

Fratelli d'arte Cuticchio



PART A. PROFILE OF BUSINESS

Figli d'arte Cuticchio is an association created in 1977 by the master Mimmo Cuticchio, in order to preserve and pass over time the ancient art of the work of the puppets in Sicily. The association is a production unit able to produce shows controlling all the phases, from the realisation of the puppets armor, to the carving of the wood of their bodies, the painting of scenes and signs, up to the realization of the costumes and the composition of the scene music.

The Opera dei Pupi is a type of Puppet Theater whose characters are Charlemagne and his paladins. The exploits of these characters are treated through the reworking of the material contained in the novels and poems of the "Carolingian cycle", of the "History of the France Paladins" and of the "Orlando furioso". Puppets are called *pupi* (from the Latin "*pupus*", which means child). The *puparo* took care of the show, the screenplays, the puppets, and with a particular tone of voice, he was able to give suggestions, ardor and pathos to the epic scenes represented. Each puppet typically represented a precise paladin, characterized by armor and mantle. The *cuntista*, or the professional Carolingian cycle and epic-chivalric stories' narrator, was probably the main vehicle through which the work of *pupi* derived the subjects to be represented in its cyclic form. In 2008, UNESCO registered the Opera dei Pupi among the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, after having originally proclaimed it in 2001. It was the first Italian Heritage to be included in this list.

Therefore, the association manages a workshop where puppets are handcrafted and decorated and where the sets designed for the shows are built, a theater where the French paladins' stories (and not only) are staged, and a school for young apprentices of this ancient craft. This activity occupies the entire Cuticchio family, now in its 5th generation of professionals in the sector, which is managing an artisan-artistic business and preserving an ancient folk art with a huge impact on the folk and cultural heritage.

The association operates in several sectors: (1) in the artisan-artistic production sector, thanks to the wonderful creations of puppets and armors by the master Mimmo Cuticchio, (2) in the theater entertainment sector, in fact the master himself and his son Giacomo build the scenes, write screenplays and compose the music for the show, and finally (3) in the field of artistic and craft training thanks to the school for young apprentices.

PART B. THE FAMILY DIMENSION OF BUSINESS

Mimmo Cuticchio was born in a family of pupari from Palermo: his father was a great master of this art; the grandfather Girolamo ran a puppet theater, also taking care to recruit the "*opranti*", i.e. the maneuvers and the reciters; his mother, Pina Patti Cuticchio, still made the puppets costumes, the curtains, the bases and painted scenes and signs.



Figure 1 - Mimmo Cuticchio and the "pupi"

Cuticchio took his first steps in the wake of this tradition to realize that if he had not had the foresight to investigate with curiosity studying all the secrets of this art, that tradition would have lived in him as a tree without fruit, without the possibility to be handed down over time.

Driven by the need to preserve and embrace the family tradition, Mimmo asks his brothers for help, but they will never fully enter the family business, and create his own scenic language, recovering the reasons and the ways in which that patrimony of rules, alive in his

father, had been created. However, over time, the world of Puppet Theater of the Cuticchio family widens involving his wife, Elisa Puleo, in organizing the shows, painters, set designers and musicians as well as young artists thanks to the school close to the laboratories.

The family has always maintained a central role, indeed Giacomo, son of master Mimmo, once finished his studies of piano and composition decides to put his skills at the service of the family by including the music he composed inside the shows. Since the Puppet Theater is a very rhythmic show, the compositions of the young Cuticchio have inserted themselves in the representation in an even more effective manner, by scanning the times of the scene and the paladins' battles. The presence of music also makes the Cuticchio family's shows stand out compared to the other puppet theaters in Sicily. In fact, we are facing with the first case of musical compositions inserted in this context.

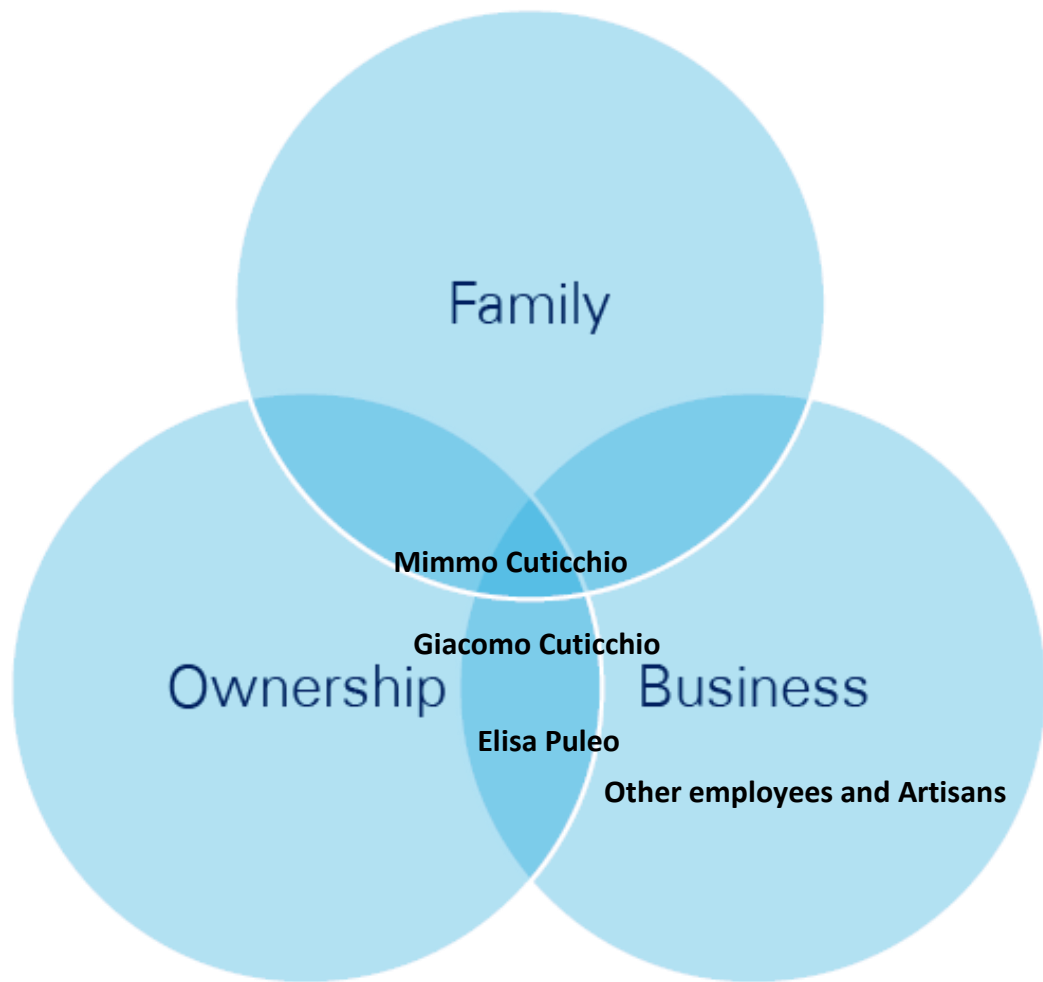
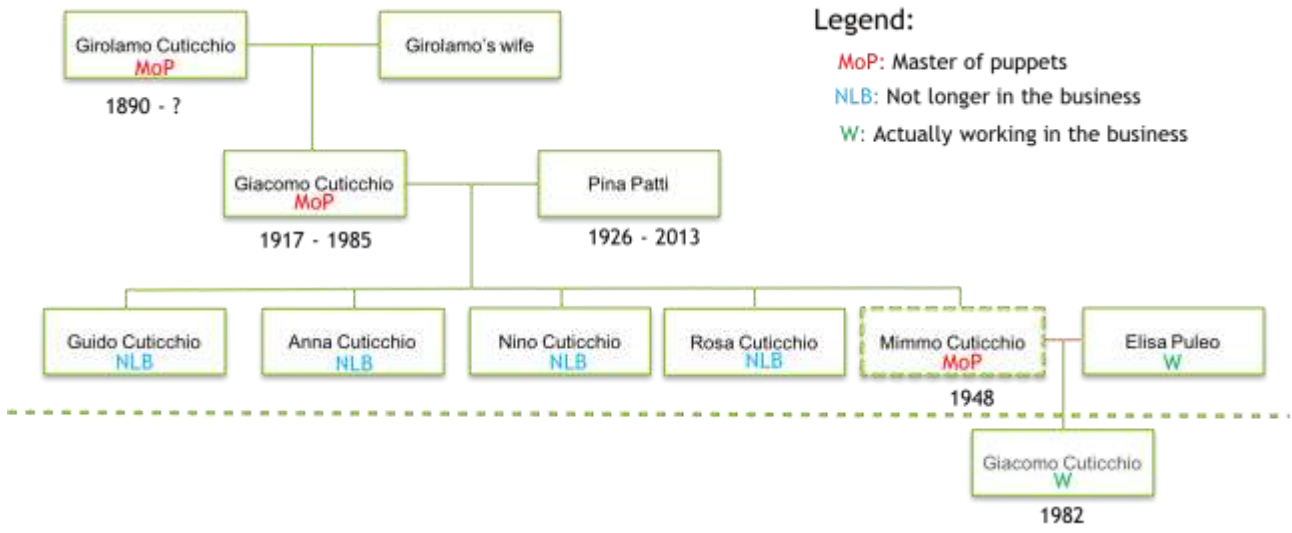


Figure 2 – Figli d’Arte Cuticchio 3-Circle diagram

PART C. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF BUSINESS GROWTH & SUCCESSION

The longevity of this centenary culture, and then of the Puppet theater of the Cuticchio family, has its roots in all the challenges that over time the various generations have managed to cope with and overcome with excellent results.



Figure 3 - Teatro Massimo view from Via Bara all'Olivella

The first challenge for the master Mimmo Cuticchio concerned the choice of the place where to build his laboratory and his theater: the historical center of Palermo. Mimmo decided to open his small theater in Via Bara all'Olivella, a side street in front of the famous Teatro Massimo. The historical center of Palermo in the 70s was not in good conditions. The population had migrated to the outskirts and tourists were not many, even though the area was full of monuments and areas of historical and cultural interest.

Rolled up his sleeves, the young Mimmo, decided to remedy this lack of customers focusing on a new target for his theatrical artistic product: children. The Puppet Theater until then had dealt with strong issues such as intrigues, charms, betrayals and murders. Trying to attract this new target meant changing the language but also the issues. Mimmo understood that the change was necessary, adapting to the circumstances without debasing

the art of Puppet Theater, which became the real Cuticchio family's strength.

However, the epic-chivalric poems were no longer enough, the audience demanded more variety of shows. Then, the master began studying the Greek epic and new possible scripts to please it. He decided to produce new puppets and new screenplays, capturing at the same time all the technical innovations of the modern theater. Therefore, as an artisan artist and expert in chivalric epic culture, he becomes a theater professional and begins to welcome different professions, such as lighting experts, audio technicians, composers and musicians (like his son Giacomo) and artisans apprentices opening a real school of pupari within his company. Artistic and technical innovation went hand-in-hand towards the realisation of a new, modern and dynamic Puppet Theater.

PART D: THE ENTREPRENEURIAL DIMENSION: OUTCOMES & BUSINESS MODEL

To date, in Via Bara all'Olivella can be found:

- the laboratory that has a series of exhibition spaces that collect the patrimony of puppets, spare heads, mythological animals, signs, scenes, curtains and little curtains, objects of stagecraft, stage machines, cylinder shelves of different sizes that enclose an arch of time extended between the second half of the nineteenth century and the present day;
- The theater that preserves a historical archive of over 50 manuscript scripts and a hundred of "canovacci". At the permanent exhibition, there is a video library and a tape one that collect shows not only of the Cuticchio family but of other Sicilian pupari and those of the largest

Puppet Theater in the world. A part of this material testifies the activity of Cav. Giacomo Cuticchio and the most experimental one by his son Mimmo.

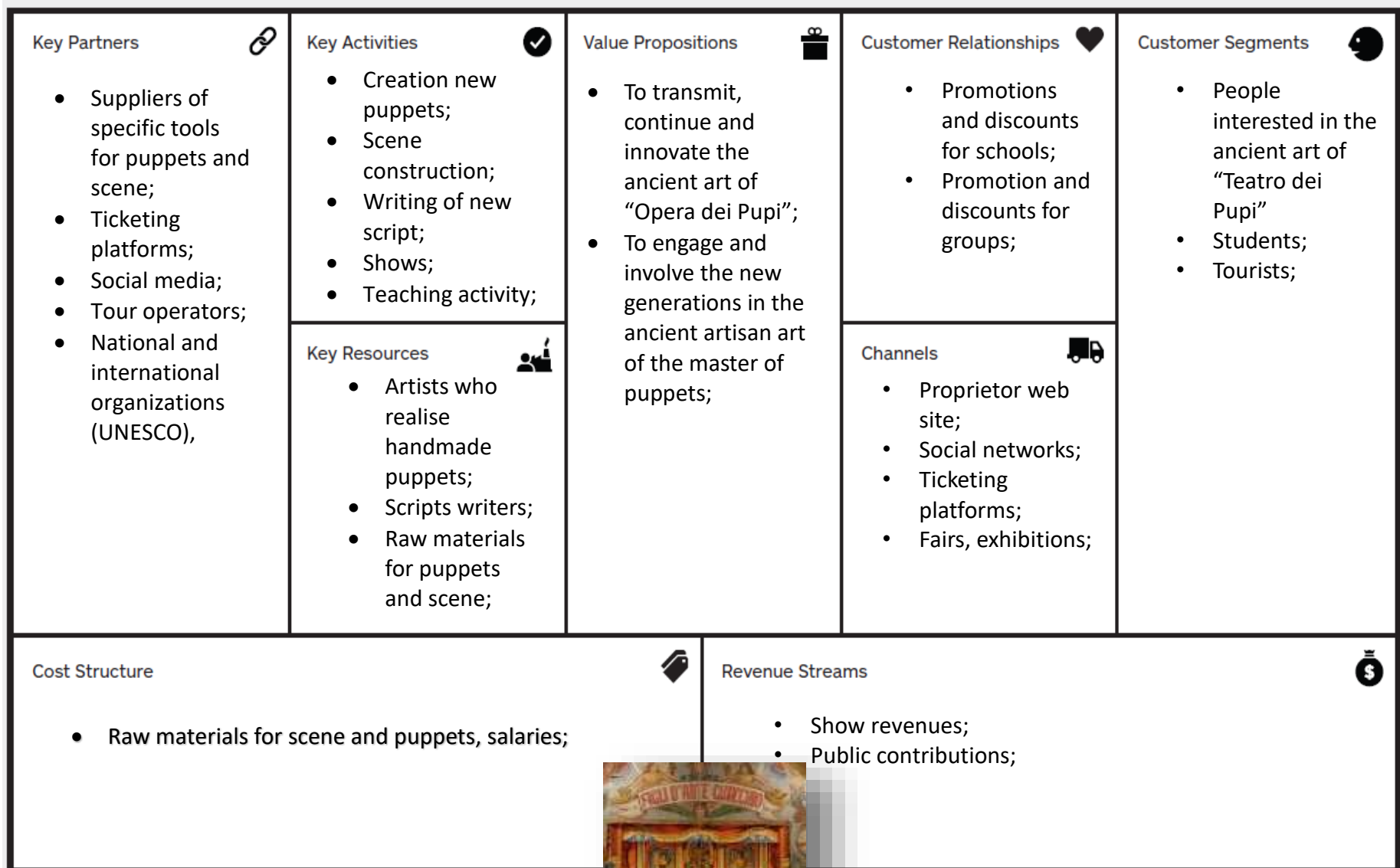
- Finally, the school for pupari and "*cuntisti*" opened in 1997. It is a very important stage in the evolution of the current Puppet Theater. The formation of young people (painters, sculptors, set designers, maneuvers) and the need for a continuous apprenticeship are the pillars of an artistic teaching that cannot afford to yield. Students, aged between 18 and 26, are prepared for the imperatives of a complete art and the whole of the project physically makes sense at the end of the third year of teaching, when deserving students can take part in a show directed by Mimmo Cuticchio. The project, come to light under the best auspices, makes use of the collaboration of prestigious cultural institutions of European level such as the International School of Theater Anthropology, the National Ecole Supérieure of the Arts de la Marionette of Charleville Mezières, the Degree Course in DAMS and the Department of Literary and Performing Communication of the University of Roma Tre, the Chairs of Theatre History and Dramaturgy of the University of L'Aquila.

Also very important for the growth of the business were the numerous collaborations with public and private entities and the awards obtained as:

- collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, which allowed the Cuticchio family business to bring their shows to various countries in the world, such as in Australia and Japan.
- In 2008, UNESCO recognized "the Opera dei Pupi" as an oral and intangible heritage of humanity.
- The establishment of an exhibition at the Quirinale palace, seat of the presidency of the Italian Republic, about the history of the Opera dei Pupi



Figura 4 - The entrance of the theatre



PART E. FAMILY ENTREPRENEURIALISM: LESSONS & CONCLUSION

Fratelli d'Arte Cuticchio is an example of how the centuries-old culture of a territory, if studied and rethought in accordance with the social and cultural changes of a land, can lead to great results both in art and business. The Cuticchio family is in full generational transition as the two generations find themselves working shoulder-to-shoulder exchanging opinions, contaminating themselves and seeking innovations in the artisan and theatrical field.

- Fratelli d'Arte Cuticchio teaches us that to improve the family business, everyone **must be able to pursue his or her passions**. In fact, the new generation has become an integral part of the business by providing to the organization new skills acquired through specialized studies in other sectors (in this case the musical composition sector, until then completely unknown to the world of Sicilian Puppet Theater). So the association is seen from family members as a possibility to fuel their passions and interests, as an opportunity to express themselves. Hence, this mechanism generates a truly strong commitment to the objectives that the company sets.
- Fratelli d'Arte Cuticchio also teaches us that **love for one's work** is a fundamental component for the longevity of a family business. It is even more, the ability to **make passionate and spread**, even outside the family, culture and love for craftsmanship and **tradition**. In fact, the company adds next to theater activities, side events such as the school for young "pupari", a great way to get involved and compare itself with new generations, both inside and outside the family.
- Mimmo Cuticchio and his family are also proof that the artisanal, cultural and traditional products have excellent opportunities for **internationalization**. Indeed, with the help of public entities and international organizations, it has been possible to broaden its borders and capture the attention of new cultures and new customers.

Having been able to grasp these new challenges launched by the global world, by innovating technically and artistically, and looking beyond their borders, is surely one of the reasons that make the Fratelli d'Arte Cuticchio Association a great example from which to take inspiration.



Figure 5 - Mimmo and Giacomo Cuticchio on stage



Figure 6 – Mimmo Cuticchio with Sergio Mattarella, President of the Italian Republic, and Leoluca Orlando, Palermo's Mayor