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Measuring the Creative Province: A Synthetic Index for Italy

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Abstract

The aim of this work is to attempt to measure the contribution that cultural heritage, art and aesthetics can offer to the collective well being. Using the BES (equitable and sustainable wellness) approach, we will try to assess the impact of aesthetics and cultural resources upon Wellness. The creative city, understood as an urban locus in which the individual is placed at the center of a wide range of cultural and artistic stimuli, seems to be the perfect setting to define a BES synthetic indicator.

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1. Cultural and Environmental Assets as Public Good

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Cultural and environmental assets are often used by the collectivity in a free and generalized fashion. They are considered public assets, since - for many different reasons and within given levels of use - they are marked by lack of exclusion and rivalry in consumption.

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In fact, for some recreational goods or services, non-rivalry in consumption does not remain unchanged as the number of consumers grows; it may indeed happen, due to limits to the physical capacity of the asset, that interference phenomena occur among consumers, in a way, that, at times, may engender congestion effects. Cultural and environmental assets can also generate multiple utilities, since they produce more services. Such is the case for a historical building that has a residential purpose while simultaneously also contributing

to the aesthetic enhancement of a public square, or for a forest that yields timber, while also serving as the center of recreational activities.

It could be that some of such services can be appropriated, thus sold, and, as a result, excluded from consumption, even if perhaps only partially: such is the case for paid access to fenced parks and gardens, or art interiors. Therefore, it is not always possible to include such goods and services in the pure public asset category, since they are, in some measure, subject to excludability from and/or rivalry in consumption. Excludability can be applied to both the asset's physical perimeters (e.g., congestion phenomena), and for legal reasons (e.g., assets managed as a concession). The convergence of public and private interests is therefore a connotation common to many cultural and environmental assets. Their appreciation could therefore be pursued by different approaches, and give rise to different relationships between public and private enterprise activities.

A deeper discussion of cultural and environmental heritage can be furthered by investigating the “artistic” nature of such assets, and consequences this nature engenders. The term “artistic” nature implies an “end without purpose”¹, which is neither part of any financial category (maximization of the product, and minimization of costs), nor of any moral counterpart (freedom and equality). Decision making is, for this reason, submitted to an unusual transformation (or trade-off) constraint among elements that include the efficiency, equity and “artistry” (or beauty) of the asset. These elements and the resulting consequences to the asset are studied herein.

Indeed, in addition to the features enunciated above, cultural and environmental assets are complex, in that:

- their use involves the exercise of most intellectual and sensory faculties (they are seen, heard and are capable of engaging the imagination, etc.);
- can be influenced by or engender fashion (to visit a symbolic place);
- often become a status symbol (let's think of the Leaning Tower of Pisa);
- can cause “dependency” (as in somebody who often returns to a specific place, for instance, to “find oneself”);
- are the heritage of those who consume today, but can also be consumed in the future (and it is in tomorrow's consumers' interests that such asset should therefore be preserved).

All these aspects originate from a particular attribute: an asset's intrinsic “artistic” nature.

This feature implies a convergence of reality and consumers' subjective presumption, and it is this very aspect that makes an asset different from any other.

With its “end without a purpose”, this asset, which is real only to the extent that it is “desired” (or imagined), is not limited to having two traditional dimensions (financial efficiency and morality), like all other assets; it also has a 3-D analytical space (fig. 1), since it must include beauty and/or “aesthetics”.

Each of the dimensions of analysis can be used to measure a decision objective, or be a yardstick of the current or perspective situation of the cultural and environmental asset (as it pertains to minimization of its costs, maximization of its gross national, as well as rightfulness, or equity, of its fruition and beauty).

Just as it happens between equity and efficiency, we can assume that there is a trade-off (or exchange) between efficiency and “aesthetics”. This does not mean that what is beautiful cannot be efficient, but simply that we presume that maximum beauty cannot coincide with maximum efficiency, and vice versa. The same can be said of the rest of the relationship between fairness and beauty.

Even in this case, as for the fairness/efficiency exchange, let's suppose that the trade-off constraint (or demarcation line) is concave towards the origin, which is to say that any intermediate situation between maximum “aesthetics” and maximum efficiency (or accessibility/equity) are obtainable by swapping attributes with each other according to the law of diminishing returns.

At first, small concessions in terms of accessibility allow great advantages in terms of aesthetics, but, as one,

¹ Definition of Kant□□

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