

TEMA

DEFINING AND MEASURING THE CULTURAL SECTOR. EXPERIENCES AND OPEN ISSUES

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*Watchman, what is left of the night?*¹

About ten years ago, in November 2011, the European Statistical System Network on Culture (ESSnet Culture), established in 2009, concluded its proceedings and submitted to the European Commission its final report, to be published the following year.

The Preface of that huge text – over 500 pages – summarises a decade and more of joint efforts to develop culture statistics at the European level.

«On several occasions, the European Council has underlined the need to develop cultural statistics² and the European Parliament has regretted the absence of data in this field³. Meanwhile, the European Commission, and Eurostat in particular, carried out a significant work back in 1997 on structuring the data and the methodology for cultural statistics, which led to the establishment of the Leadership Group Culture (LEG-Culture), then the publication of the first Cultural statistics in Europe Pocketbook in 2007» (ESSnet Culture, 2012).

The political concern for the cultural matter has repeatedly shifted its focus since the 1980s. Originally, Culture statistics were ideally located among those describing the leisure time activities, together with the sports, tourism and religious practices. The UNESCO's 2009 Framework for Cultural Statistics still keeps some tracks of that vision, rooted in the Fordist paradigm of sharply separated working time and leisure time.

At the end of the 1990s, a new emphasis on the potential contribution of culture-related activities, occupations and products to the general economy propelled a change of paradigm. Overall, that change led to the emergence of three main foci for the economics of culture and the related statistical coverage.

The first focus, the one that is considered more mature now, is about the cultural sector as a distinctive sector of the economy, as mapped by the UK

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Department for Culture, Media and the Sports (DCMS 1998), KEA for the European Commission (2006) and theorized by David Throsby (2008), with a direct influence over the Eurostat-ESSnet approach.

The second focus, prompted by the Council of Europe's manifesto In, from the margins (1998), and endorsed by the World Bank with the world conference Culture counts held in Florence in 1999, and obviously by the UN through UNESCO and UNDP, emphasizes culture's contribution to (sustainable) development, with a wider notion of culture, one that includes tradition, the intangible heritage and cultural diversity, and that tends to place tourism as the main spill-over point of the benefits of culture and especially cultural heritage.

The third focus, drawing from a vast literature originating in the 1990s, is the most comprehensive and integrated, and highlights the impacts of culture on well-being, health, and social inclusion, the efficiency of the education and health systems, the environment, regional development and urban regeneration. It is also the most challenging in terms of statistical representation.

The digital revolution has added another dimension to the challenge of describing in reliable, sustainable, accurate and timely terms the full range of cultural products, services, occupations and enterprises.

For all those reasons, culture economists and statisticians are developing ways to render a picture that is as up-to-date and accurate as possible, and which can be used as evidence basis for political decision-making. This includes tapping new information sources, like administrative registers and the Big Data.

Many questions remain, however, still open, affecting the identification of the boundaries of the sector, that is, the identification of the activities that compose it and, at the same time, the selection of the most appropriate «tools» to account for this wide and varied sector.

*The authors who have contributed to this issue of *Economia della Cultura* reflect, in their articles, the rich landscape that we have tried to summarise here.*

Carla Bodo, Dominique Jutras and Philippe Chantepie, and Ellis Simon, all of whom were key players in the founding seasons of culture statistics, tell the story of how frameworks were designed, adapted, developed and put to test.

Conor Newman, Elis Marçal, Susan Corr and Erminia Sciacchitano tackle a key issue for the Cultural Heritage Sector and Economic Statistics: the NACE Codes and their appropriateness to represent the sector and its evolution.

Traditional topics of the culture economics, like cultural occupations and museum organisations are dealt with, respectively, by Mirko Menghini – who poses skills as the basis of the analysis – and Antonio Taormina (education, jobs and careers) and Paolo Ferri, Marco Sottilotto, and Luca Zan (museum data from a user perspective). Combining a traditional topic and an innovative subject, Carolina Arias proposes a creative industries satellite account for measuring free digital services.

New, experimental approaches and data sources are proposed by Valentina Montalto, who explains the indicator dashboard designed for the Cultural and

creative cities Monitor, and by Annalisa Cicerchia and Anna Conticello, who take a snapshot of cultural and creative enterprises from the Creative Europe data base 2014-2020. Fabio Bacchini and Pietro Antonio Valentino analyze, from an empirical point of view, the interaction and complementarities between culture, sustainability and well-being to increasingly integrate culture among the sustainable development goals.

The violent impact of the pandemic on the entire cultural and creative sector, with devastating effects of the restrictive measures especially for the venue and visitor/audience-based subsectors, like live entertainment, music, theatre, cinema, and museums, requires obviously to be at least acknowledged in this exercise. In the Documentation section, Annalisa Cicerchia proposes a study commissioned by the European Parliament on the state of affairs after the autumn 2020 upsurge of the pandemic and a report published by the New York State Comptroller on the arts and entertainment up against COVID-19 in that city. Fabio Bacchini, Roberto Iannaccone and Pietro Antonio Valentino show the results of the extension of the Eurostat methodology on Big Data (the approximation of cultural consumption through the number of Wikipedia pages consulted) in the exploration of the impact of the pandemic on the virtual demand of the Colosseum and of the Louvre.

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¹ Isaiah, 21: 11, *Hamlet*.

² See the conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the governments of Member States of the Council: Priority 3 of the Work Plan for Culture 2008-2010 (2008/C 143/06) and Priority area F-culture statistics of the Work Plan for Culture 2011-2014 (2010/C 325/01).

³ See Decision no. 1578/2007/EC of the European Parliament and the Council dated 11 December 2007, Title XII.

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