

3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference on

# ARTS, HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND EDUCATION

October 16-17, 2023 | Paris, France



## Prominence versus Eminence

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What processes determine the allocation of state funds to a selection of cultural and artistic organizations? In the case of the Dutch cultural basic infrastructure two main criteria are issued, namely quality and reputation. The way in which the selection and granting is performed shows striking similarity with processes described in the literature. First, the theory of social comparison (Festinger, 1954) asserts that people in a shared activity compare opinions and abilities in a strife for growth. When technical constraints and limits impede the progress in ability effort and attention shift to opinions on abilities of the members. In this social dimension growth is more easily attained. This decoupling results in stagnation and inferior learning processes. Second, Rindova and colleagues have proposed a model in which perceived quality and prominence determine which organization will receive price premiums. Perceived quality is indicated by the quality of the inputs and expert reports. Prominence originates from media rankings and elicited preferences of intermediary organizations and affiliation with high-status actors (Rindova, Williamson, Petkova, & Sever, 2005). Prominence has more bearing in social processes in the institutional field than on quality indicators. This model provides a basis for reputation bias among stakeholders of organizations.

Four cases of the Dutch cultural basic infrastructure are examined. In spite of the balanced design of the regulation, perceived quality is outweighed by prominence. The decision-making rule simulates a process that inevitably too happens in unregulated processes. Although seemingly more transparent, the prevalence of prominence induces serious side effects like goal displacement, favouritism, arbitrariness and collusion. Investments in the level of professional expertise and extension of the scope outsider views would give more weight to artistic quality and potential creative growth.