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Culture, sustainable development and social quality: A paradigm shift in the economic analysis of cultural production and heritage conservation

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Abstract

The aim of the special issue is to address the changing paradigm that the economic analysis of cultural production and heritage preservation has undergone in the last decade, with a particular emphasis on the cultural economic perspective. New emphasis on the role of creativity in society, the spread of the digital revolution and the reconsideration of culture and heritage as drivers of sustainable development and social quality are radically changing the analytical perspectives and research agenda. The selection of papers, involving some of the leading cultural economic scholars, present several dimensions of such evolving pattern.

Introduction

The aim of the special issue is to address and discuss the changing and evolving paradigm that the economic analysis of cultural production and heritage conservation has undergone in the last decade, with a particular emphasis on the cultural economic perspective. Following the first surveys in cultural economics (Throsby, 1994; Blaug, 2001; Ginsburgh, 2001; Towse, 2003) that almost 20 years ago summarized the expanding and burgeoning interest in the economic analysis of arts and culture, it is possible to highlight the paradigm and the themes that dominated this field in the past. One major focus has been given to the definition of the object of study and methods. The inquiry on how cultural products and expressions could be analysed as a form of economic goods has mainly lead to the application of standard economic analytical tools to two main topics, namely cultural production and consumption, on one hand, and heritage preservation on the other. Further, the studies have focused on cultural systems of western and industrialized societies, with the effect to ground the analysis on public and welfare economic issues, such as the public good dilemma posed by cultural and heritage goods and the institutional mechanisms to overcome such economic problem. However, major changes occurred in the last decades at the social, economic and technological level. In particular, a new emphasis on the role of creativity has led to a deeper recognition of the pervasive role of cultural production in terms of creative industries and talents. At the same time, the "digital revolution" has radically changed the pattern of production and consumption of culture. Further, the increased economic welfare achieved by nonwestern areas of the world has contributed to set culture and heritage in the policy agenda of several emerging countries. We contend that these factors have led and are currently leading to a new shift of the paradigm in the analysis of cultural production and heritage preservation, which has impacted cultural economics as well. For instance, we assist to a move from public and welfare economic approaches to ones in which the role of cultural production is better understood as an innovation and entrepreneurial activity. This change definitely requires more multidisciplinary

perspectives, in particular cross-fertilizing economics with geography, sociology and cultural studies. Further, as the aims and topics covered by this journal perfectly express (i.e. Kirchberg and Kagan, 2013; Lazzeretti, 2012), the past emphasis on the instrumental economic values and characteristics of cultural goods is also being replaced by an increased recognition of the importance of culture and creativity for their social quality and sustainable development dimensions. This special issue is a tribute to the memory of Prof. Walter Santagata, an Italian scholar who greatly strived to develop new intellectual paths in the cultural economic field. In his works, he has highlighted the importance of cultural districts as a driver of sustainable economic development (Santagata, 2002, 2006) as well as the necessity to consider cultural creativity for its impact to social quality rather than only as an input to markets (Santagata, 2010). Finally, he deepened the understanding of cultural goods as commons or shared resources (Bertacchini et al., 2012), providing new insights on the main factors and social dilemmas affecting the production and evolution of cultural expression and heritage.

Authors' contribution

The selection of papers published in this special issue, involving some of the leading cultural economic scholars, aims at providing an overview of such evolving perspective by addressing themes that were related to Santagata's intellectual contribution. In our view, the eight articles can be grouped along four main dimensions, according to the paradigm shift occurring in the economic analysis of cultural production and heritage conservation. The first dimension refers to changes in the analytical perspectives of cultural economics due to the emergence of new phenomena and conditions. The paper by Xavier Greffe investigates in particular how the new emphasis on creativity and the creative economy is leading to more dynamic and less welfare oriented approaches to study the production of new cultural content. In a similar vein, Pier Jean Benghozi shows the challenges cultural economics faces in interpreting markets of cultural content in the digital age, where old players and economic agents are displaced by new intermediaries, while firms and talents compete along new strategies and business models for producing and distributing cultural content. David Throsby and Christian Barrere address, as a second dimension, the changing focus of heritage economics toward new heritage contexts and typologies. The work by David Throsby considers for example the application of principles and methods of heritage economics to the evaluation of investment in the conservation of urban heritage in developing countries. Historic city centres in these regions tend to have specific common features and present difficult challenges for urban planners, especially when the city's long-term development strategy is one of increasing innercity housing densities and expanding large-scale commercial investment. The article by Christian Barrere introduces the notion of informal heritage, as opposed to the one of "official" heritage goods, such as museums, libraries, archives and historic sites. According to the author, informal heritage includes a whole range of neglected elements in cultural economics, from the accumulated know how of cultural enterprises, to recipes of culinary cultures to material and intangible cultural expressions of local communities. Taking into account such forms of heritage would help economic analysis to better understand the organization of production of several heritage-based creative industries and to address management strategies not limited to the simple preservation, but more oriented to the social regeneration and long-term sustainability of cultural heritage. Two articles add to the

special issue a further analytical dimension by addressing issues about social quality in culture-led urban regeneration plans. The paper by Sacco et al. highlights, for instance, major flaws in such plans in terms of instrumental or ineffective involvement of parts of the community in participation practices. They further explore new possibilities for more effective and sustainable forms of participation, most notably social storytelling, community informatics, and relational public art and culture projects. Emiko Kakiuchi reflects, instead, on the notion of creative industries in Japan and, drawing on the case study of the city of Kanazawa, explores how urban policies related to the creative city notion have been framed and implemented in the country. Finally, two contributions point out to new perspectives on the organization and sustainability of cultural production in local contexts. Drawing from Italian case studies, Cuccia and Rizzo examine two possible strategies cultural organizations may take in order to cope with the financial harshness caused by the economic recession. On one hand, an individualistic strategy, aimed at enlarging the supply of cultural services and to exploit market opportunities. On the other hand, a cooperative strategy based on the creation of a network of cultural producers involved in projects stressing the social impact of their activities. The relevance of the network of relations in local art markets is the main topic addressed by the paper by Marrelli and Fiorentino. In this work, the authors analyze the local Neapolitan market of contemporary visual art under the cultural commons lens and show how the network relations structure helps identifying key players and the evolutionary pattern of contemporary art production in the local context.

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