



SUSTAINABILITY IN MUSEUMS PRACTICES EVIDENCES FROM ITALIAN PERSPECTIVE*

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Abstract

Relying on literature on the theme and on the International Standards the paper analyses Museums practices in Italy to understand if and how sustainability is achieved. After investigating a sample of Italian museums, pointing out their goals, the paper carries out a case study based on museum annual reports and qualitative data.

Considering the Italian perspective, social sustainability prevails on the economic one. With respect to environmental sustainability, some difficulties emerged.

This study provides an insight into sustainability practices and their communication in the Italian museum

The study is useful for managers and professionals in the field. Sustainability remains a new topic on Italian museums and a field of interest in academic research. This is one of the first studies in Italy that addressed sustainability in the museum sector.

Among the limitations, the dimension of the sample has to be mentioned. It is due to the fact that only a few museums prepare annual/social reports.

Keywords: *Sustainability; Museums; Annual/social reports; communication; competitive advantage.*

1. Introduction

The term sustainability is ambiguous, as it is used from financiers who talk of sustainable corporate profits and sustainable growth to ecologists who apply the term to the health of ecosystems (Henderson, 2006).

The concept of sustainability became widespread in 1987 with the “Our Common Future” report, released by the World Commission on Environment and Development. The statement, after investigating the world’s development issues, i.e. poverty and environmental deterioration from a social point of view, suggested directions to remedy them around the world. The report underlined the relationship between the social, environmental, and economic aspects of human life, and boosted the use of sustainable development theories in all decision-making processes.

The World Commission report defines sustainable development as the development that “*meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” and discusses in more depth the inter-relationship of the environment, society and economy with sustainable development. From the report, a key feature of sustainable development emerges, namely that it includes three elements: environment, society, economy, later also redefined “the three Ps: Planet, People, Profit”. All these three elements originate a system and they should be balanced so that one doesn't destroy another, and the system is sane.

In 1992 at the Rio de Janeiro United Nations conference, governments pledged to incorporate sustainable development into their policies when they ratified the establishment of Agenda 21. Since then, the museum sector has moved to discuss, although not necessarily apply, relevant issues concerning sustainable development. Australia and the United Kingdom lead the way, from a western perspective, in developing a holistic approach to sustainability within museums.

In 2003 Museums Australia released the first set of English language guidelines outlining how to approach sustainability across all aspects of a museum. Then in 2009 the Museums Association (UK) has held consultations and a conference dealing specifically with sustainability issues for museums. Finally, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2011 stepped into the debate affirming that “*sustainability is the dynamic process of museums based on the recognition and preservation of tangible and intangible heritage with the museums responding to the needs of the community. To be sustainable, museums, through their mission, must be an active and attractive part of the community by adding value to the heritage and social memory.*” And later, ICOM (2018) stated that Museums “*can enhance sustainability and climate change education by working with and empowering communities to bring about change, to ensure a habitable planet, social justice and equitable economic exchanges for the long term*”.

Whether they recognize it or not, museums are closely linked to sustainability pillars. The practice of maintaining a collection, the task of a museum becomes to serve both current and future generations through the display and interpretation of objects now, and to pass on the collections, knowledge and information to the future are principles of sustainability.

The misconception of sustainability as *being green* and then not an important issue to the core work of museums should be removed. Museums must consider sustainability its essence: a combination of economic, environmental and social factors (Davies, 2008).

It is important for them as institutions to embrace a sustainability approach. In fact, they naturally balance the interests of different generations, dedicate considerable resources to deliver heritage and collections knowledge, built by people in the past, to future generations. In the same time, museums are able to promote societal evolution, from the individual level to

the level of social change. At their best, they help create cohesive communities and reflect the culture, tradition, history, and identity of all surrounding citizens (Gustafsson, Ijla, 2016).

2. Museum and sustainability: literature review

The words sustainability and sustainable development have become popular terms in the twenty-first century. Even being different expressions, in common and academic language the two terms have turned into synonyms, and they have entered the lexicon of global discourse and is debated in many cultures and languages (Henderson, 2006), becoming a key concept in the management of any organization.

Over the last years, many Scholars and practitioners are addressing the sustainable development topic in different contexts and business, but literature specifically on sustainability in museums is scarce (Pencarelli et al., 2016; Pop, Borza, 2016; Pop et al., 2019). In fact, in the museum field, are more available practice recommendations for museums, mainly deriving from museum associations (Museums Australia 2003; Museum Association 2008 and 2009; National Museum Directors' Conference 2009) as well as *green* guidelines (Worts, 2006).

In recent times, the interest in defining and understanding the concept of museum sustainability has increased. In spite of being museums complex non-profit cultural organizations that differ a great deal from each other in terms of funding, size, type and collections (Pop, Borza, 2016), two main assumptions contribute to the development of the concept of museum sustainability. Firstly, that museums are organizations like any other (Griffin, 2002) – in fact they use resources to provide experiences, cultural and educational services and useful information to visitors; secondly that, according to Worts (2006), sustainability is rooted in museums' mission which essence is, on the one hand to preserve and enhance cultural heritage and its value, delivering , and on the other is to contribute to the cultural well-being of the community (Lord et al., 2012; Pop, Borza, 2014; Pencarelli, et al., 2016).

According to ICOM (2011), *“sustainability is the dynamic process of museums, based on the recognition and preservation of tangible and intangible heritage with the museums responding to the needs of the community. To be sustainable, museums, through their mission, must be an active and attractive part of the community by adding value to the heritage and social memory.”* Alcaraz et al. (2009) synthetize this definition affirming that museum sustainability is linked to the ability of museum management to collect resources they need in order to to maintain existence, and fulfil its objectives, into the future.

Furthermore, the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) considers that a museum is sustainable if *“it assessed the impact of its activities on the environment, on the quality of life of its stakeholders and on the economy”*.

Regarding to museums, sustainability concerns their long-term role and their relationships with communities (Pop, Borza, 2016). To be sustainable through their mission, museums *“must be an active and attractive part of the community by adding value to the heritage and social memory”* (ICOM, 2011), and in the meantime, be actors of sustainable local economic development, drivers of social cohesiveness and environmental sustainability, as well (Gustafsson, Ijla, 2016; Pop et al., 2019).

Sustainability is usually considered under three headings: environmental, economic and social sustainability. However, considering the field of museums – and more in general the cultural environment – a fourth dimension emerges: the cultural sustainability, that was first defined by the World Commission on Culture and Development (1995) as inter- and intra-generational access to cultural resources.

Cultural sustainability is connected, on the one hand to the museum role of preserving cultural resources and making them known to current and future generations. Then, this dimension of sustainability is primarily concerned with ensuring the continuity of cultural values that link the past, present, and future (Pop et al., 2019). On the other hand, cultural sustainability is connected to the educational role of museums aimed at keeping alive and transmitting the beliefs and practices of a community, as well as to encouraging the development of new values and attitudes within society (Hawkes, 2001).

Analysing more in-depth the four types of sustainability in the frame of museums literature, it emerges that economic sustainability is a crucial dimension for cultural institutions. In fact, from the one hand they are still economic organizations that pursue an aim of general interest and receive, at least partially, public contributions; from the other their survival and development are factors that allow museums to carry out their mission and socio-cultural goals (Pop, Borza, 2016). This is particularly important in Italy today, where many museums are fighting for their cultural and economic survival because of financial bottlenecks in the public sector and increasing competition from other cultural institutions, such as opera houses or leisure facilities (Esposito et al., 2019). For this reason, even if they carry out nonprofit activities, museums have to apply the principles of sustainable development and consider a better use of their resources to fulfil their mission. Considering this last point, the economic sustainability might sometimes be best achieved by working in close partnerships with other museums, or other types of organisation, to share resources.

Environmental sustainability is linked with most museum missions. In fact, many institutions are implementing sustainability as a key part of their identity and are involved in public education and research on *green* issues (Gustafsson, Ijla, 2016). In addition, some museums are implementing sustainable architecture and technology into their building design and/or organizing exhibitions, events, and other programs to create and spread a culture of sustainability in local communities.

Social sustainability concerns the relationships between museums and society. Museums are audience-focused, and many efforts have gone into making museum activities more attractive to wider audiences, starting from local people. For this reason, museums engage with many communities and actively develop new audiences taking into account people's interests and needs as well as their physical and intellectual accessibility (Sutter, Worts, 2005; Merriman, 2008, Pencarelli et al., 2016). This is why, next to collection, conservation and research activities, museums have implemented different social, educational, cultural-artistic and economic programs aimed at reaching different audiences.

Lastly, cultural sustainability must be considered (Hawkes, 2001). In fact, the nature and the role of museums are closely linked to cultural aims. Museums collect and preserve tangible and intangible cultural heritage, disseminate values and knowledge pass them on to future generations (Pop et al., 2019). However, cultural sustainability goes beyond the preservation of cultural heritage, and it also includes the use of heritage to create values, attitudes, and behaviors among local community (Härkönen et al., 2018).

Scholars consider cultural sustainability and its contribution to sustainability of museums from different perspectives: as an instrument for attaining the traditional three pillars of sustainability (Ernst et al., 2016; Soini, Dessein, 2016); as the fourth independent pillar of sustainability (Errichiello, Micera, 2018); as a global magnitude of sustainability (Soini, Dessin, 2016; Pop et al., 2019); as the result from of the economic, social, environmental sustainability (Loach et al., 2017). In this paper, cultural sustainability will be considered as closely linked to social sustainability.

3. Sustainability as driver of competitive advantage in museums

Museums are immersed in a context featured by financial constraints, other alternative, cultural and creative supplies and the intense competition for attracting funds (Kotler et al. 2008).

Due to this threats and challenges museums – without neglect their mission of acquiring, preserving, and researching collections – chose to dedicate more effort than in the past in different management strategies, from marketing and branding to fundraising, in order to exploit the anti-cyclic potential of which culture is a carrier (Esposito et. al., 2019). In addition, museums are increasingly embracing sustainability as pivot strategy to achieve the mission and a driver of competitive advantage (Tsai, Lin, 2018).

While economic sustainability is closely linked to competitive advantage, to understand how the other three pillars can lead to museums' competitive advantage, they are analyzed below.

Environmental sustainability, based on the paradigm of three R's - reducing consumption of natural resources, re-utilising resources as much as possible, and recycling what can no longer be used in its current form (Brophy, Wylie, 2013) – implies cost reduction through resource savings, improvement of economic performance and, consequently, improvement of the competitive advantage. Furthermore, according to Chitima (2015), triggering a virtuous circle to attract new audiences and boost self-generated revenue; to foster partnership and to attract financial resources; lastly to gain competitive advantage (Walsh, 2017).

Regarding to social and cultural sustainability, they focus on people. Keyword of these pillars are accessibility, that is to say fostering cultural diversity and promoting social inclusion, as well as facilitating the access of disadvantaged people to museum activities; involving in museum activities the local community; engaging employees and stakeholders, as well as engaging actual audiences by creatively interacting with them in the museum itself. In addition, social sustainability requires museum commitment in reaching out to new groups, including those currently underrepresented in the museum (Gustafsson, Ijla, 2016). According to Scholars (Pencarelli et al., 2016; Gustafsson, Ijla, 2016; Pop et al., 2019) social sustainability is an important lever to spread a sense of collective memory, create sense of place and consolidate cultural identity (Scott, Soren, 2009).

Social sustainability and cultural sustainability can be identified in the degree of openness and accessibility – even digital accessibility – of the museum, that is to say: public accessibility of museum collections, cooperation with other cultural and noncultural organizations, web and social-media presence, the accessibility of programmes developed and the participative/interactive nature of the educational programmes provided (Geladaki, Papadimitriou, 2014), volunteering opportunities offered. In addition, they refer to the proactive behaviour of museums in detecting visitor satisfaction and taking into account their suggestions. Then, social and cultural sustainability impact positively on stakeholder perception increasing reputation and consequently contributing to competitive advantage.

For all the above-mentioned reason museums must communicate sustainability orientation and practices (Wickham, Lehman 2015).

4. The Italian Museum Sustainability Practices: A Pilot Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate Museums practices in Italy to understand if and how sustainability is achieved and communicated. Specific research objectives are represented by the following research questions:

R.Q.1: do the major Italian Museums achieve and communicate their practices of sustainability?

R.Q.2: if yes, what kind of sustainability prevails?

4.1 Methodology

This study was carried out taking into account 22 Italian museums, which have topped the Italian ranking for number of visitors for at least one decade.

To answer the research questions, research methodology has been divided into three phases:

a) literature analysis, which has been focused on a series of observation points, related to sustainability in nonprofit and cultural environment. Economic, environmental and social-cultural sustainability were deeply analyzed considering all the elements among them. This was the starting point to create a scheme of interpretation of sustainability practice into museums; b) a photography of consolidate sustainability practices within the sample through Annual reports. If in the extant literature, the role of the Annual Report as an instrument of accountability is indubitable (Bambagiotti-Alberti et al., 2016), Coy et al. (2001, p. 14) added that: *“the value of the annual report rests in the provision of a wide range of summarized, relevant information in a single document, which enables all stakeholders to obtain a comprehensive understanding of (an entity’s) objectives and performance in financial and non-financial terms. No other single source of such information is available to all stakeholders on a routine basis”*. However, Annual report is often in literature integrated with other type of information and data, as social report and other type of reports disclosed (Bambagiotti-Alberti et al., 2016). In fact, downward accountability mechanisms remain underdeveloped and social reporting can help fill in this expectation gap, extending information to a wide range of stakeholders including visitors, donors, communities, employees (Paulus, 2003). For this reason, also this study considers other type of report available on sample museum websites;

c) qualitative method – thanks to in-depth interviews within the sample – since it favors a meticulous delineation of the observation context, without however limiting itself to a mere description of it (Hancock, Algozzine 2011).

In line with the explorative nature of the study, the collection of primary data in this study consisted of in-depth interviews (King, 1994). For the comparison of results, the same information was gathered, and common data collection tools were employed in all the museums studied. The interviews involved the directors/managers or communication managers. The support of top management was not an important prerequisite for the respondents’ input. The interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the interviewees, and then they were transcribed. This was useful in order to discuss the interviews afterward and to have feedback on the role of the interviewer.

The prepared interview script was followed in the meetings with the interviewed managers. Interviews were held over the year 2017.

4.2 Selection of cases

This article examines cases of Italian museums which have topped the Italian ranking for number of visitors for at least one decade. These museums have feature elements, which are relevant to the present study: they have a national relevance, autonomy – national museum are

those that have been included in the State museum reforms of 2014, and they use branding activities – as beginners or expert as result from in-depth interviews.

The museum included in the study are showed in Table 1.

Table 1. Selected museums

Museum	Governance	Site	Branding activities*
Collezione Guggenheim	Private	Venice	Expert
Galleria Borghese	Public	Rome	-
Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze	Public	Florence	Expert
Gallerie degli Uffizi	Public	Florence	Expert
Genus Bononiae	Private	Bologne	-
MAXXI	Public	Rome	Beginner
MuSe	Public	Trento	Beginner
Musei Reali	Public	Turin	Beginner
Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli	Public	Naples	Expert
Museo Egizio	Public/Private	Turin	Expert
Museo Nazionale del Bargello	Public	Florence	Beginner
Museo Nazionale del Cinema	Public/Private	Turin	Expert
Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte	Public	Naples	Beginner
Museo Poldi Pezzoli	Public/Private	Milan	-
Palazzo Ducale	Public	Mantova	Beginner
Palazzo Ducale	Public	Venice	-
Palazzo Strozzi	Public/Private	Florence	Expert
Parco Archeologico di Paestum	Public	Paestum	-
Pinacoteca di Brera	Public	Milan	-
Reggia di Caserta	Public	Caserta	Beginner
Triennale	Public/Private	Milan	Expert
Venaria Reale	Public	Turin	-

Source: Own elaboration.

The branding activities are very important to define the museum sample. In fact, being an Expert or a Beginner (Esposito *et al.*, 2019) correspond to some feature element useful for this pilot study as showed in Table 2.

Table 2. Selected museums: the branding approach

	Expert	Beginners
Branding efforts	Corporate level (Interactions with visitors and other strategic stakeholders) Product level (visitors' experience)	Product level (Exhibitions)
Exogenous branding Acknowledge of Institutional Value	Public-private partnerships National and International	Co-branding with Public Administrations and local sponsor
Economic sustainability prevailing sources of funding	Ticketing and other revenues Private contributions	Public resources

Responsibility of branding efforts	Whole organization Employees should become ‘brand managers and ambassadors’	Director
Key stakeholders (apart from PA)	Investors Local community Other cultural Institutions (mainly at national and international level)	Visitors Other cultural Institutions (mainly at local and Regional level)
Communication efforts	Network and relationships building Reputation	Lack of an explicit strategy Awareness
Branding activities	Rebranding New Logo Museum built around the brand	No explicit branding activities apart from temporary exhibitions
Perspective	Inside out and People branding	Inside out

Source: Own elaboration of Esposito et al., 2019

4.3 Annual/Social report scheme of interpretation

To evaluate Annual/social report for answering to the research questions, researcher used a scheme of interpretation based on literature analysis and to International Standard, showed in Table 3. It’s important to underline that this scheme is a reading scheme and no indicator has been constructed.

Table 3. Annual/Social report scheme of interpretation

Kind of sustainability	Information searched
Economic	Exchange value
Economic	Institutional value
Economic	Diversification of funding sources index
Economic	Network participation
Economic	Branding activities
Environmental	Sqm exhibition
Environmental	Safety standards
Environmental	Year of last restoration
Environmental	Maintenance plan
Environmental	Energy Efficiency Plan / Energy Class Certification
Environmental	Waste management
Environmental	Sustainable design of events
Social-cultural	Projects on the territory
Social-cultural	Projects for local
Social-cultural	Projects for accessibility
Social-cultural	Projects for cultural identity
Social-cultural	Projects of Social Integration
Social-cultural	Internal awareness projects
Social-cultural	Accessible caption
Social-cultural	Online collection
Social-cultural	Audience survey
Social-cultural	Tactile works

Source: Own elaboration

5. Findings from the Pilot study

In Italy the topic of sustainability is spread in every business. Considering nonprofit cultural organizations, here below, are presented the findings of the pilot study conducted in the museum context, considering the sample above described.

R.Q.1: do the major Italian Museums achieve and communicate their practices of sustainability?

The analysis pointed out that museums, in the sample, are all involved, with different levels of commitment, in sustainability activities, but not everyone shares their sustainability practices with stakeholders.

In fact, only five museums draft the Annual report or Social reporting. Only three of these have at least three years of consistent practice.

This is coherent with the assumption that decision to start a reporting process is depends on different dynamics and on normative and cognitive drivers (Gray et al., 1993; Gray et.al., 2010).

In Italy there are not coercive normative rules regarding to annual and/or social reporting in museum context, so annual or social reporting are the results of a managerial choice.

From interviews emerged that the annual/social report is considered as a form of dialogue with stakeholders, a tool to make museum activities comprehensible and understandable to publics who are interested in. Furthermore, reports are seen as a powerful tool for the employee engagement as well as instrument to reach cultural and social accessibility that is part of sustainability.

In addition, it should be emphasized that annual/social report is considered from museum directors as a tool for strengthening the identity of the museum. Then, it is not surprising that the four of the five museums are branding experts.

Concluding, the reporting activity of sustainability practices is a discriminant factor among the major Italian museums. Two groups emerge: *Silent Museums* and *Disclosed Museums*.

R.Q.2: if yes, what kind of sustainability prevails and what activities are carried out?

Prevailing kind of sustainability

Considering Disclosed Museums, the research returns a picture of a homogeneous group with similar features.

Referring to economic sustainability Disclosed Museums are proud of their results based on own sources, that vary from 100% to 33% of self-generated revenues. Other funds are provided by public entities, and for the rest by private organizations. So economic sustainability seems to be a sort of award that must be achieved and communicated to stakeholders. In fact, economic sustainability is, from the one hand, an essential requirement for museum survival and existence – the pillar that allows museums to achieve their mission, from the other hand it is not the pillar of competitive advantage in museum context. This is probably the reason why, annual/social reporting give low space to economic sustainability in terms of storytelling.

Except for two museums, environmental sustainability is not a relevant topic to be communicate via museum annual/social reporting. It emerges that the most part of the group are silent on this subject. However, the best performer in environmental sustainability considers it as a pivotal goal and an ethical conduct, so that it is rooted in the identity of the museum.

Social cultural sustainability is the topic most shared with stakeholders. All museums are committed in reporting every single aspect of their social cultural activities.

Embracing a social-cultural perspective, museums have transformed their essence: they are no longer institutions only devoted to collections, but spaces where all categories of visitors can co-create their own experience, produce value and change their behavior.

Museums are aware that social-cultural sustainability is a lever to spread a sense of collective memory, create sense of place and consolidate cultural identity.

Carried out activities

Regarding the activities that are planned and carried out by museums to achieve the set sustainability objectives, a wide variety emerged.

Considering economic sustainability, the activities are mainly aimed at ensuring the long-term survival of the museum and could be grouped in internal and external actions.

Among external actions the most recurrent actions there are: collecting and diversifying resources, building relationships with the local society, forging partnership, strengthening a positive image of the museum within the community through its system of values, consolidating the brand, participating in museum network for sharing competencies and resources.

Regarding internal actions, apart from the application of effectiveness and efficiency principles in management, some museums in our sample are committed in some projects dedicate to staff that are aimed at promoting a good quality of life for all members of the organisation and consequently creating positive effects on the quality/quantity of staff performance – and therefore in productivity – as well as on the organizational climate, motivation and staff satisfaction.

As for the most widespread practices, environmental sustainability is pursued also thanks to environmental education, waste management, eco-sustainable merchandising,

In addition, environmental sustainability is linked to the implementation of innovative technologies in restoration, maintenance and expansion of existing buildings. Some new buildings are equipped with high-efficiency systems which allow energy saving and use of renewable sources.

Social-cultural sustainability is the area in which museums are outstanding. The proposed programs are many, varied and creative pursue to improve accessibility Under this heading there are different activities i.e. from heritage digitalization to “museum outside the museum” – a project aimed at reaching audience (in hospital, prison or in outlying districts) that due to their particular conditions, have not the chance to visit museums and participate in educational activities.

6. Discussion

The study considers sustainability in the Italian museum context. After pointing out the emergence of the concept of sustainability in the nonprofit cultural environment – considering the extant literature on the theme as well as recommendation and practical guidelines provided by international organizations – the meaning of sustainability, its evolution over time and the importance of the topic for museums environment have been underlined.

Even though sustainability is widespread in the Italian museum context, the most part of museums in our sample, do not have an Annual/Social report. Only five out of twenty-two museums draft a reporting at the end of the year.

Among museums that draft such documents, two out five, that is to say *Silent museums*, do not communicate adequately their practices, even though they are aware that sustainability is a lever to gain competitive advantage.

The others, the *Disclosed museums*, have a consolidated reporting practice and they communicate in the knowledge that it is important in order to increase reputation, to enhance the value of the brand, to strengthen the cultural identity and to pursue competitive advantage.

The emergence of *Disclosed museums* could be explained according to the Institutional literature (Bambagiotti-Alberti et al., 2016) that often focuses on the concept of *institutional isomorphism*, which addresses the need to respond to environmental expectations, guaranteeing the organization's survival and increasing the probabilities of success in a particular context. Isomorphism emerges through three different mechanisms: coercive, normative, and mimetic (DiMaggio, Powell, 1983). According to Larrinaga-González (2007):

- coercion explains social reporting as a response to regulation or consumer pressure;
- normative mechanisms explain social reporting as a response to voluntary initiatives on the grounds of social responsibility linked with new values deeply rooted in the society in absence of explicit laws or regulations that impose social reporting;
- mimetic approaches interpret social reporting as the consequence of a trend or a voluntary practice widespread among an organization's competitors or among local institutions (e.g., public administrations, corporations, and third sector organizations).

Disclosed museums are organizations which adopt a normative approach that allow them to communicate their sustainability activities. These museums could benefit from the positive correlation existing between sustainability and economic performance stated by Scholars (Kotler et al., 2008; Walsh, 2017) that consider sustainability a tool for attracting visitors as well as ensuring brand consolidation (Walsh 2017).

Furthermore, museums' financial autonomy seems affected by sustainability and its communication. Sustainable museums not only achieve higher shares of their own income in total revenues when compared to unsustainable museums, but also are more likely to have access to private fundings. This ensure them more financial independence and a higher level of competitiveness.

7. Conclusion

Nowadays, sustainability represents a topic of major interest. However, definitions and scientific understanding of museums' sustainability has spread only in recent times. This is due to the increasing trend to embrace sustainability – not only in economic terms – as a pivot strategy to achieve museums' mission, as well as a driver for competitive advantage.

The paper aimed at understanding how some of the major Italian Museums achieve and communicate their practices of sustainability by analyzing the information disclosed in annual/social reporting. As a result, only 5 out of 22 of them can be defined as *Disclosed Museums*, while the others remain *Silent*. This fact can be linked to the lack of a communication department. It is then remarkable to observe how *Disclosed Museums* constitute an exception rather than a praxis.

The analysis of annual report as one of the primary sources of information can be considered a limit of the present research. Also, the sample must be considered: it consists of 22 Italian museums which have topped the Italian ranking for number of visitors for at least a decade.

Paths for further research on this topic should deepen the study of the best practices developed by the most virtuous museums, and construct some statistical indicators to

measure economic, environmental, and social-cultural sustainability. In addition, future research should enlarge the sample, in order to include medium and small-sized museums.

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