CultureCase

How ownership status and organisation structure can affect museum performance

This research was conducted by **Enrico E. Bertacchini, Chiara Dalle Nogare** and **Raffaele Scuderi** at the **University of Turin** and **two other institutions in Italy**

Summary

This research specifically examined ‘the effectiveness of museums in their provision of public services’ against four criteria (accessibility, friendliness, visibility, and connection to locality). The study used data from a 2011 census of more than 2,500 museums in Italy. It divides the museums into three administrative types: ‘governmental museums’, ‘public museums whose administration is either outsourced or has financial autonomy’ and ‘private museums’. It found that ‘private museums, public museums with financial autonomy and outsourced museums outperform public museums run as sub-units of culture departments.’

The paper used a number of measures to evaluate accessibility, friendliness, visibility, and connection to locality

Museum accessibility was measured in terms of opening days and schedule. Friendliness by the provision of audio and/or video guides, performances and similar events, a cafeteria and restaurant. Visibility mostly used digital measures including online catalogue, online calendar, social media presence. Connection to locality looked at links with other local institutions, both cultural and touristic (and the existence of volunteer or friends programme).

The study revealed positive benefits from being outsourced and financially independent from government

In essence, the ‘service performance’ was higher in public independent museums than ‘public museums run as sub-units of governmental culture departments’. The authors found that the impact of being outsourced and decentralised was ‘positive’ and ‘sizable’, meaning the museums increased the ‘number and diversity of services and activities’ they provided.

The researchers wonder whether the findings are unique to Italy

During the 1990s a number of museums under the control of local and national government departments became administratively and financially independent in Italy. Other countries will have other contexts that shape the performance of museums. Outsourcing the management of publicly owned museums in Italy has ‘not significantly enhanced’ funding from donors, although it ‘has provided governments with an excuse to give less public grants to outsourced museums’.

Keywords

modelling **survey** **museum** **Italy**

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