

Introduction to the Special Issue: The Economics of Cultural Industries

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Received: 29 September 2014

Accepted: 29 September 2014

In recent years, Cultural Economics has reached the status of a well-established field of analysis in Economics. The presence of several recent handbooks (Ginsburgh and Throsby, 2006, 2014; Towse, 2003, 2011) is a testament to this. Furthermore, it is an expanding and increasingly productive research area, perhaps because it is a field that is extraordinarily well-connected with modern ways of life and the challenges facing our societies. Coming from the foundational topics of performing arts, heritage and visual arts markets, the field has incorporated the study of cultural industries (audiovisual, music, publishing) and today is generating new researching opportunities in our continuously changing times. In this sense, globalization and new technologies are changing the concept of cultural products and their chains of value, their systems of production and distribution, and their links to final consumers. Traditional cultural production can be considered as a mature, if not an obsolete, industry. However, new opportunities, instruments and markets are being opened and the issue of how to implement global access to culture is a major challenge in these times. In essence, cultural products are based on creativity and culture therefore acquires an increasing importance given that creativity is considered as a key determinant of success, growth and development of any economy. It is not only important to recognize that culture participation in GDP is growing, but also that it is now considered as a strategic option in national, regional and local development plans. Creativity is born from intellectual efforts and this fact leads to a renewed interest in intellectual property rights and other incentive schemes, especially when new technologies facilitate access to these products at (almost) zero marginal cost. This in turn brings us back to the role of the State in culture. Today, the discussion is not only about the reasons why (or why not) the State should participate in arts and culture but also about the mechanisms of such participation in terms of public support, regulation, tax expenditures or the definition of incentive schemes for improving cultural management under conditions of risk and uncertainty.

The four papers included in this special issue of *Economics and Business Letters* deal with some of the core questions in cultural economics, ranging from consumers' responses to live and industrial cultural products to the economic impact of cultural factors on tourism, with the inclusion of a paper dealing with freedom of the press that is closely related to constitutional economics.

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Citation: Fernandez-Blanco, V. and Prieto-Rodriguez, J. (2014) Introduction to the Special Issue: The Economics of Cultural Industries, *Economics and Business Letters*, 3(2), 77-78.

In the first paper of this special issue, Palma, Aguado and Osorio explore the determinants of the decision to read books and visit libraries in a developing country, Colombia, based on data from a Cultural Consumption Survey (ECC2008). Using multilevel logistic regressions, they conclude that a high level of education and a greater socioeconomic status have a positive and significant effect on the decision to read, whereas socioeconomic status does not prove to be significant vis-à-vis library visits. However, these authors go beyond individual decisions and also explore the impact of the neighborhoods. According to a Variance Partition Coefficient, unobserved features of the neighborhood are responsible for 5.33% (6.58%) of the residual variation in the propensity to read at least one book (visit a library).

Whitehead, Noonan and Marquardt contribute to the literature on valuation of cultural assets in a non-market environment. They compare ex ante stated preference data to ex post-revealed preference data inside a framework of demand for live music performances. They conclude that predictive accuracy in contingent behavior models can be improved when using an ex ante revealed-stated preference demand model with a stated preference adjustment.

In the third paper, Patuelli, Mussoni and Candela combine cultural and tourism economics, with a policymaking aim, to evaluate the potential returns from investments in culture. Applying a spatial interaction model to the case of Italian domestic tourism, they conclude that a destination's cultural endowment appears to be more attractive for long-distance tourists, while the origin region's endowment seems to discourage long-distance trips to a greater extent.

Finally, Zazdravnykh offers empirical evidence on a quite new goal in cultural economics, namely the presence and defense of freedom of the press. The author observes that, besides economic factors such as the market size of the media sector and the wealth of the country, the type of political regime is also a key determinant of this freedom.

In sum, these four papers are valuable contributions to the current debates in cultural economics. Not only do they provide empirical evidence about some relevant questions but they also offer new instruments and new arguments to be incorporated and developed in future research.

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