

# Designing a beautiful organization. Empirical evidence of the aesthetic dimensions of organizations

Alessandra Ricciardelli\*, Gianluigi Mangia†

Summary: 1. Introduction – 2. Aesthetics in organizational research – 3. The organizational dimensions of beauty – 4. Research methodology – 4.1 Selecting case-study – 4.2 MacNil’s profile – 4.3 Procedures of data collection – 4.4 Data analysis – 5. Results – 5.1 Case-study description – 5.2 The impacts of aesthetics on the organizational design of MacNil – 5.3 The role of the local government in influencing beauty – 6. Discussion – 7. Conclusions – References.

## Abstract

Organizational aesthetics stands as a specific research stream within organizational studies. Organizational aesthetics emphasizes, on the one hand, the cultural dimension by considering cultural, symbolic elements as well as the pathos of the organization. This perspective focuses on the pursuit of organizational beauty, which is considered to influence performance. On the other hand, organizational aesthetics goes beyond the symbols to look at how organizations “feel and perceive” beauty, hence, how they pursue it. This perspective affects organizational performance, as well. This stream of research is useful because it sheds light on aspects that deal with, in a less conventional way, the issue of organizational performance. The positive relationship between aesthetics and performance is illustrated through the case of MacNil’s, an IT and TLC company. Through the analysis of this case study, this study leverages on theories of organizational aesthetics aiming to understand how the pursuit of beauty by organizations triggers material and immaterial impacts for organizations and their environments. The paper thus contributes to filling a gap in the organizational aesthetics literature, as well as raising the awareness of practitioners about the practical value of aesthetics.

**Keywords:** organizational aesthetics, organizational design, aesthetic sensibility

---

\* **Alessandra Ricciardelli**, Lecturer of Organizational Behaviour, Department of Management, Finance and Technology, Università LUM “G. Degennaro”, Casamassima, Italy; E-mail: ricciardelli@lbsc.it

† **Gianluigi Mangia**, Full Professor of Organization Studies, Department of Economics, Management, Institutions, University of Napoli Federico II, Italy; E-mail: gianluigi.mangia@unina.it

## 1. Introduction

In our modern economy, changes in the role of people's experiences and emotions are very much evident. What is considered of primary importance in life is satisfaction with respect to the context that the individual lives according to the idea that, ideally, everyone should have the opportunity to spend a significant part of his/her life, in terms of time and relevance, in an environment that is considered beautiful and motivating. Subject to functional, effectiveness and efficiency requirements, the literature suggests that it is possible to create favourable conditions for the development of an organizational environment that is aesthetically satisfactory (van Aken et al., 2012). The aesthetic approach enables us to consider an organization from a new perspective. Creating conditions instrumental to an aesthetic perspective means to anticipate a change in the organization and its processes, as well as to change the perspective of stakeholders, developing their sensitivity to aesthetics and awareness of organizational beauty.

There are two most important key issues of organizational aesthetics: it prepares for and enables change; it is relevant not only for corporate image, but also for organizational dynamics, such as employee satisfaction, which is directly linked to the business performance of an organization. In other words, employees' satisfaction is a driver of performance for the organization itself (Weggeman et al., 2007).

According to the aforementioned premises, it can be finally argued that the term of *aesthetics* is used in organizational studies in a general sense, to refer to all kinds of sensory experience and not simply to experiencing what is socially described as beautiful.

A general overview of the literature on aesthetics applied to organizations enables the acknowledgement of the different use of the concept of aesthetics in organizational studies and how it differentiates the method and content of the research. The content of research on organizational aesthetics can take on two main characters: one is instrumental to the study of organizational phenomena (Guille'n, 1997; Witz et al., 2003) the other is purely aesthetic (Romme, 2003). This general overview is essential to conduct a more detailed literature review based on the analysis of aesthetic approaches used in organizational studies that characterise the aesthetic dimensions of work and organizations.

It is important to mention that aesthetic understanding of organizational life is an epistemological statement and allows overcoming a static representation of the spatial dimension of organizations, by developing, instead, a performative and processual understanding of the relationship between physical space and organizational life. Informed by the more general theoretical shift from organization to organizing (Czarniawska, 2008), a performative and processual view of aesthetics (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011; Hernes et al., 2006) is aimed to "orient the understanding of organizational space toward its material, embodied, affective and minor configurations" (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011: 45). By the same token, Yanow (2006) argues that the physical setting of organization, through its materiality, is not viewed as an empty container where social action takes place, but as a space that conveys organizational meanings and messages to those who live therein (Yanow, 2006).

There is a further area of study, which considers the organizations and the organizational culture in line with the determination of products in terms of symbolic or aesthetic value rather than on the value of use. These studies refer to organizations in industries where the aesthetic experience (sensory knowledge learned directly from one's feelings) is more important than functionality (Weggeman et al., 2007). The empirical case analysed in this study provides concrete evidence of the aesthetic dimensions of organizations and the contribution that this perspective can offer in line with the valorisation of the person and his or her abilities. The proposed analysis highlights the core elements of beauty present in organizations and companies: the attention to the territory and the surrounding community places organizations as promoters of social welfare and awareness of culture. Beauty at work can thus be an important catalyst, a spin-off of culture that contributes to improving the emotional commitment and performance of workers. Some of the dependent variables of organizational beauty are: employee satisfaction (Faisal, 2020), employee organizational commitment (Ivanaj et al., 2018), employee behaviour and performance (e.g., extra-role behaviour and OCB, task performance).

This article is based on a single case study: an Italian IT company, which has stood out for its corporate social responsibility and its effort to improve the organizational performance through intangible values that have been drivers for intrinsic motivation. This case study offers the opportunity to analyse the role of local government as facilitating an aesthetically pleasing organization where the aspects of aesthetics and performance are in balance. Indeed, although much of the existing literature has theorized and analysed the concepts of governing and aesthetics separately, there is an important role played by public authorities in promoting beauty in territorial and organizational contexts (He & Qian, 2023). This study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the impacts of aesthetics on the organizational design?

RQ2: What is the role of local government in influencing beauty and enhancing organizational performance?

The implications of the present study will look at the rise of best practices in terms of aesthetics of an organization, with hints for managers, which are asked to give better response to employees in terms of transferring knowledge and action related to cultural values of beauty and ethics in order to boost organizational performance. Similarly, the exogenous impact of local government is taken as a starting point to analyse and suggest addresses of intervention for policymakers to enable and foster organizational performance strategies.

The reminder of this article is organised as follows: Section 2 and 3 present the background of the study; Section 4 introduces the methodology. Section 5 brings in the results of the study while Section 6 deals with the discussion. The last section draws the conclusions.

## 2. Aesthetics in organizational research

The first works conducted on the notion of organizational aesthetic date back to the nineties and refer to studies by Gagliardi (1990, 1996) and Strati (1990, 1992, 1996, 1999). Both authors argued the relevance of studying organizational aesthetics that enables a better knowledge of how meanings are designed and promoted inside the cultural environment of an organization (Weggeman et al., 2007). In the general sense, aesthetic experience includes (Gagliardi, 2002):

- a) a form of sensory knowledge (other than intellectual knowledge): often unconscious or tacit, that is, not formally literally translated;
- b) a form of expressive action: it is spontaneous and not influenced by external factors;
- c) a form of communication (other than speech) that can occur to the extent that expressive actions, or the artefacts they produce, become the object of sensory knowledge, thus a way of disseminating and sharing an extraordinary knowledge.

The field of research pertaining to organizational aesthetics has been largely concerned with analysing the beauty of material products associated with organizations; however, beauty at work can also be associated with other strands such as Organizational Development, positive psychology, happiness research, humanistic management and Total Quality Control (Minghetti, 2014; Mohrman, 2007; Peltokorpi, 2008; van Aken et al., 2012).

The content of research on organizational aesthetics can take on two main characteristics: an instrumental character to the study of organizational phenomena or a purely aesthetic character (van Aken, 2004; Romme, 2003).

In the first case, studies consider organizational research issues primarily oriented towards efficiency and effectiveness, thus considering aesthetics as a criterion of judgment. For example, in Taylorism and the scientific management of work, what qualifies a job as beautiful is the achievement of certain standards and objectives measured and arranged from the perspective of efficiency (Guille'n, 1997). This perspective of beauty, connected to the achievement of a set of standards and goals is still dominant in modern organizations. The statement "it works beautifully" refers to smooth, efficient operation, exactly as intended: the realization of twentieth-century management ideals of planning and control (Taylor & Hansen, 2005).

Many approaches of the organizational aesthetics phenomenon are called positivist or simply functionalist as they are based exclusively on analytical and rational methods, privileging the "cognitive and rational dimensions of social action" (Strati, 2010) and showing interest only in the utilitarian and instrumental qualities. (Ratiu, 2017). In other words, elements of the aesthetic dimensions shall be used to increase the non-economic wellness of organizations.

The second perspective of inquiry is characterized by the aesthetic themes that address the everyday feeling of the organization, from the perspective of beauty and ugliness, or aesthetic contents that belong to organizational research, such as change management, employee wellness, working environment and so on (Strati, 2010). In particular, if the feeling of what is part of a group is expressed through aesthetic

forms, the literature on relationality adopts aesthetics as a fundamental form of investigation of social action. Aesthetic sentiment constitutes, in this case, an active connection in the organization capable of discriminating among participants in organizational life, aggregating some over others (Strati, 2010).

Hence, it could be argued that aesthetic understanding of organizational life goes beyond the metaphor and its instrumental trait since artefacts do not simply express organizational values in symbolic form, but “enact” specific behaviours with their own materiality, with what they make people do and feel (De Molli, 2019).

A large piece of literature also contains most of the work done regarding organizational aesthetics that employs artistic form as an organizational metaphor (Berniker, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Lewin, 1998; Weick, 1998). In these studies, the organization is compared to a theatre and, through role-play, simulations and staff cabaret processes, the intellectual methodological process is used to portray the dynamics of production or management with a view to building a better organizational climate, providing an unconventional professional training experience, or allowing people to identify with the values of corporate culture. These studies include a critical analysis of the organizational situation that is carried out on an aesthetic and emotional level in order to stimulate self-reflection on everyday working life.

### **3. The organizational dimensions of beauty**

*“A beautiful organization is an organization whose stakeholders share a sustainable positive aesthetic judgment on it” (van Aken et al., 2012; p. 8).*

The definition of a beautiful organization, as suggested above, highlights a very important element: the sharing of a judgment. Arguably, an organization can be considered as beautiful if there is some level of consensus among stakeholders. A positive aesthetic judgment does not imply that stakeholders judge everything in their organization to be beautiful.

An ugly organization is just as important as a beautiful organization. Unfortunately, manifesting this judgment is much easier than the previous example because this aspect is much more intuitive and common and quite easy to create and develop: the example is given by organizations characterized by abusive leadership. This particular work context can be a source of negative aesthetic experiences and, if constant over time, can easily lead to negative aesthetic judgments (Sandelands & Buckner, 1989; Weick, 1969).

Literature regarding bad experiences refers primarily to negative events and their consequences such as bullying, perceived unhappiness, and layoffs. It is important to note that personal judgment about an organization results in direct consequences; beauty resulting from a positive judgment can lead to positive affective commitment and better performance while a negative judgment can lead to employee withdrawal, silencing, absenteeism, turnover, and alienation from work (Brandes & Das, 2006; McCardle, 2007).

According to Taylor (2013), beauty is not inherently associated with any type of craft or art: it is simply the situation in which something is performed or done so well that it triggers in others a direct and heartfelt experience that leads them to qualify it as beautiful. Taylor (2013) defines such craft skills as “little beauties”: small moments when, for example, a particularly astute observation is made or when a small thing works perfectly. These craft skills are also exceptional as they relate for example to humour, interpersonal communication, or organizational politics.

Another research trend on what concerns the dimension of beauty has focused on the working environment. As a context of continuous interaction among organization members, the quality of the atmosphere of the working place has a fundamental role in building organizational beauty (Julmi, 2017). Scholars argue that working in an aesthetically pleasing environment can increase employees’ satisfaction and can have a positive effect on bottom line (Swanson & Davis, 2006). Indeed, the care for building the correct environment in the working place may contribute to several aspects related to health and wellness (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009) or to the emotional satisfaction of organizations’ members (Sharma & Black, 2001). In this sense, in the glance of environment harmonization, this positive metabolization of a beautiful working environment may have positive impacts on the surrounding territory, deriving from positive, welfare networks that benefit the entire community (Strati, 2010).

According to some scholars, the most interesting aspect in terms of organizational aesthetics research is organizational culture (Taylor & Hansen, 2005), which includes the search for alternative methods of knowledge construction (Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Hansen, 2005).

A discussion of aesthetics may absorb organizational resources without providing an immediate direct return in terms of instrumental outcomes, thus undermining organizational efficiency. In addition, a discussion of organizational aesthetics could weaken a leader’s position of power and effectiveness: as reported by Taylor (2002), a manager who is in the business of doing something beautiful is considered less powerful and less effective, as strength is associated with brutality, while beauty is associated with weakness.

#### **4. Research methodology**

It is important to emphasize that the focus on the aesthetic dimension means that the investigated organizational dimensions use aesthetics as an experience, thus as a tool for analysis within organizations (van Aken et al., 2012). The aesthetic understanding of organizations inevitably highlights the weaknesses of studies of social phenomena in organizational environments that exclusively rely and depend on rationality (Witz et al., 2003), since they fail to consider practical knowledge including senses and emotions.

A relevant theoretical foundation to aesthetically analyse case-study results is given by the fourfold perspective offered by Strati (2010), which describes four different components of implementation of aesthetics in organizations. First, the

archaeological approach that considers architectural/structural elements of organisations, including tangible and intangible elements (a brand's logo, the workplace visualization), highlighting the symbolism of art and aesthetics in organizational life. Second, the empathic-logical approach (Gagliardi, 1990; 1996) which focuses on the sensory aspects of conditions through which artefacts represent the premises for action. Third, the aesthetic approach deals with the ability to understand organisational life emotionally, with the intention of understanding how people interact within the organization and their ability to work in communities. This element is enriched with software components to integration and harmony among organisation members. Fourth, the artistic approach is structured to create a creative and playful atmosphere, which may help to create cohesion and connections among organisation members.

Concerning this study as part of the research on organizational beauty, the research methodology leverages on a single-case study. The latter is appropriate for two main reasons: firstly, because this research refers to an analysis of complex phenomena that constitute a new field of research (Eisenhardt, 1989). Secondly, although it is not a new field of research nor unexplored within organizational studies, this study allows the analysis of a particular situation that may be revelatory or representative. Also, as Benbasat et al. (1987) states: "*case methodology is clearly useful when a natural setting or a focus on contemporary events is needed*" (p. 372). Thus, one organization operating in the region of Apulia, characterized by a marked sensitivity to the art of beauty, has been identified and its peculiar characteristics were analysed.

#### **4.1 Selecting the case-study**

This study is based on an in-depth analysis of the case MacNil, which represents a virtuous case of "organizational beauty" in Southern Italy. Other companies at both international and national level show structural and context characteristic which are completely different from those of MacNil.

#### **4.2 MacNil's profile**

This case study is conducted on MacNil, an IT, electronics and telecommunications company specialising in the development of M2M and IoT (Internet of Things) projects located in Gravina in Puglia, an Italian town at the core of the Murgia area, located north-west of the regional capital, Bari. It designs integrated systems for Smart Cities and remote-control systems in the Automotive, Telematics and Telemedicine sectors. It develops Digital Mobile Marketing platforms to create, publish and measure landing pages for smartphones and social networks. All the platforms are in the cloud and can be used in SaaS (Software as a Service) mode with remote access via browser and Apps. Thanks to the expertise and experience gained

over the years, MacNil is able to propose an innovative, wide and modular, offer of selected and certified products for different markets and sectors.

In 2014, MacNil became part of the Italian-renowned Zucchetti Group to further enhance its product and service offering, and to grow even further in its domestic and international markets. In 2016, through the Zucchetti Group's acquisition of Getronic, a leader in the automotive sector and partner of the world's leading car manufacturers, owner of the GT Auto Alarm, GT Sat System, GT Moto Alarm and GT Casa Alarm brands, MacNil Zucchetti aimed to become leader in security in Italy and Europe. In January 2022, MacNil completed the acquisition of 51% of the share capital from the Zucchetti Group, selling 100% of the shares of the last two companies acquired in 2019, therefore currently the entire ownership of the company remains in Puglia with the acquisition of 100% of the capital by the founding entrepreneurs.

Today, MacNil is one of the first companies in Italy expert in IoT with a strong expertise in Automotive, Smart Cities, Health and Electric Mobility. Today MacNil has a turnover of around 10 million, with 2 million EBITDA, and works in Italy and abroad, managing 50,000 private customers and 5,000 companies, with 15 distributors throughout Europe. It has 70 employees in total: 50 employees work in the main headquarter in Gravina in Puglia where research and development is carried out in the IT and automotive services sectors; while 20 are employed in the Busto Arsizio branch, in the region of Lombardy, and deal with electronic design and delivery.

MacNil also collaborates in research projects with the Polytechnic of Bari and other public and private universities and research centres. It has been involved for several years in initiatives linked to the world of start-ups as well as environmental, social and cultural projects.

MacNil's organizational structure includes five main departments: Software Development, Marketing & Business Development, Research & Development, Customer Care, and the Management Board.

MacNil hosts a "Vivaio Digitale" (Digital Nursery), a place dedicated to training, communication, events, open to the territory and networking with national and international partners. It was created to accompany the growth of new business ideas that can take root in the territory, to stimulate new ideas, talent, innovation projects and support start-ups. It is home to an academy to train new highly specialised professionals in the field of Logistics 4.0 as well as other fields of innovation. The vision of the company was that whatever came from the Digital Nursery would merge into a flourishing environment where people find comfort and feed the surrounding territory, the so-called Murgia Valley, as a whole.

### ***4.3 Procedures of data collection***

This study has adopted a mixed methodological approach according to Yin (2008). Collection of data was made through secondary data (such as documents) and primary data (interviews and direct observation by one of the researchers of this study, from now on researchers), followed by a detailed analysis.



As to secondary data, the documents analysed for this study have been the following<sup>1</sup>:

- Profit and loss statements
- Balance sheets
- Sales figures
- Inventory records
- Previous market research studies
- Statute of the company (year 1999) filed in the archives of the Chamber of Commerce of Bari
- Communication campaigns artefacts: posters, leaflets, brochure, documents
- Website: <https://www.MacNil.it/>

It is worth mentioning that profit and loss statements, balance sheets, sales figures, inventory records have all been provided by the company's CEO to the authors for the sake of this study.

Primary data refer first of all to interviews addressed to employees, territory's stakeholders (representatives of institutions, NGOs, local companies, schools, universities, citizens) and conducted by one of the researchers. Amongst the institutional representative interviewed, there are: the former Mayor of the city of Gravina, City councillors, school headmasters, professors of the Polytechnic of Bari and of the University of Bari, students participating within the academy. Interviews to multiple stakeholders allowed triangulation of data and differentiated analysis.

After a first step of non-structured interviews, which were sensitizing towards the object of study, a second step of semi-structured interviews focused on aesthetic aspects.

Primary data has also comprised of direct observation, carried out in two forms:

- Participation in meetings. The researcher has participated as an external consultant within MacNil meetings to gain knowledge of internal processes and dynamics, from an insider's perspective. In this way, the possible bias in the analysis of the phenomenon deriving from perspectives and perceptions of interviewees is reduced.
- Monitoring of social networks of MacNil channels. The researcher has analysed contents of social networks such as Facebook and Instagram in order to acknowledge connections amongst participants. Considering that social networks are relevant because of their interactive nature, observation and monitoring have been on a daily basis. By doing this, monitoring guarantees that interpretation of the phenomenon is made in line with a multi-stakeholder perspective.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is important to point out that MacNil's CEO provided for consultation the first four documents (Profit and loss statements; balance sheets; sales figures; inventory records) to the researcher.

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

Considering the qualitative nature of data that has been used for the sake of this study, the researcher has leveraged on Charmaz's grounded theory (2014) based on a methodology that suggests rigorous steps. Firstly, it starts by identifying "key points" that will be transformed into "codes" (Katamba et al., 2016). Secondly, those codes are grouped according to identifiable "concepts". Thirdly, concepts are used to form "categories" which become the basis to start hypothesis formulation and discussion.

In this study, the researchers decided to broaden Charmaz' theory (Charmaz, 2014) by leveraging on other speculations (Katamba et al., 2016; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Yin, 2008) in order to enhance the level of analysis. Having said that, data analysis has developed through three steps:

1. A cross-examination of raw data that starts from their general analysis in order to gain an overall knowledge of MacNil as a whole organization. It proceeds with a more meticulous analysis of the two research questions. By doing this, data has been adequately and appropriately assessed, while excluding data not in line with the scope of this research, visualised to allow preliminary conclusions.
2. Codification, conducted taking into account identification, denomination, extrapolation and classification of data. Along with grounded theory, codes are considered as useful to review and select data to be able to define an order and a complete view of the phenomenon under investigation. Data is later classified and, for the sake of this study, extrapolated according to a two-fold dimension: method (different sources) and subjects (different stakeholders). Ultimately, abstraction and comparison of data is conducted. More specifically, to give emphasis of linkages between results given by different methods and stakeholders, it has been necessary to carry out an analysis with the purpose of establishing the reasons of such behaviours (Turvey, 2011).
3. Interpretation refers to the collection of explanations that enable making topics and observations resulting from data more clear so to make reference to the purposes of this study. According to Charmaz's grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) and its advanced approach, displays enabling data visualisation have been used in order to organise and arrange results as well as select information in line with Miles and Huberman (1994). Following Yin (1993, 2008), this step has also considered an analytical strategy.

In order to ensure that data is valid and reliable, a thorough and twofold process has been undertaken: aggregation and triangulation. Such a technique is used to guarantee that results coming from a qualitative investigation are credible, accurate and valid (Creswell, 2007; Denzin, 2017; Stake, 2008). This study has adopted a four-type triangulation (Katamba et al., 2016).

- (I) Collecting data from all sources that have been analysed (i.e., primary and secondary data) and make a comparison between them; (II) adopting diverse methods of data collection that come, consequently, from different sources;

- (III) emphasising on the individual and autonomous investigation of the phenomenon that each researcher has conducted, and, when it comes to data analysis and implementation, all the required efforts have been adopted;
- (IV) leveraging the contents of the study.

## **5. Results**

### **5.1 Case-study description**

MacNil was born from the encounter between a computer scientist and an electronic engineer specialised in telecommunications. Both decided to use their skills and expertise to create a series of products, which, with well-known technologies, were able to satisfy common needs. The MacNil team was, thus, created with the aim of creating a technological hub in Southern Italy (in the Murgia Valley) through the union of companies specialising in their fields, with the common mission of offering their customers, on the national and international markets, highly qualified products and services through a widespread sales network of resellers and distributors.

By this light, MacNil was born out of the dimension of innovation and willingness to provide a service for the community and territory where it operates, which has an innovative factor pursued through a networked organization. Hence, the company stands as a business as well as a social and cultural experiment. It has been able to produce innovation in terms of generating content, creativity and collaborative networks with the territory.

If, as argued, the value of an artistic work is the result of dynamics occurring within an institutional context (Vickery, 2003), by the same token, the aesthetic value of MacNil has been socially and culturally built to conduct ideas enhancing both beauty and organizational performance.

According to these premises, it could be argued that MacNil stands as one of those organizations that creates aesthetic experiences for its territory (Strati, 2020) in order to enhance the community.

### **5.2 The impacts of aesthetic on the organizational design of MacNil**

The analysis of MacNil has shown that the aesthetic dimensions have produced impacts on the organizational design of the company itself. More specifically, it is possible to classify the impacts in two clusters: material and immaterial.

Amongst the immaterial impacts, it is important to refer to *personnel well-being*. This topic has been extensively studied in the literature (i.e., Joo & Lee, 2017; Schulte & Vainio, 2010) as well-being and happiness at work can generate very positive consequences for the organization (Kun & Gadanecz, 2022). In other words, this relationship leads to question to what extent people are happier when they

experience aesthetically pleasing processes and the reverse, if happier people make organizational processes more aesthetically pleasing.

With this regard, during a video-interview, the chief responsible for the Customer Care Department claims:

*".....any technological product or a software we place into the market explains the difference between a satisfied customer and a dissatisfied customer"...*

Another statement found in social media accounts, more specifically on MacNil's Instagram profile, refers to that of an employee working in the Marketing department: *"...by doing our job, we make an experience every day as we feel indeed intrinsically motivated"*.

Along these lines, another employee from the Human Resource Department, during an interview reported on the website, declares:

*"...the work I do makes me feel good and I can recognize that I take pleasure in this. I am convinced that what we do here is beautiful, not because we are paid to do that but because the work we do, which is related to MacNil production of technologically advanced artefact, is pleasant in itself".....*

Interview declarations are backed up by MacNil's 2020 annual integrated reporting that clearly emphasise this immaterial impact on MacNil that focuses on the well-being of employees. The latter originates in MacNil's enlightened vision of welfare that finds few virtuous examples in Southern Italy today, to help employees to deal with childcare. In the last 5 years, MacNil employees gave birth to 15 children overall, so it was urged to setup a nursery for the well-being of the mothers as well as for the company's overall productivity.

A legitimization of the public about the social responsibility of MacNil is a good way to interact with the territory, to generate good feelings about the presence of such a firm in a certain region, but it is between the lines that we observe the sense of such construction. The core of the issue regards the metabolization of non-financial values by workers, which must acquire the propaedeutic behavioural intention. This factor is more relevant than the public disclosure of the CSR values of the firm.

By this light, this immaterial aesthetic impact is the result of a manager's significantly developed sense of aesthetic in designing beautiful organizational structures. It can be defined as the aesthetic manager's attitude to inspire.

The role that the management plays is to pursue beauty, as Ackoff (1981) put it, and to create visions of the better and stimulate new aspirations to people working in the organization. Even though the connection between a manager's aesthetic sensibility and the aesthetic qualities of organizational design has been widely developed in the literature, this case study suggests that the effort of building MacNil reflects new and enduring values by the founding managers. During press interviews, the founding manger declared that:

*"...the construction of MacNil implied that before thinking of the business, we thought of a true community where people would have been close to each other. By community, I do not merely mean the ensemble of people working for MacNil, but all actors who*

*interact with the organization from the outside, hence public and private stakeholders.... To make this community live as healthier and at ease, MacNil has created an Innovation Lab and Digital Nursery a place dedicated to training and development of talent, hence, open to the territory and networking with national and international partners. We felt it our duty to contribute to the development of the Murgia area”.*

As part of the aesthetic sensibility impact, the aforementioned statement leads to the idea that people that work and live in beautiful surroundings will themselves live and work at an aesthetically elevated level (Strati, 2010). This is also found in the words of an interviewed employee working in the Quality/Environment and Risk Management Department who says:

*“...to describe MacNil I would say it is comfortably designed to ensure that each person feels all spaces as if they were one’s home” ...*

The characteristics of the 4,500 square metre headquarters show a special focus on people and the provision of a beautiful working environment, capable of stimulating the abilities and enhancing the talents of each individual (Strati, 2010; Swanson & Davis, 2006). The headquarters feature a shared space for thinking and discussion, called the Think Tank, created to conduct innovation processes, organise events with the most advanced technologies, and a gym to ensure fitness and personal leisure. Moreover, there are spaces dedicated to recreation, a work café, library, art exhibitions, and last but not least, a garden where zero km vegetables are grown and used for cooking in the company café. Knowledge-sharing activities such as exhibitions, experiences in digital culture and education, book presentations and training courses often take place on site.

MacNil’s awareness of beauty and art is also shown by the on-site presence of rooms dedicated to historical reconstruction and a celebration of the beauty of the city of origin.

Demonstration of the value of aesthetic sensibility is given by the education of the management. Indeed, education is functional to the improvement of the aesthetic sensitivity of governance, which will be keener to adopt aesthetic solutions (Weggeman et al., 2007). Hence, this shows a positive relationship between managers’ education and their capacity in promoting the development of aesthetic sensibility. This explains why attention given to aesthetics in management curricula increases aesthetic sensibilities of managers in their roles as organizational designers (Strati, 2020; Weggeman et al., 2007).

This orientation is stressed in the in words of the Chief of the Human Resources Department during a local television interview during the inauguration of the new headquarters in 2019:

*“...our company’s values are rooted in a focus on its stakeholders, both internal and external, and on the beauty of the organization in terms of sustainability, research and innovation. To be able to pursue research and innovation we have a team of specialised technicians who here are less and less employees and more and more co-businessmen in order to express their full potential and achieve excellent results. This is what MacNil does to give value to people. This is the driving force behind this company” ...*

Attention given to people's expertise and knowledge has consequently empowered workers to the extent that they have the power to act on their own authority, while fostering relational and social capital in each single department. By doing this a bottom-up wider workers' participation in management decisions is very much encouraged.

MacNil's experience shows a medium-sized entrepreneurial reality, where beauty is pursued through a wide range of concrete activities, aimed at promoting the well-being of people inside and outside the company boundaries, with a view to caring for the predisposition of the entire community towards innovation, a distinctive element that drives MacNil as an overall organization.

As far as the material impacts of aesthetics are concerned, this refers to the aesthetic quality of services produced by MacNil that influences business performance. Scholars argue that organizations able to generate beautiful goods will be more successful in their environment. It is true that aesthetic dimensions contribute to the successful growth of the business (Weggeman et al., 2007). However, to have a concrete idea of how beauty has an influence on business performance to the extent that it produces material impacts, it would be necessary to refer to the European Foundation for Quality Management (2004) as a tool for measuring successful performance.

Successful performance of MacNil is measured according to material data obtained through results in terms of people, customer, and society. Figures and numbers help understanding the level of satisfaction by the side of MacNil's employees, customers, and stakeholders.

With this regard, it is interesting to quote the words of former CEO of KFT Spa and GuardOne Italia (leaders in electronic remote control systems, design, and manufacture of GP systems), Giuseppe Meroni, after having handed his leadership to MacNil managers:

*"...amongst all players in the automotive market we have chosen to rely on MacNil for its long experience, innovative vision and continuity that it can offer to the development of KFT and GuardOne, enhancing the resources in the field and integrating them with its own".*

In order to climb to the top of the automotive market, thanks to the acquisition of the two new Lombardy companies, in 2019, MacNil doubled its presence within the national territory, bringing the number of offices in Italy to four. It has also doubled the number of employees from 70 to 150; and finally the turnover, thanks to such an enhanced operation, has increased to the value of about 20 million euros. According to MacNil manager:

*"...thanks to the entry of KFT Spa and GuardOne Italia in MacNil, we are aiming more strongly at the European market and will be able to offer the best existing solutions in the field of Black Boxes 4. 0 (Connected Car) and in-vehicle security for all vehicles, including commercial and heavy transport vehicles, making it the first Italian hub for car, home, and office security, with the guarantee of the largest Italian software groups..."*

### ***5.3 The role of the local Government in influencing beauty***

If on one hand, the impacts of aesthetics on the organizational design of MacNil have touched the material and immaterial spectrum of the organization, on the other hand, the role of the local Government (regional and municipal) in influencing beauty while enhancing MacNil performance has been also significant.

Such a strong willingness is shown in the political document (2015-2025) that is the political programme of the current Governor of the Region of Apulia that confirmed his election for two mandates. The ambition to achieve a “Wealthy and Innovative Community” stands as one of the most pivotal goals of the overall programme of the Governor. This goal was perfectly in line with the umbrella governing principles of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that encourages the creation of sustainable and resilient communities. The financial instrument called Programme Contracts, according to the Regional Government’s objectives, is aimed to support larger SMEs, medium-sized enterprises willing to make an integrated investment in the territory of the Region of Apulia.

The Region of Apulia has significantly supported the creation of the MacNil headquarters. Thanks to Puglia Sviluppo, the financial company of the Apulia Region, MacNil received substantial institutional support because its mission and vision fit into the regional government development programme for guaranteeing regional economic development. Puglia Sviluppo, as granting innovation aid to enterprises and facilitating access to credit and innovative finance, granted MacNil 6.5 million euro through a Programme Contract (Art. 17, Regional Registry 17/2014) co-financed by European Funds. Hence, funding was admitted and authorised on the basis of a research project to be conducted in the realm of IoT where MacNil has strong expertise within projects carried out in the related fields such as Automotive, Smart Cities, Health and Electric Mobility.

The allocation of financial resources by the regional government to MacNil is an indicative sign of the important role it plays as well as its political leadership in implementing a peripheral area of Apulia in need of excellence.

During the inauguration of the new headquarters in March 2019, the deputy Regional Governor declared:

*“...we felt it was our duty to contribute to the development of the Murgia area, investing on an innovative company that will grow local talent while offering attractive alternative to emigrate to the North or abroad. This is a proof to ourselves and to our territory that nothing is impossible” ...*

During the press conference held during the inauguration of the headquarters, DG of Puglia Sviluppo introduced the project to the audience and confirmed the decision of allocating resources to MacNil by making the following public statement:

*“...the community is called in to share this challenging project for the years to come. This is an extraordinary experiment not only for the company itself, but for the territory as a whole, for the community where MacNil operates: each of you can contribute to this challenge through your own experience, talent and ideas... to produce positive impacts on the people and environment of Murgia Valley...”*

## 6. Discussion

This study moves within the framework of organizational aesthetics to the extent that aesthetics is seen as a continuous and on-going process of sensory and sensitive knowledge development about work and the organization, whilst emphasising the art of performance of individuals and groups in organizational routines.

Aesthetics is also a process of organizing because it seeks to identify the presence of an ongoing, collective, social negotiation in the daily routine of work in organizations, that is, in the social practice that takes place within them. It is an evolving process grounded in the materiality of an organization's everyday life, which is characterized by processes of interaction inside the organization itself and between organizational actors and their communities. Aesthetics, in this study, is a paramount framework, which explains how organizational micro-processes are activated and experienced by individuals in their everyday work and how micro-practices developed, acted upon and negotiated help developing that sensory knowledge based on the corporeality of the perceptive-sensory faculties and the sensory-aesthetic judgment.

Even though MacNil is a young organization, its outputs are visible and known at a national level. MacNil represents an aesthetic experience for those who work in the organization and for those who, from the outside, gravitate towards it (stakeholders, partners, institutions, civil society). This case study has brought to the attention the concept of beauty as an added value in the competitive dynamics that organizations face every day (Ramírez, 1996; Strati, 1992; Weggeman et al., 2007).

MacNil has demonstrated an entrepreneurial reality whose organizational growth and business performance has depended significantly on the awareness of the culture of beauty and aesthetics. This latter concept is in this case, the immaterial and material impacts and results that MacNil has achieved along its path (Strati, 1996; van Aken et al., 2012). The analysis of MacNil shows that attention to aesthetic can strengthen and multiply performance outcomes. These impacts are inextricably interconnected: personnel well-being and ensuring inclusiveness, equality, creativity in the organization while fostering aesthetic sensibility to enhance the qualities organizational design are critical to realise service beauty, thus, a durable business performance.

The strengths of MacNil refer to the geographical area where it is located. This area has been marginal, for years, to the attention of the national and regional Governments that have followed; therefore, MacNil has taken the advantage of the peripheral status of such an area by creating a special bond with it. Hence, promotion of development of the Murgia area has started by drawing growth opportunities from it and by promoting that collective intelligence for the service of the community itself. In other words, it is possible to argue that MacNil, in pursuing organizational aesthetics, has been able to achieve:

- Excellent business performance based on an agile leadership. A joint management that is implemented by the employees, hence, it is not only top-down. Excellence, hence, as a form of beauty, is achieved by top-down management specification together with bottom-up planning by employees.



Such an agile joint coordination that increased the level of employee motivation and transparency amongst them make MacNil a service performing organization.

- A structured organizational beauty to the extent that MacNil produces beauty in the services that it creates and places on the market, and for the surroundings and the closer community. By structurally producing beauty per se and for others, MacNil becomes an actor able to contribute to community awareness about the potentials owned, hence, to exploit and enhance them to create a wealthy community.
- In this framework, the role of the local government fits in with two elements: political leadership in promoting a peripheral area and financial strategic decision connected to grants allowed.

## 7. Conclusions

The literature suggests that it is possible to create favourable conditions for the development of organizational beauty (van Aken et al., 2012). The aesthetic approach allows one to consider organizations from a new perspective, different from those generally used but focused on elements fundamental to success.

The creation of instrumental conditions for an aesthetic perspective corresponds to envisaging a change in the organization and its processes, as well as a change in the perspective of stakeholders, developing their aesthetic sensitivity and awareness of organizational beauty (Akgün et al., 2019). Organizational aesthetics can represent a strategic sensation/feeling for designing organization.

The attention of management towards more 'irrational' aspects can improve organizational well-being: there are in fact aspects that are intertwined with the needs and fundamental values of employees that can have a very strong impact on company results.

The proposed case study provides concrete evidence of beauty within an organization and the contribution it can make to enhance the value of people and their capabilities as well as of the territory and its community. In this way, organizations become promoters of social wellbeing and cultural awareness. Beauty at work can thus be an important catalyst, a spin-off of culture that contributes to improving the emotional commitment and performance of its workers.

The present study contains some limitations, which are related to the single-case type of analysis. This analysis needs to be replicated in other contexts gain more support and generalization, as well as credibility as a possible scheme to be adopted and implemented. The territorial heritage is a limit itself to the replication of analysis, or a founding pillar of adaptation to different business contexts. This can give hints to enable new research paths that take into account the territorial elements, in order to assess the impact of local culture on the aesthetic design of organizations.

In this light, the study may provide implications for managers, which, according to the local context of activity, may implement new forms of organizational beauty, based on the accountability and the responsibility of managing the atmosphere of an

organization. The adoption of best practices may enhance intrinsic motivation and the social wellbeing of the members of an organization. Other possible implications may involve government stakeholders, which are often detached from firms' welfare, to improve political strategies that look at the social sustainability and the wellbeing of organizations.

## References

- Ackoff, R.L. (1981). *Creating the corporate future: Plan or be planned for*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Akgün, A. E., Keskin, H., & Kırçovalı, S. Y. (2019). Organizational wisdom practices and firm product innovation. *Review of Managerial Science*, 13(1), 57–91. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-017-0243-2>.
- Benbasat, I., Goldstein, D. K., & Mead, M. (1987). The case research strategy in studies of information systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 11, 369–386. <http://doi.org/10.2307/248684>.
- Berniker, E. (1998). Working the jazz metaphor: Musings driving down I-5 past midnight. *Organization Science*, 9(5), 583–585. <http://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.9.5.583>.
- Beyes, T., & Steyaert, C. (2011). The ontological politics of artistic interventions: Implications for performing action research. *Action Research*, 9(1), 100 –115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750310396944>.
- Brandes, P., & Das, D. (2006). Locating behavioural cynicism at work: Construct issues and performance implications. In Perrewé, P.L. and Ganster, D.C. (Ed.) *Employee health, coping and methodologies*, Vol. 5, pp. 233–266. London: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: Sage.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Czarniawska, B. (2008). Organizing: how to study it and how to write about it. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 3(1), 4–20. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17465640810870364>.
- Denzin, N. K. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry under fire: Toward a new paradigm dialogue*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532–550. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258557>.
- European Foundation for Quality Management (2004). *EFQM excellence model: Public and voluntary sector version*. Brussels: European Foundation for Quality Management.
- Faisal, R. (2020). Analysis of competency to employee motivation and the impact to employee satisfaction (study cases at beauty services company). *Journal of Research in Business, Economics and Education*, 2(5), 1276–1285.
- Gagliardi, P. (1990). *Symbols and artifacts: Views of the corporate landscape*. New York, NY: De Gruyter.

- Gagliardi, P. (1996). Exploring the aesthetic side of organizational life. In Clegg, S., Hardy, C., & Nord, W. (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational studies*, pp. 565–580. London: Sage.
- Gagliardi, P. (2002). Exploring the aesthetic side of organizational life. *Organization Studies*, 55, 701–724. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781848608030>.
- Guille'n, M. F. (1997). Scientific management's lost aesthetic: Architecture, organization, and the Taylorized beauty of the mechanical. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 42(4), 682–715. <https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.52.3.492>.
- He, S., & Qian, J. (2023). Police and politics in aesthetics-based urban governance: Redevelopment and grassroots struggles in Enninglu, Guangzhou, China. *Antipode*.
- Hernes, T., Bakken, T., & Olsen, P. I. (2006). Spaces as process: Developing a recursive perspective on organisational space. In Clegg, S. R. and Kornberger M., *Space, Organizations and Management Theory. Advances in Organization Studies*, p. 17-44, Copenhagen, Liber & Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Katamba, D., Nkiko, C. M., & Ademson, C. (2016). Managing stakeholders' influence on embracing business code of conduct and ethics in a local pharmaceutical company: Case of Kampala Pharmaceutical Industries (KPI). *Review of International Business and Strategy*, 26(2), 261–290. <http://doi.org/10.1108/RIBS-02-2014-0028>.
- Kun, A., & Gadanez, P. (2022). Workplace happiness, well-being and their relationship with psychological capital: A study of Hungarian Teachers. *Current Psychology*, 41(1), 185–199. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-019-00550-0>.
- Joo, B. K., & Lee, I. (2017). Workplace happiness: Work engagement, career satisfaction, and subjective well-being. In *Evidence-based HRM: A global forum for empirical scholarship*. London: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Julmi, C. (2017). The concept of atmosphere in management and organization studies. *Organizational Aesthetics*, 6 (1), 4–30. <http://digitalcommons-wpi.edu/oa/vol6/iss1/2>.
- Ivanaj, V., Shrivastava, P., & Ivanaj, S. (2018). The value of beauty for organizations. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 189, 864–877. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.04.122>.
- Lewin, A. (1998). Jazz improvisation as a metaphor for organization theory: Introduction to the special issue. *Organization Science*, 9 (5), 539–622. <http://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.9.5.539>
- McCardle, J. G. (2007). *Organizational justice and workplace deviance: The role of organizational structure, powerlessness, and information salience*. Florida, FL: University of Central Florida.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. London: Sage.
- Minghetti, M. (2014). *Collaborative intelligence: Towards the social organization*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars.
- Mohrman, S. A. (2007). Having relevance and impact: The benefits of integrating the perspectives of design science and organizational development. *The Journal of*

- Applied Behavioral Science*, 43(1), 12–22.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886306297014>.
- Peltokorpi, V. (2008). Transactive memory systems. *Review of General Psychology*, 12(4), 378–394.
- Ramírez, R. (1996). Wrapping form and organizational beauty. *Organization*, 3(2), 233–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135050849632007>.
- Ratiu, D. E. (2017). The aesthetic account of everyday life in organizations: A report on recent developments in organizational research. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 47(3), 178–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2017.1303413>.
- Romme, A. G. L. (2003). Making a difference: Organization as design. *Organization Science*, 14(5), 558–573. DOI: 10.1287/orsc.14.5.558.16769.
- Sandelands, L. E., & Buckner, G. C. (1989). Of art and work: Aesthetic experience and the psychology of work feelings. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 11, 105–131. DOI: 10.1007/978-94-007-6510-8\_46.
- Schulte, P., & Vainio, H. (2010). Well-being at work—overview and perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 36(5), 422–429. <http://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.3076>.
- Sharma, U., & Black, P. (2001). Look good, feel better: Beauty therapy as emotional labour. *Sociology*, 35(4), 913–931. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038501035004007>.
- Stake, R. E. (2008). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*, pp. 119–149. London: Sage.
- Strati, A. (1990). Aesthetics and organizational skill. In Turner, B. (Ed.), *Organizational symbolism*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Strati, A. (1992). Aesthetic understanding of organizational life. *Academy of Management Review*, 17(3), 568–581. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258723>.
- Strati, A. (1996). Organizations viewed through the lens of aesthetics. *Organization*, 3(2), 209–218. <http://doi.org/10.1177/135050849632004>.
- Strati, A. (1999). *Organization and aesthetics*. London: Sage.
- Strati, A. (2010). Aesthetic understanding of work and organizational life: Approaches and research developments. *Sociology Compass*, 4(10), 880–893. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00323.x>.
- Strati, A. (2020). Beauty of responsible management: The lens and methodology of organizational aesthetics. In *Research handbook of responsible management* (pp. 410–419). New York, NY: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Swanson, S. R., & Davis, J. C. (2006). Arts patronage: A social identity perspective. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 14(2), 125–138. <https://doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679140203>.
- Taylor, S. S., (2002). Overcoming aesthetic muteness: Researching organizational members' aesthetic experience. *Human Relations*, 55(7), 821–840. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726702055007542>.

- Taylor, S. S. (2013). Little beauties: Aesthetics, craft skill, and the experience of beautiful action. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 22(1), 69–81. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492612441393>.
- Taylor, S. S., Hansen, H. (2005). Finding form: Looking at the field of organizational aesthetics. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(6), 1211–1231. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2005.00539.x>.
- Taylor, S. S., & Ladkin, D. (2009). Understanding arts-based methods in managerial development. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 8 (1), 55–69. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40214571>.
- Turvey, B. E. (2011). *Criminal profiling: An introduction to behavioral evidence analysis*. New York, NY: Academic press.
- Van Aken, J. E. (2004). Management research based on the paradigm of the design sciences: the quest for tested and grounded technological rules. *Journal of Management Studies*, 41(2), 219–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2004.00430.x>.
- Van Aken, J. E., de Groot, S. A., & Weggeman, M. C. D. P. (2012). Designing and developing beautiful organizations: a conceptual framework. In Weggeman M.C.D.P., *Innovation Technology Entrepreneurship & Marketing*. Academy of Management 2012 Annual Meeting: The Informal Economy. Boston, United States.
- Vickery, J. (2003). Organizing art: Constructing aesthetic value. *Culture and Organization*, 12(1), 51–63. <http://doi.org/10.1080/14759550500490568>
- Weggeman, M. C. D. P., Lammers, I., & Akkermans, H. A. (2007). Aesthetics from a design perspective. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 20(3), 346–358. DOI: 10.1108/09534810710740173.
- Weick, K. E. (1969). *The social psychology of organizing*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Weick, K. E. (1998). Improvisation as a mindset for organizational analysis. *Organization Science*, 9(5), 543–355. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.9.5.543>.
- Witz, A., Warhurst, C., & Nickson, D. (2003). The labour of aesthetics and the aesthetics of organization. *Organization*, 10 (1), 33–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508403010001375>.
- Yanow, D. (2006). Talking about practices: On Julian Orr’s talking about machines. *Organization Studies*, 27(12), 1743–1756. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840606071935>.
- Yin, R. K. (1993). *Applications of case study research*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (2008). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Newbury Park: Sage.