

Network governance and co-production of community services: the case of the interregional Italian - Swiss program D.E.A.

Network governance e co-produzione di servizi alla comunità: il caso del programma interregionale Italia-Svizzera D.E.A.

Davide Maggi

Università del Piemonte Orientale – Dipartimento di Studi per l'Economia e l'Impresa

Veronica Giuliani*

Università del Piemonte Orientale – Dipartimento di Studi per l'Economia e l'Impresa

Cinzia Zugolaro

Università del Piemonte Orientale – Dipartimento di Studi per l'Economia e l'Impresa

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Summary: 1. Introduction – 2. Public Networks – 3. Methodology – 4. Theoretical framework – 5. Analysis – 6. Discussion and implications

Negli ultimi decenni, specialmente nel settore pubblico, le interazioni tra diversi attori, e quindi l'attivazione di network, dovrebbero trovare soluzioni condivise a problemi di interesse generale che né il governo né altre sfere della società possono affrontare da sole. Utilizzando approcci partecipativi, i network pubblici rimodellano i tradizionali paradigmi di welfare redistributivo e le responsabilità nella produzione del benessere sociale. Questo contributo analizza la struttura, i ruoli, le performance e fattori critici, della rete costruita per realizzare il progetto interregionale italo-svizzero D.E.A. (Diversità E Arti performative per una società inclusiva del terzo millennio), programma europeo che coinvolge pubblica amministrazione, enti non profit, università e cittadini, per promuovere e sostenere la partecipazione ad attività civiche di persone fragili a rischio di esclusione sociale.

Over the last decades, especially in the public sector, the interactions between different actors, and thus the activation of networks, ought to find shared solutions for problems of general interest that neither government nor other spheres of society can meet on their own. Using participative approaches, public networks reshape the traditional redistributive welfare paradigms and responsibilities in the production of social wellbeing. This paper analyzes the structure, roles, performance and critical factors of the network built to implement the interregional Italian-Swiss project D.E.A. (Diversità E Arti performative per una società inclusiva del terzo millennio), a European program that involves public administration, non-profit organization, universities and citizens, to promote and support the participation in civic activities of fragile people at risk of social exclusion.

Au cours des dernières décennies, notamment dans le secteur public, les interactions entre différents acteurs, et donc l'activation des réseaux, devraient trouver des solutions partagées à des problèmes d'intérêt général que ni le gouvernement ni les autres sphères de la société ne peuvent résoudre seuls. En utilisant des approches participatives, les réseaux publics

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remodèlent les paradigmes traditionnels de redistribution du bien-être et les responsabilités dans la production du bien-être social. Cette contribution analyse la structure, les rôles, les performances et les facteurs critiques du réseau construit pour mettre en œuvre le projet inter-régional italo-suisse D.E.A. (Diversità E Arti performative per una società inclusiva del terzo millennio), un programme européen impliquant l'administration publique, les organisations à but non lucratif, les universités et les citoyens, pour promouvoir et soutenir la participation aux activités civiques des personnes fragiles à risque d'exclusion sociale.

*Corresponding author; email: veronica.giuliani@uniupo.it
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1. Introduction

Over the last decades, both academics and practitioners have reported the growing development of inter-organizational networks in both public and private sectors.

Brass et al. (2004) define a network as the set of ties representing the relationships between a certain number of nodes or actors. The management of this system of multiple actors' relations takes the form of multi-organizational governance (Kickert et al. 1997; Provan and Kenis, 2008): crucial to the existence of networks are dependency connections between subjects and/or organizations, which continually interact one with another (Klijn et al., 2010). Especially in the public sector, the interaction between different actors, and thus the activation of a network, is linked to the concepts of co-production, participation, multi-stakeholder engagement, social inclusion, community empowerment and development. In this sense, public networks reshape the traditional redistributive welfare paradigms and responsibilities (Venturi and Zandonai, 2014), given that the state is flanked by non-public actors in the production of social wellbeing. Some areas of the public sector – especially health, social care, local development and education (Turrini et al. 2010) – have increasingly relied on collaborative networks due to difficulties not only in accessing resources and know-how, but also in establishing a direct connection between users, needs, society and public projects (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Emerson et al. 2012; Sorrentino et al. 2018).

The public networks ought to find shared solutions for problems of general interest by using participative approaches (Mandell, 1999b; Milward and Provan, 2003; Agranoff, 2005, 2007; Osborne, 2010; Turrini et al. 2010): in the network model, traditional hierarchies between public and non-public actors have been replaced by a circular subsidiary cooperation in which participants become partners in achieving effective outcomes and in creating value for the entire society (Mandell, 1999a; Zalmagni, 2015; Maino, 2013; Giuliani and Barreca, 2022). The advantages of building multi-actor relationships include a more efficient use of resources, a more successful capacity to plan and address complex problems, greater competitiveness, and better services (Brass et al. 2004; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Provan and Kenis, 2008; Sørensen, Torf-

ing, 2016): this coordination has become an essential element for satisfying those social needs that neither government nor other spheres of society can meet on their own.

Departing from these considerations, this paper analyzes the properties, design, roles, management, and performance of the network built to implement the interregional Italian-Swiss project D.E.A. (Diversità E Arti performative per una società inclusiva del terzo millennio). Based on the extant literature on the characteristics, dimensions, governance and outcomes of public networks, this paper proposes a unified theoretical framework to explore the nature and the related critical factors underlying the success of the case under study. The typical case study research design (Yin, 2014) is employed to validate current theories on network management and performance, where the units of observation are simultaneously at level of (a) relations and the exchanges among actors, (b) overall network, and (c) community level. This study aims to investigate the single elements which characterize the project D.E.A, from the design to the management; in a second step we contextualize the network in the social system that has been the reason of its foundation and development.

The European program D.E.A. is an ideal test bed to better understand how and why network governance produces social benefits, as well as the implications of multi-sphere and multi-actor's governance for network performance. The interregional Italian-Swiss project D.E.A is a program that: (1) offers services to the community; (2) manages and coordinates a multiplicity of actors in a network that involves public administration, non-profit organization, universities and citizens; (3) promotes and supports the participation of fragile people at risk of social exclusion. (4) It sets out to implement new inclusive strategies and tools to generate public value and social wellbeing, and, for this reason, (5) it may be considered an important hub for managerial innovation and experimentation of dialogue, participation and co-production between different spheres of society. Applying the theoretical framework to a real context, the analysis identifies a conceptual background useful to trace guidelines of good practice for successful management of multi-sphere networks and creation of public value. A result of particular interest is that the network D.E.A emerges as social service delivery network, born as a collective action and become a solid and resilient system of co-production of social wellbeing, capable of reacting to the series of shocks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: section 2 reviews the extant literature on public networks and network characteristics; section 3 describes the methodology; section 4 builds the theoretical framework drawing upon the literature; section 5 presents the case study selected and analyzes the case through the different components of the theoretical framework; finally section 6 discusses the results as well as their implications from policy, managerial and academic points of view.

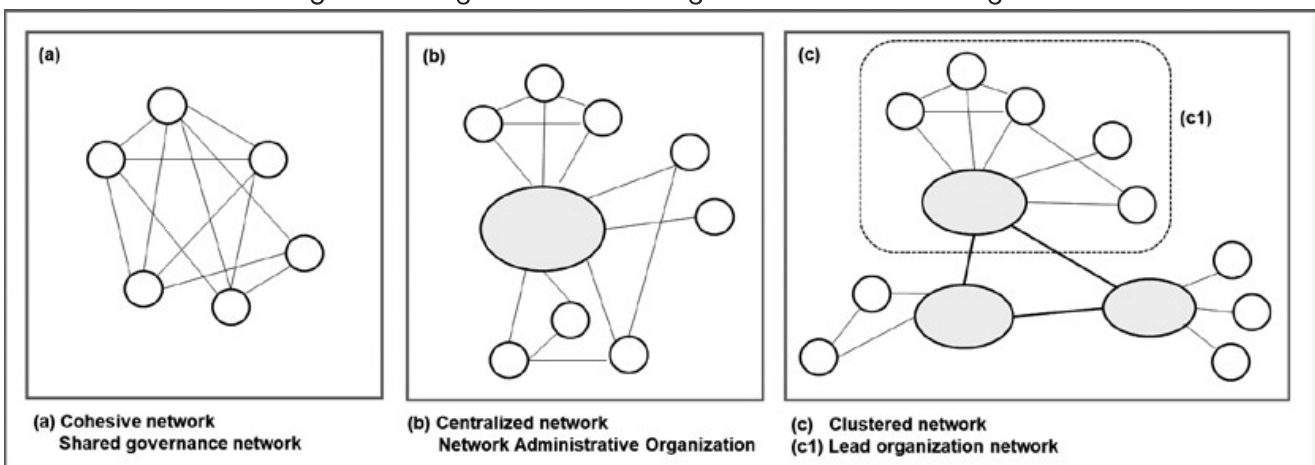
2. Public Networks

Since the early 1990's, public networks have been built and implemented to provide public goods and services or, more in general, to manage programs of public interest. Public network is a set of public and other societal actors linked by relational ties, based on the principles of trust, collaboration, reciprocity, mutual interdependence, and exchanges (Osman, 2018; Fadda, Rotondo, 2020): from this point of view the network is considered ecosystems of social organization which are more than the sum of the partners involved (Provan, Kenis, 2008). The building of a network is framed as a formal means for managing and providing a variety of public services and goods - in form of service implementation, community-based, or collaborative networks (Turrini et al. 2010, Klijn, 2008; Isett et al. 2011) – in which participants belong to different sectors and cooperate for a common purpose, through top-down, bottom-up or horizontal approaches (Kenis, Provan, 2006; Matinheikki et al. 2017). The actors (partners or participants), autonomous and specialized, contribute to the pursuit of community objectives, exchanging information, competencies, trust, and other resources, oriented to the creation of public value (Osman 2018; Yi 2017; Fadda and Rotondo, 2020). In a public network, (1) public and non-public spheres establish interdependent relations and collaborations; (2) each actor controls the resources at his disposal and depends on other subjects for those resources he does not dispose of; (3) the network's functioning is based on the ability of the public actor to govern the system of relations (Cristofoli et al. 2014).

Network properties

For what concerns the forms, networks can be categorized along three dimensions that characterize the organizational structure and governance: (1) the density of the network, (2) the position and centrality of the actors, (2) the presence of cohesive subgroups (Provan et al., 2005; Cristofoli et al., 2012).

Figure 1 - Organizational configurations and forms of governance



Source: adapted from Kenis and Provan, 2009: 447; Cristofoli et al., 2012: 49)

As shown in Figure 1, in (a) strongly cohesive networks, all partners are interconnected, managing decisions and activities in a dense and highly decentralized system. At the other extreme (c), a lead organization-governed network occurs when a single organization acts as the central network broker within a system of very few direct organization-to-organization interactions. Such brokered networks can be further distinguished as participant governed or externally governed networks. The former are shared networks, governed collectively by the members themselves, while the latter are governed by a single Network Administrative Organization assuming a leadership role. The strength of the externally governed model relies in its capacity to improve legitimacy, sustainability and efficiency (Kenis and Provan, 2009).

Coordination mechanism and network management

Shifting the focus from the structural characteristics of public networks to the distribution of power within the partnership, Provan and Kenis (2008) distinguish three main categories of network governances (Figure 1). (1) The simplest form is the shared-governance network (or participant-governed network) in which the network is governed by the members themselves, without any distinct governance entity. The organizations involved are responsible for managing internal and external relations and operation, taking decisions on a relatively equal basis. (2) In the Network Administrative Organization (NAO), a separate entity governs the network and its activities. This model may have formal or informal structure, revolving around a certain subject who acts as facilitator, broker, or leader, and addresses strategic and operational decisions. (3) In a lead organization network, all key decisions and activities are coordinated through and by a single internal lead organization. Here, governance is highly centralized and brokered under an asymmetrical distribution of power. The literature identifies the managerial structure of a network as a key determinant of its performance. In particular, several authors demonstrate a positive relation between the degree of network integration, the degree of network centralization and network performance. Focusing on the integration and cohesion mechanisms, Fadda and Rotondo (2020) relate the impact of the coordination with the presence of (a) a strategic plan and common long-term goals; (b) a regulatory framework and a system to control behaviors and relationships; (c) rules to guide the decision-making process; (d) collaborative processes and tools for ensuring active participation, dialogue and exchanges both internal and external (Sørensen and Torfing, 2016). Especially the latter point is mentioned by several studies that highlight its correlation with internal and external legitimacy, degree of trust among actors and of stakeholder involvement, conflict resolutions and the capability to affect the network effectiveness (Provan and Kenis 2007; Verweij et al. 2013). Klijn et al. (2010) point out that the outcomes resulting from the networking process and network management

are characterized by the following elements (1) the innovative character of the outcome, that is the way in which the network shows innovative results; (2) the modality in which the operational strategies represent the different socio-environmental problems or functions, that is the integrative aspect of the solution; (3) the impact of the stakeholders' involvement on the decision-making; (4) the problem-solving capacity of the results, that is how the solutions address the problems; (5) the future robustness of the results; (6) the relation between costs and benefit of the project; (7) the level of satisfaction perceived by the actors about the manners of involvement; (8) conflict resolution, that is the way in which conflict is addressed and solved; (9) the mode in which the network has encountered shocks, stagnations and deadlocks; (10) the way in which contrasting views of actors have been reconciled; (11) the frequency of the interactions among actors; (12) the stakeholders/partners' satisfaction about the results achieved. Other studies on successful implementation and management of a network (Sandström et al., 2014; Torfing et al., 2020; Busscher et al., 2022), go beyond the impact of exogenous conditions, focusing the analysis on the interaction between internal and external design strategies and how they influence the network management. Busscher et al. (2022), group the literature on network management along two strands that represent two different strategic approaches: (a) the first block of strategies, called by the authors process design strategies to build institutional capital, is based on interactions and collaborations between actors in the network and aims at creating shared perspectives, trust, mutualism, reciprocity, social capital (Putnam, 1993). The second, institutional design strategies, represent those approaches that instead aim at influencing the set of rules that structure the interactions within networks. Accessing to institutional capital of multiple actors, allows network manager to build, encourage and improve the quality of the interactions and collaborations.

3. Methodology

This paper analyzes the structure, roles, dynamics, exchanges and performance of the network built to implement the interregional Italian-Swiss project D.E.A. (Diversità E Arti performative per una società inclusiva del terzo millennio). From the illustration of the structural elements of the network to its impact on the society and its contribution to the social development, the analysis explores the nature and the related critical factors underlying the success of the case under study, in order to understand what network conditions lead to certain outcomes, and to assess the contribution that the network D.E.A. make to social fabric and stakeholder involved.

Understanding successful performance of a public network requires investigating not just structural elements, but also the managerial, contextual and functional characteristics, which coexist and effect the success or failure of networks (Turrini et al., 2010; Isett et al., 2011; Cristofoli et al., 2015). The typical case study research design (Yin, 2014) and the

qualitative analysis are employed to validate current theories on network management and performance. The characteristics of the case study are investigated applying the theoretical framework built and based on the literature, following a configurational approach which explores the outcomes produced as a result of a combination of different factors and conditions (Turrini et al., 2009; Cristofoli and Markovic, 2016; Wang, 2016 Fadda and Rotondo, 2020).

As suggested by Provan and Milward (2001), the network effectiveness is investigated through a multi-level approach, that is at actors, network, and community level.

The data have been gathered along the whole period of the project (2019-2021). The analysis is based on formal and informal surveys held among the actors and the organizations involved in the program D.E.A. The project manager has been interviewed through a semi-structured questionnaire. From the partners' side, the data are collected through focus groups which have taken place during workshops, project meetings, briefing sessions of the steering committee, and other events organized during the period of the project. The partners have been heard in the same phases of the project. An overview of the questions asked is shown in section 3 (theoretical framework). The intermediate monitoring reports have been used to collect complementary information.

4. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework proposed is built on the extant literature to unify all the known elements useful for a deep interpretation of public network phenomena. Employing a combined approach, this paper analyzes the case study from analytical to management and governance perspectives, up to bring out the outcomes produced. The theoretical framework is composed by three centrifugal levels of analysis: (1) the innermost layer shows the characteristics of the network (size, structure, diversity, density, centrality, etc.), the design of the network (roles, procedures, processes of interaction, etc.) and the types of relationships among actors of the network; (2) an intermediate level of analysis investigates the network management, that is the process of constructing of conditions, strategies, activities and coordination; (3) the outermost level of analysis investigates the outcomes resulting from the interaction and co-production processes.

(1) Structural/analytical analysis focuses on micro-level and the egocentric aspects of the network: using concepts such as density, centrality, and structural conditions, it aims at describing and explaining the structural characteristics of the network. As Provan and Kenis (2008) point out, the unit of observation in this approach are nodes, positions, actors, the presence or absence of relations among the subjects, control, edges, ties or links. The main objective of the analytical approach is to describe

and explain relational configurations highlighted within the network, using these characteristics to clarify certain outcomes produced (e.g. level of innovation, performance, learning etc.). As stated above, typical structural characteristics mentioned by the literature include integration, centralization, the presence of integrated subgroups, network composition and size. Scholars have shown the positive relation between the presence of a network manager and success: specific managerial characteristics directly influence the performance of a network (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; O’Toole and Meier, 2004). For what concerns the first step, the following framework of analysis is composed of structural elements that the literature highlights as distinctive features of a network.

Table 1 – Structural elements (adapted from Kenis and Provan, 2008)

| (1) Structural elements | | |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Characteristic | Description | References |
| Size | Number of participants | Scott, 1991; Provan et al., 2005 |
| Density | Level of connectedness between organizations. It shows the degree of fragmentation of the structure. | Scott, 1991; Provan et al., 2005 |
| Centrality of the actors | Level of betweenness that is the measure of the overall connectedness, positions occupied (pivotal or not to the network’s connectivity) | Scott, 1991; Provan and Milward, 1995 |
| Presence of subgroups | Presence of subgroups of interconnected organizations that reveals the level of cohesion | Scott, 1991; Provan and Sebastian, 1998 |
| Composition | Heterogeneity of the network partners | Brown et al., 1990; Cristofoli et al., 2015 |

(2) The managerial elements include all those formal and informal mechanisms and tools that support the network management. In the literature the network as a form of governance approach uses the network itself as the unit of analysis, treating it as a discrete form of governance, with determined structural characteristics, modalities and strategies to solve problems and conflicts, bases of legitimacy, nature etc. (Raab and Kenis, 2009). As Provan and Milward (2008) highlight, the network’s structural characteristics alone cannot explain neither the complexity of a network nor the combination of factors underlying its success. For this reason, the authors suggest to consider key predictors of effectiveness, as listed in the table below.

Table 2 – Managerial contingency

| (2) Managerial elements | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Characteristic | Description | References |
| Tools of management | Formal and/or informal relations and tools | Cristofoli et al., 2012 |
| Tools of integration | Tools to facilitate the development of shared activities or the integration | Kickert et al., 1997; Cristofoli et al., 2015 |
| Tools of coordination | Definition of rules, meetings, modality of interaction etc. | Kickert et al., 1997; Cristofoli et al., 2015 |
| Tools of control | Tools of information to control, report and share the activities of the network | Kickert et al., 1997; Cristofoli et al., 2015 |
| IT | Information Technology investments, level of development, operations, management of IT | Jacobs, 2015 |
| Role of the public administration | The public actor can take charge of: regulation and control, mediation, supporting collaboration, leadership | Agranoff, 2005; Cristofoli et al., 2012 |
| Role of the network manager | Three different roles of the manager: facilitator, broker, leader | Kickert et al., 1997 |
| Organizational configuration | Forms of configuration: cohesive, centralized, or clustered network | Provan and Kenis, 2008; Cristofoli et al., 2012 |
| Governance | Forms of governance: shared governance, lead organization, NAO | Provan and Kenis, 2008; Kenis and Provan, 2009 |

Source: adapted from Provan and Milward, 2008

The presence of particular managerial and strategic tools is a lever for integration, coordination, control of the activities, innovation and creation of common vision and identity among network nodes (Cristofoli and Markovic 2016; Sørensen and Torfing, 2016), ensuring the effective and efficient achievement of results in line with network's objectives (Kenis and Provan 2006; Fadda and Rotondo, 2020). This confirms the importance of stabilizing the connections within the network (Cristofoli et al., 2019).

(3) The third level of analysis examines outcomes produced by the activities of the network. The literature on the public networks management mentions several aspects and elements which characterize the outcomes resulting from the governance process. Klijn et. al. (2010) list twelve factors, summarized in the table below and divided between content outcomes and process outcomes, as the authors suggest.

Table 3 – Content and process outcomes

| (3) Outcomes produced | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| 3a. Content outcomes | | |
| Characteristic | Description | References |
| Innovative character of the outcomes | The way in which the network shows innovative results | Nooteboom, 2006; Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| Integrative aspects of solutions | The modality in which the operational strategies represent the different social problems | De Jong and Edelenbos, 2007; Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| Involvement of actors | The impact of the stakeholders' involvement on the decision-making process | Edelenbos and Klijn, 2006; Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| Effectiveness solutions | How the solutions address the problems | Innes and Boehler, 2003; Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| Robustness of the results | The future robustness of the results | Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| Costs-Benefits relation | The relation between the costs of the project and the benefit of the results | Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| 3b. Process outcomes | | |
| Characteristic | Description | References |
| Level of management | The level of satisfaction perceived by the actors about the manners of involvement | Meier and O'Toole, 2001; Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| Conflict resolution | The way in which conflicts have been addressed and solved | Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| Deadlocks | The mode in which the network has encountered shocks, stagnations and deadlocks | Van Eeten, 1999; Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| Productive use of differences | The productive use of differences in perspectives | Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| Contact frequency | The frequency of the interactions among actors | Meier and O'Toole, 2001; Klijn et. al., 2010 |
| Support | The partners' satisfaction about the results achieved | Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Klijn et. al., 2010 |

Source: adapted from Klijn et al., 2010

5. Analysis

Case study selected: the project D.E.A. for the community integration services. An overview

The Interreg Europe Program, covering the whole territory of the European Union, Norway and Switzerland, supports regional and local governments across Europe for creating shared solutions and policy learning. The program supports public local, regional and national authorities, research institutes, for-profit and non-profit organizations, in order to stimulate the economic, environmental and social development. The pro-

ject “D.E.A. - Diversità E Arti performative per una società inclusiva del terzo millennio”, (priority 4 - Services for Community Integration) is a multidisciplinary and transversal project that aims at increasing the involvement and participation of citizens with fragility through community performing arts. Going beyond the concept of entertainment for artistic practices, D.E.A. proposes dance, music and theatre as social services: it promotes accessibility to social, health and educational services by actively involving communities and experimenting innovative methodologies and practices. The interregional Italian-Swiss project D.E.A offers services to the community in an innovative way, managing and coordinating a multiplicity of actors in a network that involves public administrations, non-profit organizations, universities, and citizens. It promotes and supports the participation of fragile people at risk of social exclusion, implementing new inclusive strategies and co-production tools to generate public value and social wellbeing (Giuliani et al., 2018; Giuliani and Barreca, 2022). The partnership built to realize the interregional project DEA is structured as a cohesive network, and it is composed of two related blocks each formed by Italian and Swiss partners. The Italian component includes: (1) Università del Piemonte Orientale (UPO), that is the leader of the project; (2) IuseFor, university training agency; (3) the Municipality of Novara (social services sector); (4) Associazione Didee -arti e comunicazione; (5) Fondazione Nuovo Teatro Faraggiana; (6) Oltre le Quinte a.p.s. The Swiss component consists of: (7) Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI), leader of the Swiss part, and (8) Teatro danzabile – an overview of the partners involved is offered in the table below.

Table 4 – Actors involved (our elaboration)

| Actors involved | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------|-------------------------|--|---|---|
| | Organization | Country | Sector | Field | Role | Role in decision-making | Resources deployed | Entrance into the network | Activities |
| 1. | UPO – Università del Piemonte Orientale | Italy - Novara | Public actor (academia) | Education | Leader | High | Administrative personnel, external advices, study grants, research, know-how | Phases: design, planning implementation of the activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project coordination and management - Coordination and monitoring of the project's background - Tutoring, mentoring and administrative coaching for the economic feasibility of socio-artistic activities - Scientific research on public-private partnerships: models and procedures in social services - Definition of an intervention protocol - Study and analysis of local and international best practices (social impact) - Monitoring of the social impact of the offered interventions |
| 2. | IUSEFOR – Agenzia Formativa Universitaria | Italy - Novara | Private for profit | Education and training | Partner | High | Internal personnel, external advices | Phases: design, planning implementation of the activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theoretical-practical master classes on the methodologies applied in the different Workshops - Services to the person (theatre, dance, music for integrated groups and communities) for operators and dancers with frailty |
| 3. | COMUNE DI NOVARA | Italy - Novara | Public administration | Public sector | Partner | High | Know-how | Phases: design, planning implementation of the activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comparison of good practices for the development of a protocol for evaluating the educational, relational and cultural effectiveness of the intervention process, in order...to make the construction of performative and cross-border community |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|------|--|---|--|
| 4. | ASSOCIAZIONE DIDEE-ARTI E COMUNICAZIONE | Italy - Torino | Private non-profit | Performing arts | Partner | High | Internal personnel, external advices, know-how | Phases: design, planning implementation of the activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion of services offered with a focus on social inclusion and audience development - Digital marketing - Professionalizing workshops and training courses, with show dissemination - Community performing arts - Cross-border events with community performing arts |
| 5. | FONDAZIONE NUOVO TEATROFARAGGIANA | Italy - Novara | Public actor | Theatre | Partner | High | Internal personnel, external advices, know-how | Phases: design, planning implementation of the activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication activities (preparation of promotional and dissemination material) - Creation of a social network - Territorial comparison aimed at the construction of the living lab - Workshops and training courses through cinema, frontier theatre and narrative theatre - Community performing arts - Cross-border events with community performing arts |
| 6. | OLTRE LE QUINTE | Italy - Novara | Private non-profit | Social and cultural promotion | Partner | High | Internal personnel, external advices, know-how | Phases: design, planning implementation of the activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion of the services offered with a focus on social inclusion and audience development - Workshops and training through dance and music - Community performing arts |
| 7. | USI – Università della Svizzera Italiana | Switzerland - Lugano | Public actor (academia) | Education | Leader | High | Administrative personnel, external advices, study grants, research, know-how | Phases: design, planning implementation of the activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey of PPP experiences in the Swiss health sector - Study and analysis of best practices at local and international level (social impact) - Creation of a cross-border start-up to complement public health and education services |
| 8. | TEATRO DANZABILE | Switzerland - Lugano | Private non-profit | Theatre | Partner | High | Internal personnel, external advices, know-how | Phases: design, planning implementation of the activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop and performance routes - Swiss network |

The network is founded on the ideas of co-responsibility, dialogue, exchange of information and resources, co-design and co-production of services and direct and continuous collaboration between actors.

During the last three years, the partners of the project, together with the two lead academic actors, have developed different project activities, structuring the collaborative strategies in a synergic, co-participative and multidisciplinary way.

Applied analysis: from characteristics to the outcomes produced

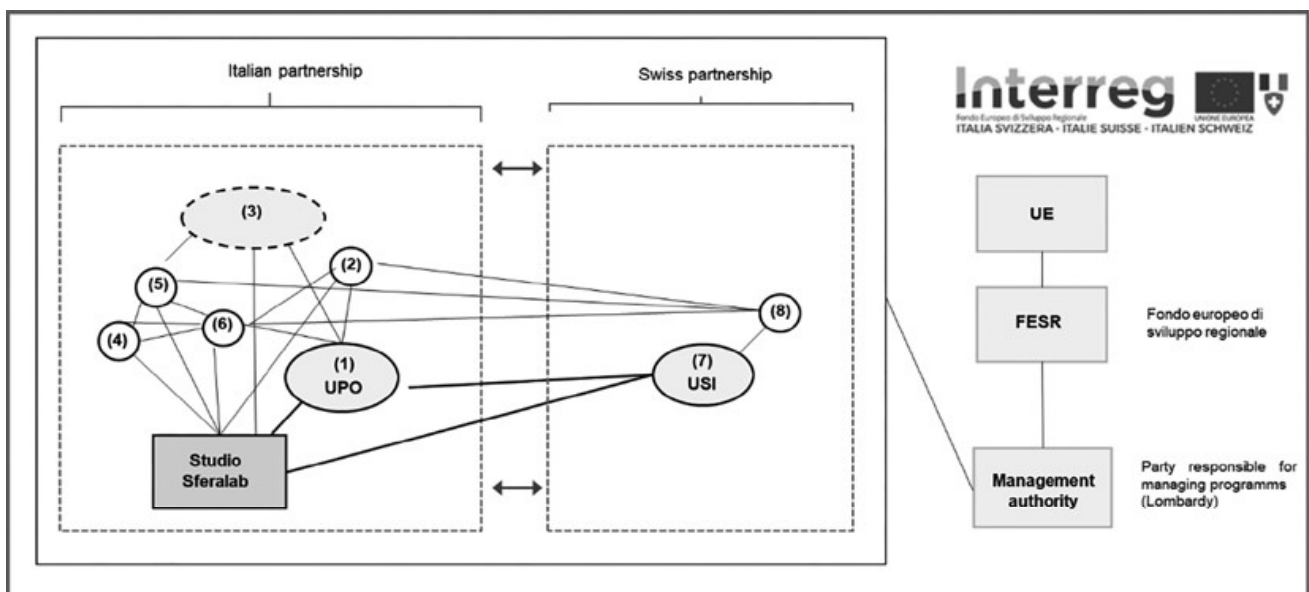
Network properties: the network D.E.A. is composed of two related blocks which form the interregional Italian-Swiss partnership, an organized and goal-directed international network. Summarizing the result of the analysis, the table below presents the main structural characteristics of the original nucleus of the network D.E.A.:

Table 5 – Network D.E.A. characteristics (our elaboration)

| Network D.E.A. characteristics | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | Italian partnership | Swiss Partnership | Interregional program D.E.A. |
| Size | n. of partners | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| Homogeneity | n. of municipalities | 1 | / | 1 |
| | n. of non-profit org. | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | n. of for-profit org. | 1 | / | 1 |
| | n. of public actors | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | | | | |
| Structure | Org. configuration | Externally governed | Internally governed | Multi-centrally integrated structure |
| | Density | Centralized network | Clustered network | Moderately high |
| | Betweenness | High | Moderately high | High |
| | n. of clan | High | High | 2 |
| | | | | |
| Governance | | N.A.O. | Lead organization | NAO/Meta-governance |

The partners, 8 in total, whilst establishing interdependent relations and collaborations, are autonomous and specialized (Kickert et al. 1997): they belong to different spheres of the society (public administration, private for-profit and non-profit, academia), and provide different resources, abilities and competencies to the network.

Figure 2 – Structural configuration of the network D.E.A. The Italian partnership: (1) Università del Piemonte Orientale (UPO), (2) IuseFor, (3) the Municipality of Novara (social services sector), (4) Associazione Didee -arti e comunicazione, (5) Fondazione Nuovo Teatro Faraggiana, (6) Oltre le Quinte a.p.s.; The Swiss partnership: (7) Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI), (8) Teatro danzabile.



(Source: Authors' elaboration)

As shown in Figure 2, the two partnerships have different organizational configuration: (a) the Italian side is more complex and managed by a separate entity which governs the network and its activities. It is externally governed, and thus assumes the form of Network Administrative Organization (NAO) model; (2) the Swiss part consists of two members, and the key decisions are coordinated through and by a single partner, USI, acting as a lead organization. This type of highly-interconnected network facilitates not just the circulation of information, support and resources but also the accomplishment of trust (Cristofoli et al. 2019). The table below (6) present the main elements emerged from the application of the theoretical framework.

Table 6 – Structural and managerial characteristics of the network

| (1) Structural elements | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Elements | Network D.E.A. |
| Size | 8 (original nucleus) + 12 (expanded network post workshops). |
| Density | The level of connectedness is high. |
| Centrality of the actors | The network is formally centralized and the degree of betweenness is high. The key central actors are the universities (UPO and USI). |
| Presence of subgroups | A subgroup is referring to the Steering Committee (technical and administrative contact partner). |
| Composition | Heterogeneity of the network partners, |
| (2) Managerial elements | |
| Elements | Network D.E.A. |
| Tool of management | There is coexistence of formal and informal relations and tools. |
| Tools of integration | Physical spaces (meetings, workshops etc.) and digital platforms to share and promote activities, initiatives, documents etc. |
| Tool of coordination | Periodic meeting among the partners (in physical, telematic and hybrid forms) |
| Tool of control | The transparency, control and accountability are guaranteed by the intermediate reports and the continuous activity of monitoring. |
| Information Technology | Platform Mega.nz |
| Role of the public administration | The PA assumes the role of coordinator (management and monitoring). |
| Role of the network manager | The manager is the facilitator and broker of the network, coordinating the overall partnership and managing financial and technical aspects of the project. |
| Organizational configuration | Multi-centrally integrated network. |
| Governance | Network Administrative Organization (N.A.O.). |
| Trust | High (among partners and between partnership and manager). |
| Goal consensus | Shared identity, common goals-problems-solutions. The willingness to cooperate and share information is high. |
| Need for network-level competencies | The tasks are performed internally and independently by the network members. Due to the lack capacity in managing an international partnership, this task has been outsourced. |

Coordination mechanism and network management: the overall network D.E.A. has a multi-centrally integrated structure, a form used for enhancing network legitimacy, dealing with complex network-level problems and issues, reducing the complexity of shared governance (Provan and Kenis, 2008). This mode of governance provides a greater balance regarding the tensions between the need for efficient operations and inclusive decision making (Sørensen and Torfing, 2016)

The network members interact one with another, with both formal and informal exchanges, and participate in decision making process; the organizational structure of the project DEA is centralized, with an asymmetrical distribution of power, and legitimacy is ensured interactions by the representative structure of the network. In line with Provan and Sebastian (1998) the high network performance is related to the degree of in-

tegration: the network D.E.A is strongly integrated by overlapping sub-groups (that is multi-centrally integrated network) that share responsibility and governance.

An external and superpartes entity, the Managing Authority, guarantees the correct development of the overall tasks in line with the rules and macro-objectives of the European program. The public administration encourages the formation of networks, supporting the development of collaborations among the different actors, and participating in the definition of strategies and goals (Agranoff, 2005).

The Universities involved (UPO and USI) assume pivotal positions, that is of leaders, which manage the ongoing interaction process between actors in the network, in order to encourage mutual learning and trust building (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). Their role, linked to the concept of meta-governance, aims at initiating, guiding, and facilitating the interactions, creating and changing network arrangements, achieving better coordination and evaluating the results obtained (Klijn and Edelenbos, 2007).

In line with the characteristics noted in the literature, the manager, instead, is responsible for: (a) activating actors and resources; (b) realizing cooperation structure, project groups etc.; (c) coordinating goal-achieving strategies; (d) developing trust and joint knowledge production; (e) creating convergence in the perception of problems and solutions. This reveals the fundamental role that coordination mechanisms and interactions among partners assume in ensuring good performances (Brown et al., 2008; Jennings and Elwalt 1998; Provan and Kenis, 2008, Cristofoli et al. 2014). As highlighted in the recent literature the network manager D.E.A. acted as a mediator among the multiple interests: in order to ensure coherence between the network's objectives and an effective service provision, the manager creates and stabilizes relationships and activities, also building trust, stimulating connectivity and knowledge sharing (Cristofoli and Markovic, 2016; Cristofoli et al., 2019).

Network development, stakeholder involvement and the outcome produced: the role of the network manager is not only to build and maintain trust among participants, but also to establish credibility of the network to outsiders.

Many outcomes (shown in Table 7) found in the network are the consequence of strategic interactions and negotiations between actors in an ongoing exchange with the external environment.

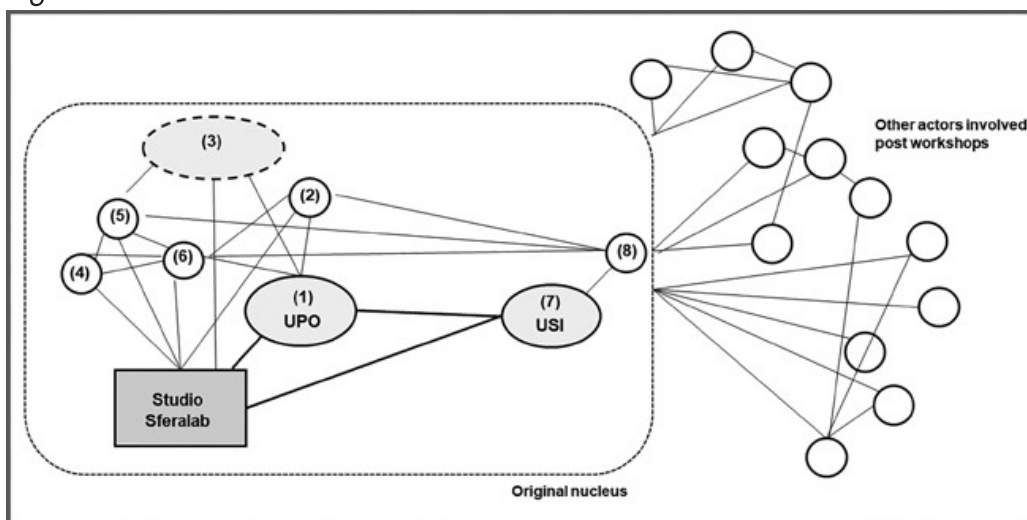
Table 7 – Content and process outcomes (adapted from Klijn et al., 2010)

| (3) Outcomes produced | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 3a. Content outcomes | |
| Elements | Network D.E.A. |
| Innovative character of the outcomes | The project goes beyond the concept of artistic practices as entertainment and offers dance, music and theatre as public health services for the well-being of the whole community. |
| Integrative aspects of solutions | The project generates integration and inclusion of fragile people at risk of social marginalization. |
| Involvement of actors | The actors have delivered a fundamental contribution to the development of the result, getting actively involved in the process of decision making, co-design and co-production of services |
| Effectiveness solutions | The monitoring and evaluation in itinere of the activities confirm that the solutions deal with the problem. |
| Robustness of the results | The project designs and delivers courses for the training of professionals to ensure that the solutions are durable for the future |
| Costs-Benefits relation | High. The benefits for the society produced by the project exceed the costs of the cooperation process |
| 3b. Process outcomes | |
| Elements | Network D.E.A. |
| Level of management | High. The actors involved are satisfied with their involvement |
| Conflict resolution | The conflicts were monitored during the whole period of the project. The solutions were evaluated and collectively adopted |
| Deadlocks | During the Covid-19 pandemic, the partners have redesigned their activity and changed the traditional way of interaction. |
| Productive use of differences | The entire project is based on the use of integrated approaches borrowed from different disciplines |
| Contact frequency | The actors involved have frequently interact with each other, with a frequency that varies in relation to the planned activities |
| Support | Internally, the partners and the project manager, and externally the Managing Authority and the Steering Committee are satisfied of the results achieved |

As noted by Cristofoli et al. (2019) a relevant outcome lies in the capacity to strengthen the community cohesion, to solve public problems, to encourage integration of vulnerable subjects and improve social economic development and responsiveness.

Very interesting is the evolution of the network, expanded thanks to the strategic choice of opening the activities to other organizations operating in the community. As shown in the Fig. 3, during the participative workshops, the network D.E.A. has proactively attracted other local actors to build support for economic and social development and to gain additional advice for network activities.

Figure 3 – The evolution of the network D.E.A.



Source: Authors' elaboration

As Koza and Lewin (1999) pointed out in their theory of co-evolution, the network D.E.A. is an osmotic network which dialogues with and attracts local stakeholders, consciously forming an organized and goal-directed coalition for the benefit of the entire community, based on common visions and social interests.

These results illustrate the importance of share identity as an essential element for an effective network (Agranoff and Mc Guire, 2003; Provan et al. 2011), especially when it was born as and takes the form of a co-productive and participative system for social purpose. From a stakeholder perspective, network D.E.A. worked for meeting the expectations, direct and indirect interests and needs of those actors within a community (Cristofoli et al., 2019).

As reported by Sørensen and Torfing (2009: p. 242), "Effective network governance begins with the identification of relevant policy problems and ends with the building of capacities for future cooperation". From this point of view, the network D.E.A. involved the local communities and actors, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the activities implemented.

6. Discussion and implications

The design of the network, roles, procedures, processes of interaction and the types of relationships among the members, depicted D.E.A as a diversified multi-actor system of social innovation.

The program was structured to ensure the active involvement of citizens, groups, associations, administrations, academics and pracademics, and to promote innovative tools to transform the participatory planning into the collective production of social wellbeing. The active participation of different actors was ensured through the ongoing process of involvement and dialogue as soon as the constant monitoring has maintained the activities in line with the social objectives and needs: this participatory approach offered an innovative way to plan, implement and evaluate a successful system of social-health-educational services.

The actors involved, coming from different sectors and spheres (public entities, schools, associations, civil society etc.) shared their experience with virtual and non-virtual actions undertaken during the pandemic. Having identified strengths and weaknesses, their ideas contributed to the resilience of the network and to its recovery from the shock. In line with the literature, the network D.E.A. has identified in the planned meetings a solution for sharing opportunities and decisions, and for clarifying strategies and situations (Cristofoli and Markovic, 2016).

The balancing of powers and claims, together with a greater understanding of needs, differences, solutions, have made possible to establish a fruitful process of interaction and co-production, moving from the D.E.A. activity per se towards a broader social and collective empowerment.

This practice recalls the strategy of collective co-production, that is the provision of services and/or goods, where the parties involved share

the responsibility of producing benefits for the entire community (Bovaird 2007; Bovaird et al. 2015; Nabatchi et al., 2017). Networks, multi-actor relationships, collaborative partnerships, participatory public governance, is relevant both in terms of the allocation of resources – efficiency, effectiveness (Osborne, 2010) – and the social participation: citizen empowerment, social innovation, and democracy (Pestoff, 2012). The core vision of the program D.E.A. is promoting a culture of participation and thus enhancing the spirit of cooperation, and reinforcing the basis of dialogue between different actors, spheres and needs. An integrated and cooperative approach is used to exchange and develop knowledge, proposals, skills, and resources (physical, human and intellectual), with the purpose of designing, evaluating and delivering services in a perspective of value co-creation. The collective co-production of services can amortize those disparities originated from different needs, perspectives, experiences, expectations and prerequisites (Eriksson, 2019) to guarantee effective, efficient and tailored health services.

To encourage the process of co-production (from co-planning and design to co-performing and assessment – Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012) and the active contribution of professionals, volunteers, citizens/users, the DEA Living Lab was designed and implemented. It is an online platform, serving as a starting point for the activation and maintenance of territorial synergies.

As Provan et al. stated (2011), the genesis of the network D.E.A. has its root in three related factors that contribute to this sense of shared identity: (a) common problem; (b) emergence of a common solution; (c) perceived need for change. This sense of belonging, initially identified (and shared) and then institutionalized through the constitution of the network, is one of the critical factors underlying the success of the project D.E.A., and it was a fundamental strength thanks to which the network had overcome stagnations and deadlocks encountered during the pandemic.

This characteristic is related with the concept of resilience, which can be broadly defined as the ability of a system to react to external changes and thus to recover from the perturbations and to re-establish an equilibrium and/or stability (Adger, 2000). The notion of resilience is related to the capacities of (a) persistability, (b) adaptability, (c) transformability (Keck and Sakdapolrak, 2013). During the global pandemic, the program D.E.A., thanks to its network, proved to be a resilient ecosystem, showing the ability to: (a) absorb the shock, keeping stable the relationships between actors, partners and stakeholders (persistence); re-organize autonomously, adapting the activities to the ongoing changes, while maintaining the same functions, structure, objectives and identity (adaptability); (c) create new pathways of stability, transforming criticalities into opportunities for innovation (transformability). The shock due to the Covid-19 pandemic has also revealed the tension between stability and flexibility. The program DEA has faced

the need to respond quickly to the environmental threats in a way that meets stakeholder needs and demands, and the importance to develop consistent responses to stakeholders. The informal relations, internal restructuring and social exchange with the external stakeholders, have been at the heart of the process of resilience undertaken and stimulus of reaction to the shock.

From the data collected during the pandemic, three critical factors which confirm the extant theories on the formation and evolution of public networks emerge, and depict the network DEA as a resilient system of collective co-production: (a) role diversity – need for network-level competences; (b) building support from the bottom-up – trust; (c) centrality of a shared network mission - goal consensus.

As a service-delivery vehicle, the network D.E.A. provides value to local community, putting together – and under the same objective, a series of fragmented and autonomous actors and thus improving their access, responsiveness, and integration into and for the social ecosystem (Cristofoli et al., 2019)

In synthesis, consistent with the finding of Provan et al. (2011), the project D.E.A. was built by first developing a shared identity around a common problem; the keys to ensure its early success were to draw the structure and activities on the diversity of roles, to build support for the network through a bottom-up strategy, to develop and implement a mission that has become supportive of the network actors/partners. Using participative approaches, the D.E.A. networks reshaped the traditional redistributive welfare paradigms and responsibilities in the production of social wellbeing. The ongoing process of co-creation and involvement has contributed to maintain high levels of consensus among the members, to open the network to other (external) local stakeholder, and thus to enhance the collective participation in the generation of public value. Under this perspective, the project D.E.A. represents a good practice of bringing out the internalized values of the actors involved, and a form of social innovation through which the different spheres of the society can produce public value for the entire community.

In line with Sørensen and Torfing (2009), the effectivity of the network D.E.A governance networks lies in the capacity to: a) highlight policy problems and opportunities; b) implement innovative and proactive solutions to social needs and challenges; c. reach joint policy decisions; d. provide a fair revision of the public service system; e. create a stimulus for future cooperation and development of mutual trust.

The case of why and how the network D.E.A. developed, may be relevant for both practitioners and academics. For practitioners, the characteristics emerged from the analysis emphasize the relevance of multiple actors of different nature and sectors in creating public value and wellbeing. The results direct the research toward: (1) the ratio between the number of D.E.A. network users and the total population of

the geographical area in which D.E.A. operates; (2) the social impact produced, and the added value generated (actual and potential); (3) the survival of the initiatives even after the official closure of the program, both in terms of partnerships created, community services and social wellbeing.

For academics, the results pave the ground for future research in the direction of co-production, meta-governance, triple helix model for innovations: the set of interactions among universities, private sector and public administrations, foster the academic third mission, the knowledge economy and society, building a strategic triangle centered on economic and social development.

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