Understanding Artistic Performance In Its Context:

A Case Study Of The Practice Of Evaluation In A Publicly Funded Opera Company

Thursday, 25 October 2018, 2 PM
Seminar Room, Department of Economics and Management, Via Inama 5, Trento.

Speaker:
- Francesco Chiaravalloti – University of Amsterdam

Abstract
This paper shows how the different groups of managers (administrative, artistic, and technical) of a publicly funded opera company evaluate the artistic performance of their organization. Performance information of varied nature is exchanged between the internal and external stakeholders of the organization through a dense web of formally defined procedures and of naturally occurring activities. It is within this dense web that the managers make sense of different dimensions of performance, and of the opinions and expectations of different evaluators of performance.

In forming their judgments about artistic performance the interviewed managers share a common frame of reference in which the evaluators and the dimensions that are central (respectively: press, audience, peers, direction, staff and oneself; artistic and social dimensions of performance) are those which are closely related to the core artistic processes of the organization: opera creation (programming, production, reception) and opera distribution (audience development). The evaluators and dimensions that are largely absent from the common frame of reference used by the interviewed managers to form their judgments about artistic performance (respectively: government, cultural council, auditors/inspectors, sponsors, donors and supervisory board; organizational and financial dimensions of performance) are related to the supporting processes of the organization: financial and organization management.

The shared frame of reference stresses the distinction between core and supporting processes and does not seem to be influenced either by the individual profile of the managers, or by the procedures of evaluation inspired by NPM-oriented forms of accountability and imposed by funding and regulatory bodies. Rather, the common frame of reference of the interviewed managers seems to originate in the nature of work processes in opera. The implications of these findings for the study of performance evaluation and for the understanding of accountability in arts and cultural organizations are discussed. In particular, I suggest that concepts from organization studies can enrich extant taxonomies of accountability forms and enhance our understanding of the nature of work and, consequently, of accountability relationships in arts and cultural organizations.