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**From Sustainability to Excellence: Rethinking Theatre Management through Quality
A Milanese Case Study**

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolving paradigm of theatre management through the interconnected concepts of sustainability, quality, and institutional excellence. Moving beyond traditional approaches focused mainly on artistic prestige or financial performance, the study proposes a multidimensional framework in which sustainability forms the foundation for long-term organisational resilience, while quality serves as the operational condition that makes sustainability coherent, credible, and institutionally effective. Excellence is thus interpreted not as an isolated artistic achievement but as the result of systemic alignment among ethical responsibility, strategic governance, cultural relevance, and artistic integrity.

The research adopts a qualitative case study methodology focused on Teatro Franco Parenti in Milan, one of the most significant examples of innovative cultural management in Italy. By analysing governance models, programming strategies, stakeholder relationships, and urban regeneration practices, the paper shows how a mid-sized theatre institution can become a sustainable cultural ecosystem. The study highlights the redevelopment of the former Caimi bathing complex into the Bagni Misteriosi, a project that exemplifies the integration of heritage preservation, adaptive reuse, environmental awareness, and social participation.

The findings suggest that sustainability alone is insufficient to generate institutional excellence unless supported by quality-oriented managerial practices that translate values into organisational processes and long-term strategies. Similarly, quality without sustainability risks becoming disconnected from ethical responsibility and social legitimacy. The study therefore argues that excellence arises from integrating sustainability and quality within a regenerative model of theatre management. The Teatro Franco Parenti case offers broader implications for cultural organisations seeking to combine artistic innovation, urban relevance, and organisational resilience within increasingly complex social and environmental contexts.

Keywords

Theatre management; sustainability; quality; excellence; cultural management.

1. Introduction

1.1 Contemporary transformations in theatre management

In recent decades, theatre management has undergone profound transformation due to environmental challenges, changing patterns of cultural participation, technological innovation, and increasing demands for social accountability. Theatre institutions are no longer expected solely to produce artistic value; they are increasingly required to contribute to urban regeneration, community engagement, and sustainable cultural development (Mock, 2023; Rodrigues & Ventura, 2025a).

Within this context, theatres operate as multidimensional cultural infrastructures where artistic production intersects with social participation, territorial identity, and public value creation (Benington & Moore, 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transformation by exposing the fragility of traditional organisational models while reinforcing the importance of cultural institutions as spaces for collective experience and civic interaction (Esposito et al., 2025).

Consequently, sustainability has emerged as a central issue in contemporary cultural governance. Initially associated mainly with environmental concerns, sustainability is now interpreted through interconnected ecological, social, cultural, and economic dimensions (Jones, 2014). Theatre institutions are increasingly expected to combine artistic experimentation with organisational resilience, accessibility, and ethical responsibility (Birke & Keil, 2026).

At the same time, quality has gained renewed strategic importance. In contemporary theatre management, quality extends beyond artistic achievement and increasingly encompasses organisational coherence, governance reliability, stakeholder engagement, and audience experience. Sustainability therefore requires quality-oriented managerial practices that translate institutional values into coherent operational processes (Mock, 2023).

This evolution also reshapes the concept of excellence. Excellence can no longer be interpreted exclusively through artistic prestige or institutional reputation. Instead, it emerges from the integration of sustainability, quality, resilience, and public relevance within adaptive cultural ecosystems (Benington & Moore, 2011; Esposito et al., 2025).

1.2 Research aims and contribution

Despite the growing relevance of sustainability in cultural management studies, limited attention has been given to understanding sustainability, quality, and institutional excellence as interconnected dimensions of theatre governance (Rodrigues & Ventura, 2025b).

This paper addresses this gap by proposing an integrated framework in which sustainability serves as the foundational condition of contemporary theatre management, quality functions as the organisational mechanism through which sustainability becomes operationally effective, and excellence emerges as the result of systemic alignment between artistic vision, governance coherence, and public value creation.

The study investigates the following research questions:

- RQ1: How is sustainability reshaping contemporary theatre management?
- RQ2: What role does quality play in transforming sustainability into institutional excellence?
- RQ3: How can theatre institutions integrate environmental, social, cultural, and managerial dimensions within coherent organisational ecosystems?
- RQ4: In what ways does Teatro Franco Parenti represent a model of sustainable and regenerative theatre management?

The research adopts a multimethod approach to answer the four research questions: starting with the literature, it then employs a qualitative case study methodology focused on Teatro Franco Parenti in Milan, one of the most significant examples of innovative cultural management within the Italian context. Attention is devoted to examining the redevelopment of the former Caimi bathing complex into the Bagni Misteriosi, interpreted as considered an example of adaptive reuse, cultural regeneration, and sustainability-oriented governance (Ricci, 2021).

The paper contributes to theatre management literature by proposing an integrated model in which quality mediates the relationship between sustainability and regenerative institutional excellence. In this framework, sustainability provides ethical and strategic orientation, quality ensures organisational coherence and operational effectiveness, and excellence emerges from the institution's capacity to generate long-term public, cultural, and territorial value.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Sustainability in contemporary theatre management

Sustainability has become a central issue in contemporary theatre management. Initially associated primarily with environmental concerns such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, and material reuse, sustainability is now understood through interconnected ecological, social, cultural, and economic dimensions (Jones, 2014).

Environmental sustainability remains particularly relevant because theatre production traditionally involves resource-intensive processes in scenography, costume construction, logistics, and temporary materials. Recent studies emphasise that sustainable production should not be seen merely as a technical limitation but as an opportunity for artistic and organisational innovation (Beer & Hes, 2017). Sustainable production thus becomes both a managerial and creative process.

At the same time, sustainability increasingly involves social participation and cultural responsibility. Contemporary theatre institutions serve as civic spaces where accessibility, inclusion, and community engagement intersect with artistic production. Participatory theatre practices demonstrate the potential of performance to foster collective reflection and public dialogue on environmental and social challenges (Heras & Tàbara, 2014).

Economic sustainability represents another crucial dimension. Theatre institutions operate within unstable financial contexts characterised by changing audience behaviour, rising operational costs and reduced public funding. Long-term viability therefore depends on adaptive governance, diversified organisational ecosystems and resilient management strategies (Adeniyi, 2023).

Recent literature further emphasises that sustainability is effective only when integrated into governance structures and institutional culture, rather than being limited to isolated environmental initiatives (Mock, 2023; Birke & Keil, 2026). Sustainable governance therefore involves strategic planning, stakeholder coordination, and organisational adaptability that connect artistic vision with public responsibility.

2.2 Quality as organisational coherence

Traditionally, quality in theatre was associated mainly with artistic excellence and aesthetic achievement. However, contemporary theatre management increasingly requires broader interpretations of quality, including organisational coherence, governance reliability, accessibility, and stakeholder engagement (Donelli et al., 2021; Rentschler et al., 2021). Quality today concerns the institution's ability to align artistic ambition, managerial effectiveness, and public relevance within coherent organisational systems (Fanelli et al., 2020; Svensson, 2006). Cultural institutions increasingly depend on trust-based relationships with audiences, artists, communities, sponsors, and public authorities (Palumbo et al., 2022). Organisational quality therefore encompasses institutional credibility, relational consistency, and governance accountability (Rentschler et al., 2021; Moldavanova & Wright, 2020).

Quality-oriented management also requires adaptive organisational structures capable of balancing managerial coordination with artistic experimentation (Donelli et al., 2021; Fanelli et al., 2020). Unlike purely commercial organisations, theatre institutions must combine efficiency with symbolic value creation and cultural responsibility (Jamin & Gombault, 2021).

Within this framework, quality functions as the operational dimension of sustainability. Sustainable principles become institutionally effective only when translated into coherent governance practices, programming strategies, and stakeholder relationships (Svensson, 2006; Dahlgaard et al., 2019). Without organisational quality, sustainability risks to remain fragmented or symbolic; conversely, quality without sustainability risks to become disconnected from ethical legitimacy and long-term resilience (Lilja et al., 2023).

2.3 Excellence as an integrated organisational condition

Traditional models of excellence based mainly on artistic prestige, institutional hierarchy and economic performance are increasingly inadequate in contemporary sustainability-oriented cultural environments.

Excellence today can no longer be interpreted solely as exceptional artistic achievement; rather, it emerges through the integration of artistic innovation, governance quality, sustainability-oriented management and public value creation (Benington & Moore, 2011).

Contemporary theatre institutions increasingly contribute to urban regeneration, cultural accessibility, civic participation, and community wellbeing alongside performance production. Excellence therefore shifts from artistic recognition alone towards broader forms of social and territorial impact.

This transformation also reinforces the importance of resilience. Cultural institutions increasingly operate in contexts characterised by uncertainty, environmental challenges, and changing forms of cultural participation. Adaptive governance, stakeholder trust, and organisational flexibility therefore become essential dimensions of contemporary excellence.

Recent scholarship therefore interprets theatre institutions as multidimensional cultural ecosystems where artistic production, sustainability, governance, and public engagement operate within interconnected organisational frameworks (Esposito et al., 2025).

Within this perspective, excellence arises not from isolated artistic prestige but from the institution's capacity to generate long-term cultural, social, and territorial value through coherent and regenerative organisational practices.

3. From Sustainability to Excellence: Emerging Paradigms in Theatre Management

3.1 Sustainability as organisational transformation

Contemporary theatre management increasingly views sustainability not as a set of isolated environmental interventions but as a broader organisational paradigm (Mock, 2023). Early sustainability practices in the performing arts sector focused mainly on technical measures such as energy efficiency, material reuse, and waste reduction (Jones, 2014). More recent approaches, however, emphasise integrating sustainability into institutional culture, governance, and strategic planning (Birke & Keil, 2026).

Sustainability therefore becomes inseparable from organisational identity. Theatre institutions are increasingly expected to demonstrate coherence between artistic mission, ethical responsibility, and managerial practice. This transformation

reflects broader changes within cultural governance, where theatres operate simultaneously as artistic, social, and civic infrastructures (Benington & Moore, 2011).

Integrated sustainability strategies connect ecological, economic, cultural, and social dimensions within coherent organisational frameworks. Sustainable governance requires leadership, stakeholder coordination, long-term planning, and adaptive organisational structures capable of responding to uncertainty and social transformation (Mock, 2023).

From this perspective, sustainability contributes directly to organisational resilience. Cultural institutions that integrate sustainability into governance and institutional planning are generally better able to adapt to economic instability, environmental challenges, and changing audience behaviours (Esposito et al., 2025).

3.2 Quality as the enabling dimension of sustainability

The relationship between sustainability and quality is one of the most significant developments in contemporary theatre management theory. Sustainability provides ethical direction and a long-term orientation, while quality translates these principles into coherent organisational practices. Quality therefore serves as the operational dimension of sustainability. Sustainable principles become institutionally effective only when embedded within governance structures, stakeholder relationships, programming strategies, and organisational processes (Mock, 2023).

The relationship between sustainability and quality is fundamentally interdependent. Sustainability without quality risks remaining symbolic or fragmented, while quality without sustainability risks becoming disconnected from public legitimacy and long-term institutional relevance (Birke & Keil, 2026).

3.3 Beyond traditional notions of excellence

Excellence therefore emerges through the integration of sustainability and quality within coherent organisational ecosystems that combine artistic innovation, social responsibility, and adaptive governance. Contemporary cultural organisations, however, increasingly operate within environments where legitimacy depends on broader forms of public relevance and societal contribution (Benington & Moore, 2011).

Excellence today involves the capacity of theatre institutions to generate public value through accessibility, urban engagement, cultural participation and community relationships. Theatres increasingly contribute to social cohesion, civic dialogue and territorial identity alongside artistic production (Esposito et al., 2025).

Resilience further emerges as a central dimension of contemporary excellence. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that cultural institutions must develop adaptive capacities capable of responding to instability and structural uncertainty. Sustainable organisations are generally more resilient because they rely on collaborative governance, diversified participation and long-term strategic thinking (Mock, 2023).

Excellence therefore becomes inseparable from organisational adaptability and public legitimacy.

3.4 From Distinction to Integration

Although sustainability, quality and excellence are closely interconnected within contemporary theatre management, they represent distinct conceptual and managerial dimensions. Table 1 summarises their theoretical definitions, organisational functions and strategic behaviours.

Table 1. Conceptual and Managerial Distinctions between Sustainability, Quality and Excellence in Theatre Management

Concept	Theoretical Definition	Managerial Function	Strategic behaviours
Sustainability	Sustainability refers to the capacity of cultural institutions to operate responsibly across environmental, social, cultural and economic dimensions while ensuring long-term organisational resilience and public relevance (Jones, 2014; Mock, 2023). Within contemporary theatre management, sustainability extends beyond ecological responsibility and includes accessibility, heritage preservation, stakeholder engagement and adaptive governance.	Sustainability functions as the strategic and ethical foundation of theatre management. It guides long-term planning, organisational adaptability, territorial responsibility and the integration of social, cultural and environmental concerns into institutional governance.	- Adaptive reuse and multifunctional management of theatrical and urban spaces - Diversification of funding and strategic revenue management to ensure long-term viability. - Green transition practices in production, including energy saving and waste reduction. - Community involvement and participatory programming to foster social inclusion
Quality	Quality refers to organisational coherence and the capacity to translate institutional values into effective managerial, artistic and relational practices. In contemporary cultural management, quality includes governance reliability, accessibility, stakeholder trust, audience experience and	Quality functions as the operational and managerial dimension through which sustainability becomes institutionally credible and effective. It ensures coherence between mission, governance, programming and stakeholder relationships.	- Governance continuity and effective management of human and digital resources - Managerial efficiency and strategic alignment between artistic identity and institutional mission - Engagement innovation, such as the digitisation of archives and use

	institutional accountability, extending beyond artistic excellence alone (Birke & Keil, 2026).		of new technologies for audience interaction - Stakeholder trust built through transparency and consistent relational quality
Excellence	Excellence represents the outcome of systemic integration between sustainability, quality, artistic innovation and public value creation. Contemporary excellence is no longer based exclusively on prestige or artistic recognition but on the institution's ability to generate cultural, social and territorial impact through resilient and adaptive organisational ecosystems (Benington & Moore, 2011; Esposito et al., 2025).	Excellence functions as the multidimensional institutional outcome generated by the integration of sustainability-oriented governance, organisational quality, resilience and civic relevance. It reflects the institution's capacity to maintain long-term legitimacy, innovation and public value.	- Territorial impact and the role of the theatre as a catalyst for urban and social regeneration - Public value creation, enhancing community wellbeing, identity, and social cohesion. - Resilient performance, maintaining high-quality artistic output even during crises or extraordinary circumstances - Cultural relevance, acting as a hub for societal reflection, dialogue, and transgenerational legacy

Source: Author's elaboration based on Jones (2014), Benington and Moore (2011), Mock (2023), Birke and Keil (2026), and Esposito et al. (2025)

To clarify the transition from theoretical principles to institutional results, Table 2 examines the integrated dynamics among sustainability, quality, and excellence, highlighting how responsible resource management and operational coherence across diverse organisational dimensions serve as catalysts for achieving long-term cultural relevance and systemic impact. Moreover, it shows how sustainability and quality functions converge to produce specific excellence outcomes, reflecting a holistic approach to institutional value creation.

Table 2. Integrated Dimensions of Sustainability, Quality and Institutional Excellence in Theatre Management

Dimension	Sustainability	Quality	Excellence
Environmental	Resource responsibility and ecological awareness	Operational coherence and sustainable production management	Ecological credibility
Social	Inclusion, participation and accessibility	Stakeholder engagement and relational quality	Institutional legitimacy
Cultural	Heritage preservation and cultural continuity	Curatorial coherence and artistic consistency	Cultural relevance
Economic	Long-term viability and resilience	Strategic governance and organisational reliability	Institutional sustainability
Spatial	Adaptive reuse and multifunctionality	Audience experience and accessibility	Urban regeneration
Artistic	Ethical creativity and experimentation	Professional and aesthetic quality	Innovative excellence

Source: Author's elaboration based on Beer and Hes (2017), Mock (2023), Birke and Keil (2026), and Esposito et al. (2025)

3.4 Toward regenerative theatre management

Recent debates within sustainability studies are increasingly moving beyond mitigation-oriented approaches towards regenerative paradigms. Regenerative management does not simply aim to reduce negative impacts but seeks to generate positive environmental, social, and cultural transformation (Rodrigues & Ventura, 2025b).

Within theatre management, regenerative approaches involve creating cultural ecosystems that revitalise communities, activate public spaces, and strengthen collective wellbeing. Theatre institutions increasingly operate as interconnected relational systems, integrating artistic production, urban participation, heritage preservation, and social engagement (Esposito et al., 2025).

This ecosystemic perspective transforms the role of cultural institutions. Theatres no longer serve solely as venues for artistic production but as civic infrastructures capable of generating long-term public value and territorial regeneration (Benington & Moore, 2011).

The shift from sustainability to regeneration therefore represents one of the most significant transformations in contemporary theatre management. Excellence increasingly depends on the ability of cultural institutions to integrate sustainability, quality, resilience, and urban engagement within adaptive and regenerative organisational ecosystems.

The conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1 synthesises the progressive evolution from sustainability-oriented practices toward regenerative forms of institutional excellence in contemporary theatre management. Rather than interpreting sustainability as an isolated environmental concern, the framework positions it as the foundational condition through which theatres can develop organisational quality, institutional legitimacy and long-term resilience.

The model further suggests that the future of theatre management may increasingly depend on regenerative approaches capable of generating enduring cultural, social and urban transformation. Theatre institutions are therefore reconceptualised as interconnected cultural ecosystems where artistic production, engagement, adaptive governance and territorial responsibility operate within mutually reinforcing relationships (Afolabi et al., 2024).

Figure 1. From Sustainability to Regenerative Excellence in Theatre Management



Source: Author's elaboration based on Beer and Hes (2017), Jones (2014), Mock (2023), Birke and Keil (2026), and Esposito et al. (2025)

The framework summarises the progressive transition from sustainability-oriented practices toward multidimensional institutional excellence. Moreover, it highlights how excellence emerges not from isolated artistic achievement, but from the integration of sustainability and quality across organisational, cultural, and territorial dimensions.

It also provides the conceptual basis for interpreting the Teatro Franco Parenti case study as an example of regenerative and sustainability-oriented theatre management.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

This study adopts a multimethod approach to answer to the four research questions. It started with a deep literacy review and then it adopts a qualitative case study methodology to explore the relationship between sustainability, quality, and institutional excellence within contemporary theatre management.

A qualitative approach was considered particularly appropriate because the research investigates organisational cultures, governance practices, stakeholder relationships, and processes of urban-cultural transformation that cannot be fully captured through quantitative indicators alone (Yin, 2018).

Rather than measuring sustainability exclusively through technical environmental metrics, the study interprets sustainability as a multidimensional organisational paradigm involving ecological responsibility, cultural participation, governance coherence and territorial engagement. The research therefore combines theoretical reflection with contextual and interpretative analysis.

The study adopts an interpretative case-study approach focused on Teatro Franco Parenti in Milan, selected as an illustrative example of sustainability-oriented and regenerative cultural management within the Italian theatre landscape.

4.2 Case-study selection and research relevance

Teatro Franco Parenti was selected because it represents one of the most significant examples of innovative theatre governance and urban-cultural regeneration within the Italian context. The institution combines artistic experimentation, adaptive governance, participatory programming and heritage regeneration within a coherent organisational vision.

Relevance was attributed to the redevelopment of the former Caimi bathing complex into the Bagni Misteriosi, interpreted as a multidimensional example of adaptive reuse, cultural sustainability and urban regeneration (Ricci, 2021).

The case was selected according to four principal criteria:

- integration between artistic innovation and organisational sustainability;
- relevance within urban cultural regeneration processes;
- multidimensional governance involving cultural, social and spatial dimensions;
- capacity to illustrate the transition from sustainability-oriented management toward regenerative cultural ecosystems.

4.3 Secondary sources and analytical materials

The research is based primarily on the analysis of secondary qualitative sources. The materials examined include:

- publications and institutional materials related to Teatro Franco Parenti and the Bagni Misteriosi project;
- public interviews, press materials and cultural documentation concerning the theatre's organisational development and urban role;

- architectural and urban-regeneration studies related to the adaptive reuse of the former Caimi bathing complex (Ricci, 2021);
- a book chapter written by the Teatro Franco Parenti art director in Esposito and Vannini (2021).

The literature review also included contributions from sustainability studies, cultural management, urban studies and theatre governance to develop an interdisciplinary conceptual framework.

The following section applies the proposed conceptual framework to the Teatro Franco Parenti case to explore how sustainability, quality and regenerative excellence interact within a contemporary theatre ecosystem.

5. Teatro Franco Parenti: A Milanese Case Study

5.1 Institutional identity and artistic positioning

Teatro Franco Parenti was founded in Milan in 1972 under the original name Salone Pier Lombardo by Franco Parenti, Andrée Ruth Shammah, Giovanni Testori, and Dante Isella. From its inception, the institution positioned itself as an alternative cultural space characterised by artistic experimentation, intellectual engagement, and interdisciplinary dialogue.

The theatre emerged during a period of intense cultural transformation in Italy, when theatre institutions increasingly sought to challenge conventional production models and traditional forms of audience engagement. Unlike more institutionalised repertory theatres, Salone Pier Lombardo adopted a flexible and innovative approach centred on dramaturgical research, contemporary social themes, and a strong artistic identity.

Following the death of Franco Parenti in 1989, the institution was renamed Teatro Franco Parenti, further consolidating its symbolic and cultural identity within the Milanese theatre landscape. Under the artistic direction of Andrée Ruth Shammah, the theatre progressively expanded its activities and strengthened its position as one of the most innovative cultural institutions in Italy.

Over time, Teatro Franco Parenti evolved from a traditional theatre venue into a broader cultural ecosystem integrating performance, music, public debate, exhibitions, educational activities, and urban regeneration projects. This institutional evolution reflects a wider transformation in contemporary theatre management, where cultural organisations increasingly combine artistic production with civic and territorial functions.

One of the defining characteristics of Teatro Franco Parenti is its interdisciplinary and experimental artistic programming. The theatre consistently combines classical dramaturgy with contemporary research, literary adaptation, visual culture, and social reflection.

This artistic approach reflects a broader conception of theatre as a space for intellectual and civic engagement rather than merely entertainment. Productions frequently address themes related to memory, social change, identity, and contemporary political tensions, reinforcing the theatre's role as a platform for public discourse and cultural reflection.

The institution's programming also demonstrates strong openness to hybrid cultural formats. Alongside theatrical productions, Teatro Franco Parenti hosts concerts, film screenings, conferences, workshops, and interdisciplinary cultural events. This diversification contributes significantly to audience expansion and institutional sustainability, as it creates multiple forms of cultural participation and accessibility.

Importantly, the theatre's artistic experimentation remains closely connected to its organisational philosophy. Innovation is not limited to aesthetics but extends to spatial use, audience relationships, and institutional identity. Artistic quality therefore becomes inseparable from organisational coherence and public relevance.

Teatro Franco Parenti has developed a highly recognisable institutional identity within the Italian cultural landscape. This identity is based on the integration of artistic independence, civic engagement, and urban relevance.

This identity construction has been fundamental to the theatre's long-term sustainability. Strong institutional identity contributes directly to audience loyalty, stakeholder trust, and cultural legitimacy. The theatre is perceived not only as a performance venue but also as a cultural actor capable of shaping public discourse and urban experience.

The institution's reputation also derives from its ability to maintain coherence between its artistic mission and organisational practice. Programming choices, governance decisions, and urban regeneration projects all contribute to reinforcing a unified institutional narrative centred on innovation, accessibility, and cultural responsibility.

This coherence between vision and practice is one of the key dimensions through which Teatro Franco Parenti approaches institutional excellence.

5.2 Governance, leadership and strategic management

One of the most distinctive aspects of Teatro Franco Parenti is the role of cultural leadership in shaping the institution's long-term identity and strategic development. The theatre's trajectory demonstrates that leadership within cultural organisations increasingly requires the integration of artistic vision, managerial competence, and entrepreneurial capacity. The figure of Andrée Ruth Shammah has been particularly central in this process. Her leadership extends beyond artistic direction to encompass broader institutional strategy, stakeholder negotiation, fundraising, urban partnerships, and organisational transformation. This model reflects the evolution of cultural leadership from purely artistic coordination towards multidimensional governance capable of balancing creativity, sustainability, and institutional resilience.

Contemporary theatre management increasingly requires leaders who can operate in complex and unstable environments characterised by economic uncertainty, changing audience expectations, and growing demands for public accountability. Cultural entrepreneurship is therefore essential for ensuring long-term institutional continuity while preserving artistic autonomy.

The Teatro Franco Parenti case demonstrates that entrepreneurial vision within cultural organisations does not necessarily entail commercialisation or market-driven programming. On the contrary, entrepreneurial governance can support artistic experimentation by creating diversified organisational ecosystems capable of sustaining innovative cultural production over time.

This balance between artistic integrity and strategic management contributes significantly to the theatre's institutional stability and long-term relevance.

The governance model adopted by Teatro Franco Parenti reflects a flexible and adaptive organisational structure capable of integrating artistic production, public engagement, and urban cultural development.

Unlike highly bureaucratised institutional theatres, Teatro Franco Parenti operates with a relatively dynamic organisational model characterised by interdisciplinary collaboration and diverse cultural programming. Its governance structures combine permanent organisational coordination with flexible networks of artists, collaborators, technicians, and cultural professionals.

This flexibility contributes directly to organisational resilience. Contemporary cultural institutions increasingly require adaptive management capable of responding rapidly to social change, financial instability, and evolving audience behaviours. Flexible governance structures are therefore essential for maintaining institutional continuity without sacrificing artistic innovation.

At the same time, governance coherence remains fundamental. The theatre's institutional identity is reinforced by strong alignment between programming strategies, spatial development, and organisational mission. Governance therefore functions not only administratively but also symbolically, shaping the institution's cultural legitimacy and public perception.

Theatre management literature increasingly emphasises that sustainable governance relies on collaborative leadership, stakeholder integration, and long-term strategic planning (Mock, 2023). Teatro Franco Parenti exemplifies this integrated approach through its ability to combine artistic experimentation with stable organisational coordination and territorial engagement.

Economic sustainability is one of the most complex challenges facing contemporary theatre institutions. Declining public funding, rising production costs, and changing patterns of cultural consumption require theatres to develop diversified and resilient economic models that support artistic activity while ensuring organisational continuity.

Teatro Franco Parenti addresses this challenge through diversification strategies that go beyond traditional performance production. The institution integrates various cultural and social functions, including educational activities, interdisciplinary programming, urban events, and multifunctional spatial use. This diversification enhances economic resilience by reducing dependence on single revenue streams and expanding forms of audience participation.

The Bagni Misteriosi project plays a particularly significant role in this process. The redevelopment of the former Caimi bathing complex created not only a cultural landmark but also a multifunctional environment capable of generating broader social and economic activity. Through outdoor events, seasonal programming, public participation, and leisure activities, the theatre expanded its institutional ecosystem and strengthened its long-term sustainability.

Importantly, economic sustainability within Teatro Franco Parenti does not appear disconnected from cultural mission. Diversification strategies support artistic experimentation rather than replacing it with purely commercial logic. This balance between economic resilience and cultural identity demonstrates that sustainability-oriented management can contribute directly to institutional excellence.

The theatre therefore exemplifies how cultural organisations can maintain artistic integrity while developing adaptive and diversified economic structures within increasingly uncertain cultural environments.

5.3 Urban regeneration and the Bagni Misteriosi project

One of the most significant aspects of Teatro Franco Parenti's institutional transformation is the redevelopment of the former Caimi bathing complex into the Bagni Misteriosi. Originally inaugurated in the 1930s, the Caimi baths were an important public and social space in Milan. Over time, however, the structure fell into abandonment and deterioration, gradually losing its civic and cultural function.

The restoration project, completed in 2016, transformed the abandoned site into a multifunctional cultural environment integrated with Teatro Franco Parenti's broader institutional vision. Instead of constructing a new architectural structure, the project focused on adaptive reuse and heritage regeneration, preserving the historical identity of the site while introducing new cultural and social functions.

This intervention reflects broader transformations within contemporary urban cultural policy. Increasingly, cultural institutions contribute to urban regeneration not through monumental expansion, but through the reactivation of existing spaces and collective memory. Adaptive reuse thus becomes both an environmental and cultural strategy, capable of reducing material consumption while strengthening local identity.

The restoration of the Bagni Misteriosi demonstrates how heritage regeneration can contribute to sustainability, accessibility, and urban revitalisation simultaneously.

The Bagni Misteriosi project is a particularly significant example of sustainable heritage management within contemporary theatre governance. Adaptive reuse contributes directly to environmental sustainability by prioritising regeneration over demolition and reconstruction. Existing structures are preserved and reinterpreted, reducing resource consumption and limiting environmental impact.

At the same time, adaptive reuse contributes to cultural sustainability by preserving historical memory and symbolic continuity within urban environments. The former Caimi baths retained their identity as collective public spaces while gaining new cultural and artistic functions.

This relationship between heritage preservation and innovation reflects a central principle of regenerative cultural management. Historical structures are not treated as static monuments but as active cultural resources capable of generating contemporary forms of participation and urban experience.

The Bagni Misteriosi therefore embody a multidimensional sustainability strategy, integrating environmental responsibility through reuse, cultural continuity through heritage preservation, social accessibility through public participation, and organisational sustainability through diversified programming.

The project demonstrates how sustainable management practices can strengthen both institutional identity and urban cultural ecosystems. The transformation of the Bagni Misteriosi also introduced significant spatial innovation within the theatre's institutional model. Contemporary cultural institutions increasingly move towards multifunctional environments that combine artistic production, leisure, participation, and social interaction.

The Bagni Misteriosi function not only as an extension of the theatre but also as a hybrid urban space integrating performances, concerts, workshops, swimming activities, public events, and seasonal programming. This multifunctionality contributes significantly to accessibility, as it reduces barriers between traditional theatre audiences and broader urban communities.

Spatial openness thus becomes a strategic dimension of sustainability. Cultural participation extends beyond conventional spectatorship and is integrated into everyday urban experience. The theatre evolves from an enclosed artistic venue into a relational public environment.

This transformation also reinforces organisational resilience. Multifunctional spaces generate diverse forms of cultural participation and social interaction, strengthening institutional visibility and long-term sustainability.

Importantly, spatial innovation within Teatro Franco Parenti remains consistent with the institution's broader artistic and organisational identity. The Bagni Misteriosi are not separate from the theatre's mission but instead extend its cultural philosophy into urban space.

The Bagni Misteriosi project contributes directly to urban regeneration and territorial development in Milan. Contemporary cultural institutions increasingly serve as catalysts for neighbourhood revitalisation, public space activation, and symbolic place-making.

By restoring an abandoned urban site, Teatro Franco Parenti helped strengthen the cultural identity and social vitality of the surrounding area. The project introduced new forms of accessibility and participation, while also reinforcing Milan's broader cultural ecosystem.

Urban regeneration in this context should not be interpreted solely in economic or architectural terms. Cultural regeneration also involves the creation of social relationships, collective experiences, and public meaning. The Bagni Misteriosi therefore function as both physical and symbolic infrastructure within the city.

Theatre institutions increasingly contribute to urban sustainability by activating relationships between heritage, participation and public space. Their impact extends beyond artistic programming to broader processes of civic engagement and territorial cohesion.

Teatro Franco Parenti demonstrates how cultural organisations can become strategic urban actors, integrating sustainability, artistic innovation, and public value generation within a coherent institutional vision.

5.4 Stakeholder engagement and social relevance

Audience development is one of the most important aspects of contemporary theatre management. Cultural institutions increasingly operate in contexts characterised by changing audience behaviours, digital transformation, and growing demands for accessibility and participation.

Teatro Franco Parenti addresses these challenges through diversified and participatory programming strategies that attract heterogeneous audiences. The institution combines traditional theatrical productions with interdisciplinary events, outdoor activities, workshops, debates, and cultural initiatives that encourage broader forms of engagement.

This diversification contributes significantly to institutional sustainability as it expands participation beyond conventional theatre spectatorship. Audiences are no longer regarded merely as consumers of artistic products but as active participants within a broader cultural ecosystem.

Participatory strategies further strengthen relational trust between the institution and its communities. Accessibility, openness, and inclusivity become central dimensions of organisational quality and public legitimacy.

Theatre management increasingly depends on the ability to create meaningful audience relationships rather than simply increasing attendance. Teatro Franco Parenti demonstrates how participatory cultural environments can contribute to both social relevance and organisational resilience.

Theatre institutions increasingly operate through collaborative territorial networks involving schools, universities, public administrations, associations, local communities, and cultural organisations. These relationships contribute significantly to institutional sustainability as they strengthen social legitimacy and collective participation.

Teatro Franco Parenti maintains strong connections with Milan's broader cultural and urban ecosystem. Through collaborations, public initiatives, and community-oriented programming, the theatre positions itself as an active participant in local cultural life rather than as an isolated artistic institution.

Community relationships also contribute to organisational adaptability. Collaborative networks facilitate knowledge exchange, resource sharing, and collective problem-solving, strengthening resilience during periods of uncertainty or institutional transformation.

This relational dimension reflects broader shifts in contemporary cultural management, where institutions increasingly prioritise participation, accessibility, and civic engagement as central organisational objectives.

Accessibility and inclusion have become central concerns in sustainable cultural governance. Contemporary theatre institutions are increasingly expected to reduce social, economic, and symbolic barriers that limit cultural participation.

Teatro Franco Parenti promotes accessibility through diverse programming, multifunctional spaces, and public-oriented initiatives that engage different age groups, social backgrounds, and cultural interests. The Bagni Misteriosi further reinforce this accessibility by integrating cultural participation into everyday urban life.

Civic participation therefore becomes a crucial dimension of institutional relevance. Theatre institutions increasingly contribute to democratic cultural life by creating spaces for encounter, dialogue, and collective reflection.

This participatory role strengthens the relationship between sustainability and public value creation. Sustainable theatres are not limited to reducing environmental impact; they also contribute to inclusion, accessibility, and community wellbeing.

The Teatro Franco Parenti case ultimately demonstrates how contemporary theatre institutions increasingly function as cultural and urban infrastructures, rather than solely as artistic venues.

The institution integrates artistic programming, urban regeneration, public participation, and social interaction within a unified organisational ecosystem. This multifunctional role reflects broader transformations affecting cultural institutions in contemporary cities.

5.5 Empirical Evidence of Sustainability and Institutional Impact

The Teatro Franco Parenti case demonstrates the practical implementation of sustainability-oriented and regenerative theatre management through concrete organisational, spatial, and audience-related indicators.

One of the most significant aspects concern the scale and continuity of public participation generated by the institution. According to institutional data, the Teatro Franco Parenti ecosystem – including the theatre, the Bagni Misteriosi, and related cultural spaces – records approximately 227,000 annual attendances across twelve months of activity. Of these, about 130,000 attendances are directly associated with theatre programming, while approximately 97,000 relate to the Bagni Misteriosi and complementary cultural activities. Seasonal programming at the Bagni Misteriosi alone attracts around 80,000 summer attendances, demonstrating the institution's capacity to stimulate urban participation beyond traditional theatrical consumption (Teatro Franco Parenti, 2026).

The institution also demonstrates significant audience diversification and community engagement. Audience profiling data reveal a heterogeneous public comprising not only traditional theatre audiences but also younger and culturally diverse participants. The theatre maintains a broad communication ecosystem involving newsletters, digital platforms, social media, and membership communities, contributing to long-term stakeholder engagement and institutional visibility (Teatro Franco Parenti, 2025).

From a managerial perspective, Teatro Franco Parenti has developed a multifunctional cultural ecosystem integrating theatre productions, interdisciplinary programming, concerts, workshops, debates, exhibitions, and urban cultural events.

The Bagni Misteriosi project is a particularly significant example of adaptive reuse and cultural regeneration. Originally abandoned, the former Caimi bathing complex was transformed into a multifunctional public environment combining cultural programming, leisure activities, and participatory urban experiences (Ricci, 2021).

The theatre further strengthened its sustainability-oriented positioning through interdisciplinary collaborations and partnerships with artistic organisations, urban cultural actors, and design-related initiatives. Events such as *Tranceparenti*, organised in collaboration with Threes Productions, integrated music experimentation, site-specific performance, and spatial innovation within the Bagni Misteriosi environment, reinforcing the institution's role as a platform for cultural experimentation and hybrid participation practices.

The urban impact of the institution is equally significant. The Teatro Franco Parenti and Bagni Misteriosi ecosystem contributed to revitalising the Porta Romana district by transforming a previously neglected urban area into accessible cultural and civic infrastructure. The project demonstrates how adaptive reuse can generate environmental, social, and symbolic value simultaneously, strengthening territorial identity and public accessibility (Ricci, 2021).

These empirical elements reinforce the interpretation of Teatro Franco Parenti not merely as a theatre venue but as a regenerative cultural ecosystem capable of integrating sustainability, governance quality, public participation and urban transformation within a coherent institutional model.

6. Discussion

Considering the four research questions, the literature and case study reveal that sustainability is fundamentally reshaping contemporary theatre management by shifting the focus from short-term achievements to long-term organisational resilience. This transition elevates sustainability from a purely ecological concern to the strategic and ethical foundation of institutional governance, guiding long-term planning and territorial responsibility (RQ1). Within this framework,

quality serves as the essential operational dimension that translates sustainability principles into institutional excellence (RQ2). By ensuring systematic coherence between the artistic mission, managerial reliability, and stakeholder accountability, quality functions as the vehicle through which sustainability becomes institutionally credible and effective. The findings further indicate that theatre institutions can successfully integrate environmental, social, cultural, and managerial dimensions by developing coherent organisational ecosystems. This integration is achieved through functional convergence, aligning resource responsibility and ecological awareness with curatorial consistency and strategic governance. The spatial dimension also plays a crucial role, as the adaptive reuse and multifunctional management of physical venues enable theatres to pursue social inclusion and urban regeneration simultaneously (RQ3).

Teatro Franco Parenti serves as a quintessential model of regenerative theatre management through its unique "cultural ecosystem" approach (RQ4). In fact, its analysis shows that sustainability in contemporary theatre management extends well beyond environmental responsibility. Sustainability increasingly serves as an institutional philosophy shaping governance structures, artistic programming, stakeholder relationships, and urban strategies (Mock, 2023).

One of the central findings of this study concerns the relationship between sustainability and quality. Sustainability alone does not automatically generate institutional excellence. Sustainable principles become transformative only when translated into coherent organisational processes through quality-oriented governance. Quality thus serves as the managerial infrastructure that enables sustainability to become operationally effective and institutionally credible (Birke & Keil, 2026).

The findings suggest that quality serves as the mediating organisational mechanism by which sustainability is translated into regenerative institutional excellence.

The Teatro Franco Parenti case illustrates this integration particularly clearly. The institution combines artistic experimentation, flexible governance, urban regeneration and participatory programming within a coherent organisational ecosystem. The redevelopment of the Bagni Misteriosi further demonstrates how adaptive reuse and multifunctional cultural spaces can generate environmental, social and cultural value simultaneously (Ricci, 2021).

The findings also reinforce the evolving role of theatre institutions in contemporary cities. Teatro Franco Parenti functions not only as a performance venue but also as a civic and urban infrastructure that contributes to public participation, territorial identity, and social cohesion. Through multifunctional programming and accessible public spaces, the institution broadens cultural participation beyond traditional spectatorship and strengthens relationships between theatre, urban life, and community engagement (Benington & Moore, 2011).

Another important implication concerns organisational resilience. The study suggests that resilient cultural institutions are characterised by adaptive governance, diversified programming, collaborative stakeholder networks, and a strong institutional identity. Sustainability and resilience therefore emerge as closely interconnected dimensions of contemporary excellence (Esposito et al., 2025).

Table 3 summarises strategic behaviours in the Teatro Franco Parenti.

Table 3. Strategic behaviours in the Teatro Franco Parenti

Concept	Strategic behaviours
Sustainability	-Adaptive reuse of the former Caimi bathing complex into the Bagni Misteriosi -Multifunctional use of cultural and urban spaces -Participatory and accessible programming Integration between cultural activities and urban regeneration -Diversified organisational ecosystem supporting long-term resilience
Quality	-Strong alignment between artistic identity and organisational strategy -Governance continuity under Andrée Ruth Shammah's leadership -Consistency between spatial transformation and institutional mission -Diversified but coherent cultural programming -Long-term stakeholder trust and institutional legitimacy within Milan's cultural ecosystem
Excellence	-Recognition of Teatro Franco Parenti as a major cultural actor within Milan -Integration of theatre, public participation and urban regeneration -Ability to combine artistic experimentation with organisational continuity -Civic and territorial relevance beyond performance production alone -Development of a regenerative cultural ecosystem linking culture, urban life and community engagement

Source: Author's elaboration

More broadly, the findings support a shift from sustainability-oriented management to regenerative cultural governance. Regenerative institutions do not merely minimise negative impact or preserve organisational continuity; they actively contribute to cultural, social, and urban transformation through interconnected and participatory ecosystems (Rodrigues & Ventura, 2025b).

The study therefore proposes a regenerative model of theatre management in which excellence emerges from the integration of sustainability, quality, resilience, and public value creation within adaptive cultural ecosystems.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between sustainability, quality, and excellence in contemporary theatre management, using the case of Teatro Franco Parenti in Milan.

The findings demonstrate that sustainability can no longer be interpreted as a peripheral or exclusively environmental concern within cultural organisations. Rather, sustainability increasingly functions as a multidimensional organisational paradigm, integrating ecological responsibility, social participation, cultural continuity, governance coherence, and institutional resilience.

The analysis further shows that sustainability alone is insufficient to generate institutional excellence. Sustainable principles become strategically effective only when translated into coherent managerial and organisational practices through quality-oriented governance.

The Teatro Franco Parenti case demonstrates how artistic experimentation, adaptive governance, participatory programming, and urban regeneration can function within an integrated cultural ecosystem that generates artistic, social, and territorial value simultaneously.

The redevelopment of the Bagni Misteriosi particularly demonstrates how adaptive reuse and multifunctional cultural infrastructures can contribute to environmental sustainability, public participation, and urban revitalisation within a coherent institutional framework.

7.1. Theoretical contribution and managerial implications

The paper contributes to contemporary theatre management and cultural governance debates by developing an integrated framework in which sustainability forms the strategic and ethical foundation of cultural organisations, while quality serves as the organisational mechanism through which regenerative institutional excellence and long-term public value are achieved.

A central theoretical contribution is the reinterpretation of excellence. Contemporary excellence in theatre management can no longer be understood solely through artistic prestige, institutional visibility, or economic performance. Instead, excellence arises from the systemic integration of sustainability, governance quality, resilience, and public relevance within adaptive cultural ecosystems.

The study therefore proposes a regenerative perspective on theatre management, in which cultural institutions increasingly function as interconnected civic and territorial infrastructures rather than as isolated artistic venues.

Considering the managerial implications, the findings have several consequences for theatre managers and cultural policymakers. First, sustainability should be integrated into governance structures, programming strategies, and institutional identity, rather than treated as an isolated environmental initiative. Sustainable theatre management requires long-term planning, adaptive governance, and organisational coherence. Second, contemporary theatre institutions increasingly benefit from multifunctional and participatory cultural ecosystems capable of strengthening that enhance accessibility, stakeholder engagement, and institutional resilience. Third, the study highlights the strategic importance of adaptive reuse and urban-cultural regeneration. Cultural institutions can contribute significantly to territorial development and public participation by transforming historical and underutilised urban spaces.

Future cultural leadership increasingly requires hybrid competencies combining artistic sensitivity, sustainability-oriented governance, organisational adaptability and civic engagement.

7.2 Limitations and future research

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The study is based on a single qualitative case study and therefore does not aim for statistical generalisation or representativeness, as different institutional contexts may produce varying sustainability dynamics depending on governance structures, funding systems, and territorial conditions.

Furthermore, the research relies primarily on secondary sources rather than direct ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, or quantitative indicators; consequently, the analysis privileges organizational priorities organisational and conceptual dimensions over operational measurements. Given that concepts such as sustainability, quality, and excellence remain multidimensional and context-dependent, future research could integrate audience analysis and environmental performance measurement, explore comparative analyses across different theatre systems, and further develop frameworks for evaluating resilience and public value. Despite these constraints, the study provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding the transition from sustainability-oriented management to regenerative cultural ecosystems, representing a particularly promising direction for future research in institutional excellence and cultural governance.

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