



Cultural commons and local art markets: Zero-miles contemporary art in Naples



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ABSTRACT

In this paper we tried to offer a coherent definition of Cultural Commons combined with a plausible description on how they are formed, grow and eventually disappear. We concentrated on local artistic movements and examined whether and under which conditions they present the characteristic of Cultural Commons. The evolutionary process which generates Commons should be facilitated by the existence of local art markets. We test this hypothesis by examining the local art market in Naples in the years 2009–2013 and in particular the story of the exasperatism art movement.

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1. Introduction

After the work of Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues, who have studied commons in natural resources, including fisheries, grazing pastures, forests, and irrigation systems, a recent trend of analysis concentrated on the possibility of envisaging the logical and socio-economic category of “cultural commons” (M. J. Madison, Frischmann, and Strandburg (2010), L. B. Solum (2010), Bertacchini, Bravo, Marrelli, and Santagata (2012)). Although this notion has not yet been rigorously defined in the literature, it seems potentially very fruitful in terms of heuristic power and empirical applications. In general, however, Cultural Commons, referring to cultures located in time and space – either physical or virtual – and

shared and expressed by a socially cohesive community, and, therefore, a system of intellectual resources available on a given geographical or virtual area, constitute a social dilemma; as such they are subject to birth, growth and death (the tragedy of Commons).

It is interesting to enquire, in this regard, how Cultural Commons are created, how they survive or disappear. A possible formalization of these phenomena has been proposed by Bertacchini et al. (2012) by making use of evolutionary theory (Bowles, 2004). However, as already said, Cultural Commons, referring to cultures located in time and space and shared and expressed by a *socially cohesive community* can be better analysed, in our opinion, by making use of an evolutionary approach applied to networks, which, by definition, capture and describe the cohesive structure of a set of agents. Such a framework allows us, for example, to throw some light on how evolutionary mechanism are driven by the characteristics of the network and how evolution

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shapes the networks thus playing a crucial role in the probability of the tragedy of the Common.

In the definition of Cultural Commons we adopt, a basic element is given by the presence of a cohesive community; so it is natural to ask oneself, in an evolutionary perspective, how this is formed and which are the social mechanisms that tend to create this particular form of social capital. One such phenomenon can be identified, for Art Commons, in local art markets, which are sometimes labelled “zero miles art markets”.

Indeed, one recent phenomenon which can be observed in the wide variety of manifestations of artistic activities is the increasing relevance of very small and local markets characterized by very complex and fragmented networks, the presence of non-traditional exhibition localizations, very local Manifestos and so forth. A more detailed analysis of these phenomena could be of some interest; in particular, one of the hypotheses which has been put forward to explain their role is based on their capacity to accumulate social capital which can be used to reach more global markets and produce higher value. On the other hand, zero miles art markets can be seen as way in which social quality increases independently from cultural policies of the local or central level of government. This view brings us directly into some definition of Cultural Commons; are zero miles art markets an evolutionary step towards Cultural Commons? In this paper we intend to.

- a) Give as a precise definition as possible of Cultural Commons
- b) Try to analyse how these are formed and how they disappear (tragedy of Commons)
- c) Analyse zero miles art markets and in particular Naples painters market from 2010 to 2013
- d) Reach some conclusions on their characteristics as Cultural Commons

The analysis will be carried out with particular attention to a local Neapolitan art movement called Exasperatism, founded in 2000 which showed an accentuated dynamism in the years we examined.

2. Cultural commons

A definition of Cultural Commons is not yet universally shared; in our view, ‘Cultural Commons refer to cultures located in time and space – either physical or virtual - and shared and expressed by a socially cohesive community. A Cultural Common is a system of intellectual resources available on a given geographical or virtual area. A Cultural Commons could be thought as the evolution of the more traditional concept of cultural district or cultural cluster.

Ideas, creativity and styles of a community, traditional knowledge, credence, rites and customs, shared and participated productive techniques can be constitutive elements of Cultural Commons.’ (P.Fiorentino, M. Friel, M. Marrelli and W. Santagata (2010)), (Bertacchini, E., Bravo G., Marrelli M., Santagata W. (2012)). For other authors, following some work by Hess and Ostrom (Hess, C. and E. Ostrom (2007)), Cultural Commons refer only to informational goods which are commonly pooled ((M. J Madison et al. (2010), L. B. Solum (2010)); they, therefore, restrict their analysis to those “cultural commons” which they define as “environments for developing and distributing cultural and scientific knowledge through institutions that support pooling and sharing that knowledge in a managed way”. In order to arrive to a shared and workable definition, we have to start with what we believe are the three main characteristics of a Common:

- a) The existence of a common pooled resource (available on a geographical or virtual area);

- b) The existence of a socially cohesive community which shares the resource;
- c) The existence of a system of governance based on “social norms”, “reputation”, “peer pressure” or other which does not involve the existence of property rights legally enforceable.

In the case of “natural commons”, like the ones which have been analysed by Blomquist and Ostrom (1985, 1990) and Ostrom, Gardner and Walker (1994), the common-pooled resources refer to natural resource systems used by multiple individuals. In this case, Common-pool resources generate finite quantities of resource units and one person’s use subtracts from the quantity of resource units available to others. Examples of common-pool resources include both natural and human-made systems including: groundwater basins, irrigation systems, forests, grazing lands, and so on.

In “Cultural Commons” the common pooled resource are immaterial goods which belong to the domain of Culture of the relevant Community; as such can be referred to as a cultural goods or resources. Examples of common pooled cultural resources vary from informational goods (scientific research, open access electronic resources, internet, and so forth), to reputational goods or capital (reputation of an artistic movement, of institutions, of firms in the presence of “credence goods”), to a much wider concept of “culture” such as natural languages, traditions, food etc.

Whichever the extent of the definition two basic characteristics are normally found in Cultural Commons: its public goods nature, and its endless carrying capacity; the main theoretical differences between Natural Commons and Cultural Commons being exactly based on this two properties: as said, Cultural Commons do not suffer from limited carrying capacity. “Their carrying capacity, as public goods is endless: consuming culture does not reduce its total amount for the others. They are non-rival in consumption. A music or a poem can be consumed, plaid and listened without any limit. There is no exhaustion of the cultural common pool resource. On the contrary, as it is known (Hardin, 1968; Ostrom, 1990,1992,2002) a natural common pool resource has limited carrying capacity. This give raise to the over-exploitation of the common resources through the negative externalities deriving from individual rational behaviour.” (P.Fiorentino, M. Friel, M. Marrelli and W. Santagata (2010)) Furthermore, it should be stressed that while Cultural Commons focus upon the analysis of the behaviour of contributors, Natural Commons are analyzed in terms of the rational choice of the appropriators.

“A rich case-study literature illustrates a wide diversity of settings in which appropriators dependent upon common-pool resources have organized themselves to achieve much higher outcomes than is predicted by the conventional theory (over-exploitation of the common resource) (Cordell, 1989; Ruddle & Johannes, 1985; Sengupta, 1991; Wade, 1994) When this happens we are in the presence of a Natural Commons.” (Ostrom 2000; and Ostrom, 1990,1992,2002).

In Cultural Commons, as already said, the relevant Community is mainly made of “contributors” instead of “appropriators”: for example, any researcher uses the existing common knowledge but her/his activity contributes to it by adding the result of his/her research instead of subtracting from it. Can the same phenomenon be observed in all informational and reputational common pooled goods? Or, in other words, does the activity of the agents in Cultural Commons always generate positive externalities on the other members of the community?

Unfortunately, the answer is negative. The main obstacle is given by the informational content of these goods or resources; indeed, both knowledge and reputation need some kind of “certification” hence “peer reviewers”, “gate keepers” etc. The typical

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