February 2014, following the nomination of Matteo Renzi as Prime Minister. When talking about Italy’s heritage, he said that “we’re walking on gold nuggets without realising it” (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2014). The idea of “promotion” associated to culture, whose rise in the 1990s has been

analysed by Belfiore, came back to the centre stage of the Italian public discourse on culture. Franceschini's rhetoric was strongly influenced by the concept of culture as Italy's oil. The comparisons are frequent in his public declarations: "(The Ministry of) cultural assets is an economic ministry. I think that the Ministry for culture in Italy is like the one for oil in an Arab country" (in Cherchi, 2014); "cultural treasure" (in Carm, 2015); "In Italy there is a gold mine we can exploit everywhere, with its museums, our Patrimony, our beauty: and we were not able to use it" (in Morando, 2014). He was not alone, though: in 2014, the president of the Senate, Pietro Grasso, stated that culture should "look at the logic of markets to modify its offer" (Ciccarelli, 2014b). At the core of Franceschini's political philosophy there is the idea that Italy's cultural assets alone can be a major driving economic force, as they attract large number of tourists. According to him, even poor touristic structures, a problem that has affected Italy for a long time, are not a sufficient deterrent for tourists (in Carm, 2015). In one of his first interviews, Franceschini stated that his mandate would not be affected by those taboos that have undermined Italian cultural policy in the past, meaning the resistance to cooperation with private investors (Cherchi, 2014) and the belief that "culture doesn't put food on the table". His belief in the economic value of culture soon gained international resonance: in a telephone interview with the New York Times (Pianigiani and Yardley, 2014), the minister declared: "Our doors are wide open for all the philanthropists and donors who want to tie their name to an Italian monument [...] We have a long list, as our heritage offers endless options, from small countryside churches to the Colosseum [...] Just pick". The kind of private investment invoked by the Ministry was similar to the one offered by the fashion company Tod's for the restoration of the Colosseum in 2011: in return of his investment, Diego della Valle, the company's CEO, gained publicity and rights over the image of the famous heritage site. Similarly, Fendi offered funds for the restoration of the famous Fontana di Trevi and was able to organise spectacular fashion shows with models walking on the edge on the fountain (*Il Post*, 2016a). "Looking for money where the money is", as stated again by Franceschini, sounds like a safe strategy, but it also implies some difficulties. As pointed out by Stefano Monti (2015), what private investors get in exchange for their contribution is visibility; consequently, the most visited and, thus, visible cultural organisations and heritage sites are more likely to get funding from private investors. Moreover, "visibility" does not only mean being able to place one's small logo outside a heritage site, but also to use said cultural asset for private events. In 2013, the city of Florence made headlines for letting Ponte Vecchio, the Uffizi and Palazzo Pitti for cocktails and dinners (Montanari, 2013). In the case of Ponte Vecchio, the historical bridge that is used every day by Florentines to walk from one side of the city to the other, closing the bridge for private functions represents also an exclusion from culture. These initiatives flourished around 2013, but the legal infrastructure to support them had been in place long before: in 1993, law decree Ronchey allowed the Ministry to let state-owned cultural assets and, as it will be analysed later, following the implementation of federalismo demaniale, L. 42 of 22 January 2004 extended this possibility to Regions and city councils.

Furthermore, this indiscriminate call for private funding seems not to take into account issues of ethics. Italy's cultural life, including sports and religion, is affected by the generosity of large corporations which, coincidentally, often have to do with oil. As denounced by Giuseppe Pipitone (2016), the energy suppliers Eni and Enel, the oil companies Esso, Total and Shell, but also Nestlé, invest large sums of money in different aspects of Italian cultural life, including cultural events, food festivals and religious celebrations. The author stresses that these investments are often directed to areas that are directly damaged by the companies' activity: for example, Esso's oil refineries in Augusta (Sicily) are connected to the high incidence of tumours among the local population, so the oil company's decision to fund activities for the local disabled children can be seen as a way to restore their image in the area. For private companies, thus, investing in culture is not only a way to

increase their visibility or prestige, but can also be a strategy to negotiate the favour of the local population.

More recently, the belief in “Italy’s oil” was also defended by Laura Boldrini, who was President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies between 2013 and 2018. She said “Music, culture, arts, all of this represents our heritage, our past but, surely, our future too. Hence, I always say, looking at the years to come, we should invest more and more in this field, the field of culture, in all aspects of culture because, for Italy, this represents oil. Thus, we have to put culture at the centre, even when we have to establish how to use resources, because I believe that everyone who appreciates Italy, appreciates our country because of this” (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2017). Indeed, the belief in culture’s endless economic potential is not a prerogative of MiBact (Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities) and extends to the rest of governmental bodies.

Following the elections of 4 March 2018, on 1 June of the same year a coalition government formed by Five Star Movement and Northern League Five Star Movement, led by Prime Minister Luigi di Maio (Five Star Movement) took office. MiBact was assigned to Minister Alberto Bonisoli, who is a representative of the Five Star Movement. In his initial declarations, he showed a populist approach to the idea of culture, asserting that “everything is culture”, including entertainment TV shows such as *The Big Brother* (*Il Corriere di Siena*, 2018). However, despite the anti-status-quo spirit that has characterised the Five Star Movement since its beginnings, it appears that Bonisoli has not distanced himself from the market-oriented approach to cultural value of his predecessors. Indeed, he decided to abolish an initiative that granted free access to all Italian museums on the first Sunday of each month because, in his view, this caused a major loss of income in the summertime. He added: “tourists arrive here and think: why are Italians so crazy that they let me in for free?” (*Il Secolo XIX*, 2018). Eventually, the initiative re-designed by Bonisoli includes 25 free-entrance days to Italian museums, which can be decided by museum directors (*Huffington Post*, 2018). This strategy, despite increasing the number of days covered by the initiative, aims at increasing profits rather than access, as it allows museum directors to avoid placing free-entrance dates during the busiest times of the year. It is also worth noticing that the Five Star Movement places direct democracy at the heart of its politics, but in these first months of Di Maio’s government, MiBact has not manifested the intention of promoting direct participation in culture and cultural policy yet.

Four stones “it is not like people eat culture”

In May 2008, Silvio Berlusconi nominated Sandro Bondi for the role of Minister of Heritage and Cultural assets. Bondi’s career in the ministry was characterised by a series of controversies that led him to resign in 2011. For example, during his mandate, the cuts to the public funds for culture reached their peak; however, Bondi later said that these cuts were made without his authorisation (*La Stampa*, 2010). The most famous scandal of the Bondi mandate, however, were the damages to Pompeii’s archaeological site, when a flood almost destroyed the Gladiators’ domus. The poor measures of preservation and restoration taken at the time by the minister received strong criticisms from many members of the opposition. Crumbling, neglected, vandalised, Pompeii was highly symbolic not only of the failures of Italian cultural policy, but also of the general political climate of the time. In an irate appeal for more funding for his region, which had recently been affected by floods, Luca Zaia, the governor of Veneto, stated in 2010, “it is a shame to waste 250 million euros for those four stones in Pompeii” (Floris, 2010). It is possible to argue that governor Zaia might have had a political bias against Southern Italy (and therefore resent public investments made there), as he is a member of the Northern League party, which was originally a movement for regional independence of Northern Italian regions and has often advocated against welfarism in Southern Italy (Barbieri, 2012). This declaration pictures a geographically and culturally divided Italy, fighting over few resources and pitting its citizens one against the other.

In total, the public expenditure for culture decreased by 10.5 per cent between 2001 and 2014 (Bodo and Bodo, 2015). Over the course of five years, between 2008 and 2013, the funds allocated to the Ministry of Cultural Assets and Activities, and Tourism faced a 23.7 per cent cut (Ciccarelli, 2014b). As explained by Roberto Ciccarelli, the economic crisis did affect not only the sphere of public funding for culture, but also the private one: over the same period, private sponsorship for arts and culture decreased by 41 per cent. This situation was also aggravated by the severe cuts to funding for local administrations (–45.8 per cent) and by the decrease of disposable income of Italian families. It has been reported that the Minister for Economy at the time, Giulio Tremonti, when justifying the cuts for public funding for culture, was rumoured to have said that “it’s not like people eat culture” (non è che la gente la cultura se la mangia): this sentence was misquoted as “culture doesn’t put food on the table” (con la cultura non si mangia) and became a sort of motto. However, Tremonti always denied to have said such a thing; in 2017, he even co-wrote a book with art critic Vittorio Sgarbi, *Rinascimento*, where he distanced himself from this view and said that culture is as profitable as Volkswagen (Turco, 2017).

In particular, during the mandate of Silvio Berlusconi (2008–2011) the cuts were particularly serious. The reason behind this choice was not only to mitigate the damages brought on by the economic crisis: in 2008, the government abolished ICI (imposta comunale sugli immobili, a local tax on housing property), thus diminishing the income of the state. In order to compensate for this loss of revenue, the government moved EURO 60m that had been allocated for funding culture and landscape preservation to other sectors of public expenditure (Settis, 2008). Furthermore, the D.L. 112 of 2008 officialised a series of cuts to public funding for culture for the three-year period from 2009 to 2011 for a total of EURO 891m (Settis, 2008). Minister of Cultural Assets and Activities Sandro Bondi replied to a concerned article by Salvatore Settis, who at the time was the director of the Higher Council for Cultural Assets, an advisory body of the abovementioned ministry, by saying: “We’ll spend less, but we’ll spend better” (Bondi, 2008). The Pompeii scandal, and the consequent bipartisan criticism towards his work, costed Bondi the presidency of the ministry: he resigned on 23 March 2011 and was replaced by the vice-minister Giancarlo Galan.

The role of valorisation

Valorizzazione is a term that has a very long history and different interpretations in Italian cultural policy. The official definition of the word appears in the Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio (L. 42 22 January 2004) and includes all the activities aimed at promoting the development of culture, the acknowledgement of cultural heritage and ensuring better conditions for the public use of cultural assets. However, the term has also been used to describe the process of economic exploitation of cultural assets and became increasingly popular as the concept of culture as “Italy’s oil” became a staple of Italian cultural policy. It is important to note that the only agent able to initiate and manage the process of valorizzazione the state, as if it possessed some unique and special powers. This concept has been analysed by Fernando Coronil as “the Magical State”, in connection to the Venezuelan’s state monopoly over oil economy and its “ ‘magical powers’ to transform the nation” (in Plaza Azuaje, 2019, p. 70). Similarly, the valorisation of Italian cultural assets is believed to brought about immense benefits to the population, but only the state has the ability to implement it.

The period from the 1980s to the mid-2000 was a time of change in the ideas and ideology behind Italian cultural policy making. As analysed by Belfiore (2006), during this period Italian cultural policy was affected by the global neoliberal trend. In the 1980s, heritage started to be regarded as an easily exploitable economic resource which could guarantee a high return of investment. An example of this tendency is the Fondo Investimenti e Occupazione (Investments and Employment Fund) created in 1982, which oversaw the

funding of a series of structural and infrastructural projects, some of which regarding heritage. The projects were assessed on the basis of how they could generate occupation and wealth; indeed, it was considered “for the first time an attempt to evaluate intervention in the cultural heritage according to criteria of profitability” (Council of Europe 1995, p. 34).

L. 59 of 1997, which is also known as the Bassanini Act, contained an ambiguous norm that suggested the abrogation of the *inalienabilità* of *beni culturali*. As it was ironically observed by Dino Cofrancesco, this law opens up the possibility of “selling the Colosseum” (Council of Europe 1995, p. 297); as this chapter will argue later, this idea is currently not so far from reality. The new Ministry for Cultural Assets and Activities was introduced by the legislative decree No. 368 of 1998, which also opens up the possibility to externalise services to private firms also for the Ministry itself (Council of Europe 1995, p. 301). It is important to note that this legislative decree makes a clear distinction between two different areas of responsibility of the Ministry: *tutela*, on one hand, and *valorizzazione* and management on the other (Council of Europe 1995). *Tutela*, as aptly translated by Belfiore, indicates “the measures of heritage conservation and restoration (Council of Europe 1995, p. 289)”, while *valorizzazione* has a double meaning of promotion and exploitation of heritage assets (p. 290). This distinction meant that those services that focused on *valorizzazione* and management could be outsourced to private companies, whereas the Ministry should remain in charge of all the operations of *tutela*.

The *Testo Unico* of 1999 made other significant changes; it unified all existing norms on cultural assets and expanded the sphere of museum services that could be outsourced to private companies, including “services of cultural assistance and hospitality” (Council of Europe 1995, p. 304). It is clear, then, that the 1990s marked a period of continuous decentralisation of the power of the Ministry for Cultural Assets, and an unprecedented liberalisation of public cultural services. Furthermore, the Bassanini Act of 1997 contained the legal basis for the privatisation of public heritage assets, a legal possibility that was consolidated in the following decade. In fact, the L. 112 of 2002 introduces the creation of *Patrimonio dello Stato s.p.a.* and *Infrastrutture dello Stato s.p.a.*, two joint stock companies owned by the state. This law transferred to *Patrimonio dello Stato s.p.a.* “all property rights with regards to all the real estate assets that belong to the State’s patrimony, including those that are part of the *Demanio Pubblico* (State property), on the uses of which, traditionally, a number of strict limitations were in place – including the already mentioned *inalienabilità* (Belfiore, 2006, p. 309)”. *Infrastrutture s.p.a.* aimed to sustain economic development, create new infrastructures and public works; it must be noted that, unlikely *Patrimonio s.p.a.*, it was open to private investors. The Minister for Economy had the power to transfer assets from one joint company to the other, simply by issuing a ministerial decree. In the case of assets of high artistic value, the Minister for the Economy was legally bound to take this decision jointly with the Minister for Cultural Assets. Potentially, this meant that, with a decree signed by two ministers, any cultural assets that belonged to *Patrimonio s.p.a.*, could be transferred to *Infrastrutture s.p.a.*, thus losing their *inalienabilità* and potentially being up for grabs for any private investor (Belfiore, 2006, pp. 309-311). This law was then corrected by the *Codice Urbani* of 2004, which introduced some limitations for assets such as museums, libraries, archives, etc. (Belfiore, 2006, 312).

Belfiore aptly describes the governmental justification for this unprecedented liberalisation of the Italian heritage sector as a “defence of the act of selling off of the family jewels to face the hardship caused by the difficult economic circumstances” (p. 319). Indeed, the then-Minister for Cultural Assets Giuliano Urbani justified the sale of public cultural assets as a necessary strategy, for a country with such underdeveloped infrastructures.

The joint stock companies created by the Berlusconi government were short lived: *Infrastrutture s.p.a.*, according to the L. 266 of 2005, was incorporated into the *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti Spa*, an investment bank mostly owned by the Italian Ministry of

Economy and Finance, and the Article 33 of D.L. 98/2011 disposed the dissolution of Patrimonio dello Stato s.p.a. The abolition of these joint stock companies was part of a larger plan of reduction of the public expenditure (Sciascia, 2013, p. 76).

The system for heritage safeguard, however, was subject to major changes thanks to the introduction of federalismo demaniale (federal state property). The progressive detachment of the central state in the management of cultural assets opened up the possibility of letting them to private firms. In 2001, the centre-right wing government, led by Silvio Berlusconi, called a referendum for the introduction of a new law in the Constitution on the subject of federalism, which was approved by the majority of voters. This referendum was seen as part of a process of decentralisation of the power of the State; indeed, a second referendum was called in 2006, this time for an even stronger modification of the Constitution. The 2006 referendum aimed at the devolution of many of the state powers, such as the organisation of educational and health services; however, this constitutional law did not encounter the favour of the Italians, and thus was abrogated (*Il Post*, 2016b). The law approved in 2001 was officially implemented on 5 May 2009 and became known as Legge Calderoli, after the minister that proposed it. However, this was only the beginning of a process of federalisation of various aspects of the State administration. The law implemented in 2009 was complemented by a legislative decree on 28 May 2010, which introduced the possibility for Towns, Provinces, Regions and Metropolitan Cities to take charge of assets belonging to the central Demanio of the State for free (D.L. 85, 2010).

The possibility of decentralising the management of cultural assets became much easier to implement thanks to the Article 56-bis of the law decree 69-2013, which was aimed at revamping the Italian economy and to simplify the intricate administrative and normative Italian bureaucracy (D.L. 69, 2013). Article 56-bis simplified the procedures for the transferral of state assets belonging to the Demanio to the local government and defined a specific time slot, between September and November 2013, in which the local bodies should present their requests for acquiring state-owned assets. A further decree, nicknamed “Milleproroghe” (1,000 extensions) extended the deadline for these requests to December 2016 (D.L. 210, 30 December 2015).

Another key factor in the transferral of state assets to regions was federalismo demaniale, a law decree introduced in 2009 as an amendment of the current law on fiscal federalism that transfers the ownership of some state-owned assets to local authorities, such as Cities and Regions (D.L. 85, 2010). It was followed by the legislative decree 85/2010, which includes an article on “federalismo demaniale culturale”. This article establishes the procedure for the attribution of cultural assets to local governments: this process requires a three-party agreement between the local government, the Agenzia del Demanio, an economic body of the state that regulates the management of state-owned properties, and MiBACT (the Ministry with responsibility for culture). The resulting so-called “accordo di valorizzazione” (valorisation agreement) must respect the safeguard of the cultural asset but can also introduce its “requalification”, with a stress on the economic sustainability (and exploitation) of the project. The focus of this reform the transformation of a cultural asset into an exploitable resource (Yudice, 2003) that, as stated by the website dedicated to federalismo demaniale, can contribute to local urban regeneration plans (2019). For the Agenzia del Demanio the key issue at stake here is the “valorisation” of these assets. In this sense, we can understand valorizzazione as the crucial process that can convert cultural assets into resources. Using Plaza Azuaje’s concept of “Culture as Renewable Oil”, valorizzazione is the extractive process that allows for the economic exploitation of cultural giacimenti, oil fields.

The issue of valorizzazione is particularly important when it comes to the safeguard of culturally relevant buildings, especially those that are abandoned and neglected. Given the resources and the effort required by the management such spaces, it is important for Italian

cultural policy to think beyond the concepts of central state management and economic valorisation, and to reflect on the role of the third sector and local partnerships in the maintenance of heritage and the creation of cultural value.

The concession of cultural assets not only to associations but also to private firms has been debated in the Italian cultural scene for a long time. It is not uncommon that culturally relevant buildings, such as former theatres, become commercial activities, regardless of their original vocation of use. An example of this new usage of cultural sites for commercial activities is the former theatre Smeraldo in Milan, now an Eataly shop. The theatre, that was property of the Longoni family, used to host artists such as David Bowie and Astor Piazzolla, but had to close when the last heir of the family could not afford to keep it open (Ciccarelli, 2014a). The theatre was sold to the Eataly company, owned by Oscar Farinetti, an entrepreneur who played a major role in the 2015 Milan Expo. Eataly is a high-end chain of supermarkets and restaurants that boasts regional Italian products and takes pride in being located in culturally significant buildings, such as the aforementioned theatre, or the Mole Antonelliana in Turin. The concept of Eataly is deeply embedded in the neoliberal vision of culture as Italy's oil: its combination of traditional food and historical locations represent what are considered to be Italy's main assets, and its success shows that these can be easily replicated, marketed and sold abroad. Eataly shops, which can be also found in the USA, Brazil, South Korea, United Arab Emirates, Japan, Denmark, Germany and Turkey, can be seen as a high-end fast food chain, which promote local food but eventually causes a homogenisation of taste and culture that is not much different from the one promoted by any other multinational food corporation. As told in Ciccarelli's article, Eataly's strategy was seen with preoccupation by many in Italy: given the quantity of culturally relevant sites in need of restoration and reutilisation, there was a concern among the professionals of the cultural sector that the "Eataly phenomenon" would quickly become the norm.

In 2015, however, the ministry for Cultural Assets and Activities and Tourism devised a new scheme for the reutilisation of state-owned abandoned heritage sites, by letting them to no-profit organisations and associations for free. According to the ministerial decree 6 October 2015, organisations can use these heritage sites for their own activities, on the condition that they pay for the necessary restoration works, open these buildings to the public and respect their original destination of use (D.M. 6 October 2015).

The issue was further debated on 8 March 2016, when the Italian Senate held an enquiry on the abandonment of cultural assets, which included hearings from academics, activists and associations that had researched the phenomenon of the abandonment of private and public cultural assets on the Italian territory (Senato della Repubblica, 2016). The commission identified several problems with the potential implementation of a scheme for the reutilisation of public spaces. First, there is a lack of organisational and planning skills for the reutilisation of these spaces, especially in the long term; second, there is also a lack of skilled staff in public administration and, consequently, of professionals who can oversee the development of these projects; furthermore, art conservators and restorers are slowly disappearing, as young professionals struggle to find a job (Senato della Repubblica, 2016). However, the commission also identified a possible route for the implementation of such a scheme: the extension of the "art bonus" to the private donors who will fund this project, and possibly create a crowdfunding network. Another important point made by the commission is to promote a certain level of "flexibility" for the management and the ownership of public cultural spaces. In fact, it suggests that, in order to maximise their valorizzazione, the ownership and the management of cultural spaces should pass from the central state to local authorities. Again, the solutions identified tend to reinforce the language of culture as a resource and do not directly address the most important challenges related to the precarious conditions of cultural professionals and lack of training in key sectors.

An interesting initiative for the reutilisation of abandoned cultural assets came from the private sector. Culturability is an initiative led by several different public and private bodies which, in my opinion, exemplifies a possible future direction of Italian cultural policy (Culturability, 2017). This partnership is composed of: the Ministry for Cultural Assets and Activities; the Unipolis foundation, which leads social and cultural initiatives promoted by the financial services holding company Unipol Group; the Fitzcarraldo Foundation, an independent centre for research and documentation on cultural, arts and media management; Avanzi, a company specialised in sustainable development; and Make a Cube3, a consultancy company and start-up incubator and its special project dedicated to “projects of high cultural, social and environmental value (Make a Cube 3, 2019)”. More specifically, the ministerial body involved in this project is the Direzione Generale Arte e Architettura Contemporanea e Periferie Urbane (General Direction for Contemporary Arts and Architecture and Urban Peripheries), also known as DG AAP. The Unipolis foundation belongs to the financial services holding company Unipol, which is one of the major insurance groups in Italy. Its foundation, Unipolis, is in charge of funding several different cultural initiatives. Culturability funds projects that aim at creating structures and experiences that are available to everyone, such as libraries and festivals, and aims to make culture accessible to all. The applicants are usually grassroots organisations, like community centres or cultural foundations; successful applications often target particularly disadvantaged areas, such as the Scampia suburb in Naples. Culturability is an interesting example of how citizen-led initiatives can be sustained by a partnership between private investors and the state. Here grassroots projects find the support of the private and the public sector and together they focus on tackling urban abandonment and, at the same time, increase cultural participation. Successful projects gave new life to culturally relevant buildings and helped providing culture in areas where cultural participation is very low. Indeed, in the case of Culturability, the participation of citizens is crucial in articulating the value of cultural work and the importance of repopulating abandoned spaces. The process of participation, facilitated by a private stakeholder, and the social mission of the project articulate a more complex understanding of cultural value that goes beyond its economic aspect.

Conclusions

In the years between 2008 and 2018, the discourse on Italian culture, from a governmental perspective, has been dominated by market values: on the one hand, with the concept that “culture does not bring food on the table” and, on the other hand, by the strong belief in the economic value of culture and in the exploitability of heritage assets. This discourse, accompanied by the increased attempts of the Ministry to encourage private funding for culture and its substantially conservative approach to cultural policy, characterises the type of cultural value promoted by Italian policymakers as neoliberal oriented and not quite concerned with issues of access. The term *valorizzazione*, in particular, plays an important role in how value is articulated in the Italian cultural policy discourse: in its official definition, the term focuses on increasing the possibility of access to Italian culture for everyone and on improving the experience of those who use and experience Italian culture and heritage. In practice, the word has been used to define the extractive logic of Italian cultural policy, despite its aura of modernisation connected with the metaphor of culture as renewable oil (Plaza Azuaje, 2019), results with the permanence of key issues and a lack of concrete innovation and advancement, as analysed by Settis (2002). In this context, therefore, culture is a resource that has no intrinsic value (Yudice, 2003).

Valorizzazione is to be understood as a prerogative of the “Magical State” (Coronil, 1997, in Plaza Azuaje, 2019) that can radically transform the conditions of the nation. However, the most interesting examples of valorisation of cultural assets have not been implemented

by the central state, but involve grassroots actors. Exploring the concept of participation and expanding partnerships beyond the private/public dichotomy, as it is evident in the case of Culturability, might be a sustainable way to overcome exclusively economic understandings of cultural value. Nevertheless, the Italian discourse on cultural value seems stuck on market-driven positions: culture is either an exploitable resource (such as an oil field or a gold mine), or something that is useless and requires a constant flow of investment that brings no return. This tendency denotes an unwillingness to question the value of culture beyond remuneration and return of investment and to face some pressing and difficult questions. Who benefit from the process of valorizzazione? What are the implications of corporate sponsorship for arts and culture? And, most importantly, whose culture and whose heritage are at stake? Who is able to have access to culture and the arts in contemporary Italy? In a time when anti-political sentiment, separatism and intolerance pose a serious threat to cultural democracy, it is necessary that Italian cultural policy reflects not only on the role of culture for society but also on how communities can shape and produce cultural value. In a country characterised by a sense of distrust towards governmental institutions (Demos, 2016), culture can be a starting point to reignite a conversation on participation and democracy. It is vital for Italian policymakers to think about forms of innovation that do not respond to the extractive logic that has perpetuated fundamental issues over the last 30 years, and to focus on forms of valorisation that include citizens and their cultural values and identities. This is an important way to create forms of cultural policy that can respond to local challenges, contrary to the acritical importation of neoliberal-oriented policies (Settis, 2002).

This paper provides a relevant contribution in the study of cultural policy as, starting from Belfiore's (2006) analysis, it provides an account of key trends in Italian cultural Policy with a focus on the last 10 years. Furthermore, by analysing key concepts and interpretations of the value of culture in the Italian context, it is meant to contribute to the field of Italian cultural studies. Finally, it provides the scope for further research on the interpretation of cultural value in the context of cultural policy, both in national and international contexts.

Note

1. The name of the ministry in charge of culture and heritage has changed name many times in the last 40 years. In 1975 it was Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali (Ministry for Cultural and Environmental Assets) (p. 266). It then became Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities in 1998. In 2013, the coalition government led by Enrico Letta, by implementing the Article 71 of the L. 24 June 2013, changed the name of the ministry to Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo (Ministry for cultural assets and activities and tourism). The functions that were previously carried out by the Office for Tourism Policy, a body that was directly controlled by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, passed to the newly named ministry. This change was part of a larger programme of reduction of governmental bodies aimed at reducing public expenditure in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis. It has been renamed "Ministero dei Beni e delle attività culturali", that is, "Ministry of Cultural Assets and Activities", by the D.L. 86 on 12th July 2018.

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