

# Genius loci: between handcrafts, cultural heritage and local development

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## ABSTRACT

From a cultural perspective, handcrafts are among the few resources that can be mobilised locally and play a key role in defining a place. In fact, they may help to delimit, structure and identify a place within a network and/or social and cultural system. Handcrafts can therefore play a significant contribution in strongly characterising places and their genius loci. This paper aims to define the role of handcrafts in the process of place construction and how it can contribute as a resource in the creative milieu to support local development, by using the contributions of two phenomenological authors, Norberg-Schulz and Binswanger. In our approach, handcrafts as cultural capital are considered to be a product (output) and a resource (input). Without neglecting the former, through which the craft of the place is directly exploited, we will focus on handcrafts as part of the production process along two different lines. Handcrafts, as an asset - participating in the production process of a good - are used to achieve a specific goal and have a precise cultural, social and economic value. Therefore, it is important to understand how this resource - the specific know-how of a place - becomes an asset. Secondly, handcrafts affect and influence other resources to generate new activities and values of a different nature.

## Keywords:

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## Introduction

Commonly, at the institutional level, "culture in its larger sense can be considered as the totality of spiritual and material, intellectual and unique emotional elements that characterise a society or a social group. This includes not only the arts and letters, but also lifestyle, fundamental human rights, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (UNESCO, 2003: 121). Culture gives sense to societal life by creating the limits that form territories and subsequently characterise a place. In this context, two conventions must be mentioned: the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, published in 2003 and 2005 respectively. The first in particular defines intangible cultural heritage as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and know-how as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with them. This intangible heritage is often recognised to be part of a place or a community's cultural heritage. Transmitted from generation to generation, intangible heritage is recreated in perpetuity by the community in proportion to their relationship with the place, the history and their interaction with nature (Cominelli & Greffe, 2013; Vecco, 2007, 2010). This secures a sense of identity and continuity, allowing cultural diversity and human creativity to be respected. Within the field of expressed intangible cultural heritage, the knowledge and know-how tied to handcrafts play a central role. This approach, favourably accepted at the international level, has been enriched by Claval (2003) with the proposed three guiding ideas for cultural geography:

- culture is a collective creation, renewed by man. It gives mankind codes by which it can adapt to changing conditions and innovate;
- culture gives mankind the means to orient himself, learn and then utilise the space;
- and culture changes with the times (UNESCO, 2003).

Since the 1980s, this geographical approach has been combined with the emergent concept of territorial economy. The economic crisis and the limits of the post-Fordism model of development contributed to the recognition that development is not merely tied to the economy, but that it also mobilises cultural, social and environmental factors that affect the actions taken by development agents and the manner in which territorial and spatial resources are utilised (Greffe &

Pflieger, 2005). Is it possible, then, to affirm that we are participating in a cultural and economic renaissance in which cognition and culture find their status as factors of production in the territorial context?

According to the same definition by UNESCO, resources are "the totality of spiritual and material, intellectual and unique emotional value[s] that characterise a society or a social group" (UNESCO, 2001), that is to say, all the tangible and intangible tools at the disposal of a given community. Among these resources that can be mobilised at the local level to define a place, handcrafts - in their tangible and intangible dimension - play a key role. In fact, handcrafts can assist in delineating, identifying and structuring a place into a network and/or a system and to characterise it in relation to other places.

The question on the role of handcraft culture in the process of identification and mobilisation of territorial resources has its continuity in developmental politics: "Could we not go beyond cultural economics as one that explains the economic implication of cultural choices to a cultural economics that demonstrates that the cultural development of a country reinforces its creative and innovative ability within the economy and vice-versa" (Greffe, 1990: 25). Cultural economics also have a growing relevance within the creative economy thanks to the impact of digitalisation. "Like other sectors of the creative industries, where access to digital tools for both production and distribution are fundamentally changing creative-content's business models, we need to re-visit how these wider shifts are impacting the contemporary craft economy" (Luckman, 2015: 53). Moreover, as noticed by some scholars, today's political interest in handcraft is no longer limited to a creative industry agenda and 'demands' specific to the creative economy (Mignosa & Kotipalli, 2019). It has a wider outreach as the practice of handcraft is increasingly associated with progressive agendas of emancipation, individualisation, environmental sustainability and locally rooted ethical production and consumption (Jakob & Thomas, 2015).

In our approach, we will use the contributions of two phenomenological authors: Norberg-Schulz and Binswanger. Both scholars belong to the phenomenological and existentialist tradition, describing the features of space using this approach and referring to the thoughts of the same authors, such as Heidegger. They differ, however, in the perspective they adopt in the description of the space. Norberg-Schulz describes the architectural space as a space acted by the subjects in what we would call a third

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person perspective (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2013), while Binswanger focuses more on the description of the space assuming a first-person point of view. Both these applications of phenomenology contribute to the description of the peculiarities of handcraft in the creation of a place.

In our analysis, handcrafts are simultaneously a product (output) and a resource (input). Applying Bourdieu’s approach regarding the symbolic foundations of economic phenomena (2005), we can also assume that both products and resources are characterised by a dual tangible and intangible nature, namely a jointly economic and symbolic dimension. In the handcraft economy, as in an economy of singularities (Karpik, 2010) and of symbolic goods, “the work of material fabrication is nothing without the labour of production of the value of the fabricated object” (Bourdieu, 1996: 172).

Without overlooking the first aspect - the product - through which local handcrafts are directly exploited, the accent here is placed on the process of handcraft production via two differing axes. As a contributing asset in the production processes of a good, handcrafts are used to attain specific objectives with value. It is therefore important to understand how a local resource of “know-how” becomes an asset. Secondly, handcrafts affect and influence other resources. How do handcrafts operate to mobilise and transform these resources in order to generate new activities? Two different hypotheses are presented in this article. The first considers handcrafts as an essential element in the process of innovation and employment creation. The second presents the profession as a root quality specific to a place. Upon recalling the role of handcrafts in the process of positioning a place, the same question will be addressed in terms of local economic development. The objective is to demonstrate that handcrafts are simultaneously the product of a specific place and a resource that is convertible into an asset and that can

also identify and develop new resources. Furthermore, we aim to show that they can significantly contribute towards the characterisation of places and their genius loci.<sup>1</sup>

### **The space between definition and its characteristics**

Place has been defined by Norberg-Schulz through the expression of the genius loci. Norberg-Schulz takes this expression from the Roman tradition, in which a spirit or god protects a specific place. The choice of a place, made under the guide of the genius loci, was of fundamental importance not only for settlements and the construction of a city, but also for the choice and construction of any building. Taking its cue from this expression, Norberg-Schulz, in his dedicated essay, defines a place by introducing the notion of genius loci as the set of “the meanings which are gathered by a place” (1979: 12).

The author also discusses further the features of the genius loci which is

*an area with distinct characteristics. Since times of antiquity, genius loci has been considered a concrete reality faced by mankind in daily life. [...] ... a set of all things concrete with their material substance, form, texture and colour. All these elements combined define “environment”, the essence of a place. Generally, it is the natural landscape or the “atmosphere” that defines a place. A place is thus a ‘global’ phenomenon that cannot be reduced simply to one of these characteristics; for example, that of its spatial relations without losing site of its concrete characteristic. [...] While space suggests a three-dimensional structure, its ‘character’ denotes the general ‘atmosphere’ that represents the most relevant property of a given place. [...] we must recognise that in general all places have a*

<sup>1</sup> For an extensive analysis of the concept, Vecco, M. (2019-2020). Genius loci as meta concept. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*. Vol. 41, 225-231.

*character and that character is, theoretically, the principle mode of "production" of the world. The character of a place is also in part a function of time. It changes with the seasons, through the course of the day and the changes in weather (Norberg-Schulz, 1979: 6, 8, 11, 14).*

This definition proposed by Norberg-Schulz above is full of analytical ideas that highlight the importance of tangible and intangible dimensions in the notion of a place. A place is defined by concrete characteristics or structures and also by abstract features or meanings: both are aspects of the same reality (Norberg-Schulz, 1979: 166). The notion of structure is characterised by "the formal properties of a system of relationship" (ibid.). A meaning can "consist in its relationship to other objects, that is, it consists in what the object gathers. A thing is a thing by virtue of his gathering" (ibid.).

This dialectic between two components is necessary for the definition of culture that for Norberg-Schulz is nothing more than "the ability to transform given forces into meanings that can be moved to another place" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979: 170). For this scholar, then, culture therefore has both abstract and concrete features (ibid.).

All features of the genius loci can be also compared with the layered phenomenological description of space given by Binswanger (1932) which confirms, develops and crosses Norberg-Schulz's theory; both scholars belong to the same phenomenological tradition (Norberg-Schulz, 1979: 8).

Binswanger describes different spatial modes of existence; the natural space, the thymic space, the aesthetic space, the technical space and the historical space. The first two definitions of space can be helpful in order to understand the importance of objects in the creation of a particular place. For Binswanger the natural space is conceived as the space of natural science or an oriented, geometric and physical space (Binswanger, 1932). It can be found also in the concrete characteristics or structures evoked by Norberg-Schulz, which are formal properties by which the objects can gather.

Binswanger adds to this type of objective concrete-structural spatiality the description of another spatiality, which is important to understand the abstract or intangible dimensions of a place as a whole (Binswanger, 1932). In this regard, the author introduces the thymic space as a mode of lived spatiality that represents intangible characteristics. Thymic space

is a natural space, though not in the same sense as the space of natural sciences, as described above. It is an original/fundamental/primordial kind of space that brings together the subject and the world. The thymic space is the space of the heart as the centre (from the Greek *tymos*, whose etymology refers to the heart), the essence of the human being that is, at the same time, in direct connection with the natural space (Binswanger, 1932). It is also described by Binswanger as "the subject's ability to be touched by objects" (ibid.).

According to Binswanger, the natural space includes not only plains or mountains, therefore natural landscapes, but also all the places that have expressive qualities, such as churches, factories, workspaces or living spaces, that is, all places that can correspond to an attunement of the soul (Binswanger, 1932: 88).

Objects have a fundamental role as catalysts and creators of a thymic space. They make possible the interaction and resonance between the subject and the external world. This is put forward by Norberg-Schulz, who states that "A thing is a thing by virtue of his gathering" (1979: 166), and in particular by its ability to gather worlds. In other words, some places and the objects that are within them can resonate with the subjects, and this constitutes the thymic space, which is understood as a space created by the encounter between the subject and the natural world.

Objects have the power, in one hand, to gather together different places and different "worlds", and in the other, to be a vector between subjects and places, capable of fostering the process by which a natural place became a thymic space.

Place can be defined as a constructed concrete entity while also being intangible with a multi-dimensional character that is based on natural, geographical, historical, cultural and architectural as well as economic and social coherence. The interaction of these dimensions characterises the uniqueness that distinguishes different places. The common element of many places is of being an ecosystem. The ecosystem's existence is based on the following principles:

- *principal of interdependence*: all members of an ecological community are connected in a vast and complex network of relationships. They derive their essential properties and, indeed, their very existence from their relations with other members;
- *principle of cooperation or partnership*: the cyclical exchange of energies and resources in an ecosystem are sustained by general cooperation. The tendency is to associate, forge, and live one amongst the other or attached to the other;

- *principle of flexibility*: the flexibility of an ecosystem is a consequence of its multiple feedback loops that, due to evolving environmental conditions, tends to restore the system to equilibrium when deviated from its norm; and
- *principle of diversity*: in an ecosystem, the complexity of the network is a result of its biodiversity. A diversified ecological community contains many species whose ecological functions overlap and complement each other so that it remains elastic, resilient, resistant and adaptable to disruptions.

Seen through the lens of an ecosystem, we can affirm that place is an autopoietic system (Iba, 2010; Luhmann, 2003; Maturana & Varela, 1973, 1980) or unit, whose organisation is distinguished by a particular network of production processes. It constantly redefines itself, is internally sustained and reproduces itself. Moreover, it is a system in which each component is conceived to participate in the production or transformation of other components found within a multi-dimensional network that is based on geographical, historical, cultural, architectural and economic coherence. This coherence marks the distinction, uniqueness and significance of a place.

In this way, place, understood as an ecosystem, perpetually builds itself, produces its components and in turn the products. This reproduction has firstly its objective in resilience both in time and space. Resilience is to be understood as the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise itself according to social systems (Walker et al, 2004). Secondly, reproduction also has its objective in the innovation and evolution of a place. As Holling (1973) pointed out, resilience - besides this capacity of absorbing shocks and maintaining functions - also includes a second aspect concerning the capacity for renewal, reorganisation and development, to be taken into consideration when redesigning a sustainable future. Thanks to its resilience, a place regenerates itself with new significance to reinforce its importance and specificity (*genius loci*).

From an economic perspective, we can attribute

the following characteristics to the notion of place:

- uniqueness,
- irreplaceability,
- non-reproducibility,
- non-homogeneity,
- significance,
- duration and irreversibility (when damaged or destroyed, a place cannot be restored or reconstructed in its original form. It follows that, to continue to benefit from it, it is necessary to conserve it. To preserve is not a question of will but of necessity for 'the need to conserve what,

because of its age, is subject to decay' (Vecco, 2007: 45). It is a question of an evident need to maintain an anthropological perspective),

- an extended life compared to the duration of economic goods (in this case, the notions of short, medium and long term must be considered through a different but common angle (Vecco, 2007). It is a matter of a good characterised as non-exclusive (once produced none can be excluded from consuming the good), and non-rival (the consumption of the good by one person cannot prohibit the consumption by another).

Cultural heritage also has some characteristics:

- it is an experience good whose quality can only be judged once consumed;
- it is a multi-dimensional and "multi-value" good in that it can belong to many dimensions (economic, social, cultural etc.) and receives differing values from these;
- it is a cultural capital "which embodies the community's value of its social, historical, or cultural dimension", and which represents "the stock of cultural value embodied in an asset" (Vecco, 2007). Where economic categories and traditional tools are insufficient, this notion is useful to our understanding of the concept of place that allows for the expression of complex values from an economic prospective (Fusco Girard, 2000:

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62). This notion is the link between the economic system and the cultural system;

- the double nature of tangible and intangible: a physical site has intangible characteristics linked to the values and meaning it transmits.

## Handcrafts as a constitutive element of a place

These elements of the definition of genius loci are also useful to help us understand how handcrafts contribute to the creation of a place's identity in its various phenomenological facets, going beyond mere location. Handcrafts are first and foremost considered direct products that have a fundamental role in the process of specifying and denoting a place.

On one hand, their role in the connotation and creation of a place is made possible by their tangible, or concrete and structural, characteristics. On the other hand, handcrafts have a role due to their abstract characteristics or intangible meanings, as introduced by Norberg-Schulz.

First of all, they constitute the identity of a place or their genius loci because handcrafts are part of the concrete structure of a place, according to the definition of structure given by Norberg-Schulz. In addition, handcrafts - being objects that have the ability to gather together the meanings (Norberg-Schulz, 1979) - help to create the identity of a place according to the deepest definition of genius loci. As mentioned before, genius loci is defined not only as a concrete or tangible place, but also by its intangible dimension, as the set of "the meanings which are gathered by a place" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979: 12). Handcrafts, as "things", have the virtue to "gather together" the elements of a given place, to embody the place and to constantly refer back to the place where they were produced. They are central to Norberg-Schulz's definition of culture, that is, "the ability to transform given forces into meanings that can be moved to another place" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979: 170).

Secondly, comparing the role of objects in the creation of thymic space, we affirm that handcrafts are particularly suitable to describe this process of catalysis and creation of a thymic space, the latter being the space of connection between the subject and natural world. Handcraft constitutes the most significant example to describe the role that objects have not only in the constitution of the identity of a place but also in the preservation of this identity beyond the tangible dimension. Handcrafts, as a particular type of objects,

are able to catalyse or activate the creation of a thymic space. In other words, handcrafted objects are able to create a connection between subject and place, and make the subjects resonate with the place to which the handcrafts belong.

Handcrafts are so important in the definition of the identity of a place that it cannot only connote that place but even evoke it in its absence. They are a cultural vector capable of "transform[ing] given forces into meanings that can be moved to another place" (ibid.).

The thymic space is therefore the watershed that distinguishes handcrafts from other types of product, precisely because handcrafts are able to embody the place itself and to activate or catalyse the resonance of the place within the subject. In this sense handcrafts can reconnect the subject to a natural place (unlike other products, for which this connection does not take place directly).

Within the afore-discussed coherent multi-dimensional context, often one element tends to be privileged over another. For example, handcrafts can be mobilised to explain the support of a place's identity. For instance, some indigenous societies can be identified simply by their space. It is through reference to their place of residence that their existence is affirmed. The site must be characterised with a double nature: material and symbolic.

To this end, Guy di Meo's definition of a territory can be used and well adapted to such a place where

*[the territory is] first and foremost a social construction [...]. Its fundamental virtue resides without a doubt in the fact that its construction mobilises all the records of human and social life. Its edification combines concrete and material dimensions as well as ideal dimensions of representation and power (Di Meo, 2001: 273).*

Culture contributes to a place's distinction in relation to another and can also contribute to its limitation. Three types of territories have been identified by a study on the role of culture in territorial reorganisation projects:

- "pertinent cultural territories": territories that are highly characterised by places with strong historic and cultural connotations;
- "titled" cultural territories: places whose names act as a strong brand. They are indicative of the history of the region and show a strong anchorage in local traditions. The topography reveals the methods of construction in the place;

- "structured territories": culture generates the networks that structure the territory. The structure is based on the relationship between the place that characterises and structures the territory. This structure manifests itself concretely (for example by creating a thematic trajectory based on local productions) and symbolically by associating the experiences that the place of heritage reveals and the meaning it suggests (La Soudière, 2004).

## Handcrafts as products specific to a place

In the context of cultural economics, following the recognition of certain cultural industries at the international level, the development of handcraft products as well as generic cultural products can be found. For example, traditional music, though it is a local product rooted in a specific cultural context, presents the characteristics of a generic cultural product whose techniques and processes of production and diffusion allow for its global distribution:

- the necessity of great means;
- it adopts series reproductions;
- it services the market;
- it is organised in a capitalist work organisation model that transforms the creative and cultural worker into a cultural product (Warnier, 2002).

Space thus becomes a place of diffusion in which the objective is to facilitate exchange. Another approach consists of creating cultural products specific to a place, generated by a collective know-how, culture and history. The products will later illustrate the particular characteristics of the place and their preservation will be organised at the local level.

For instance, we can name the production of woodcraft in the Aosta Vallee, the tradition of violin production of Cremona, the leather tradition in southern Italy, the textile manufacturing cluster of Martina Franca, Murano's glasswork tradition, and the know-how of leatherwork in Florentine. They consist of handmade products that are based in intangible heritage transmitted from one generation to another. Across these examples, we can uphold the specifications of handcraft products:

- the products created are rooted in cultural references specific to a place;
- they are part of the materialisation of a specific

locally based cultural know-how that is transmitted from one generation to another;

- the means and resources utilised require strong participation by local actors;
- finally, a specific spatial organisation (cluster or creative milieu)<sup>2</sup> is created to reinforce and maintain this local attachment.

Thus, handcrafts emerge as a resource to create other activities.

## The resource of handcrafts as an economic asset

If one considers handcrafts as a product, it is also possible to consider them as a resource. The difficulty of the analysis is dependent on the nature of their intangibility. In order to grasp the intangible, we should commence with the tangible dimension of the cultural heritage.

Handcraft heritage can be considered as a sensor or metonymy of a place's handcraft resource since it permits us to identify and characterise the cultural resource that has contributed to the construction of a place. This handcraft heritage can be characterised with a dual process. The first is one of transmission that allows for the inter-generational transfer of this heritage in the medium and long-term. A selection process that is under the influence of contemporary cultures accompanies the transfer of this heritage. This process of selection consists of many steps: abandonment, identification, protection, conservation, restoration, exposition, valorisation by new users and in some instances, destruction. This transformation was analysed by Barel (1981) on the basis of the comparison between capitalist and heritage logic. Heritage management does not concern nor is it too concerned with maximisation or optimisation. Heritage management is the transmission of practically an entire stock of opportunities to future generations and thus the possibility to create new ones. To maximise a future generation's choice capacity, conservation involves the minimisation of the present generation's consumption choices; a noted *impasse* that is part of the inter-generational resource scarcity.

Conservation policies are fundamentally based on protecting the interests of future generations who are unable to give clear input on how they would choose to enjoy in the future the cultural heritage produced in

<sup>2</sup> Given the extensive literature on creative and cultural and for purposes of brevity, neither discussions nor definitions on these concepts are provided.

previous centuries. Without knowing the preferences of future generations, the tendency is to conserve the entire stock of past heritage so that the future offers the greatest choice possible. This is an extension of the conservation principle devised by Krutilla and Fisher (1985) in reference to environmental assets in which it is stated that, although there is no actual demand, society is expected to foresee the needs of future generations. The principle of sustainable development - or the principle of constant capital - foresees the adoption of a specific position regarding the equitable transfer of goods between people over time. The ethical reasoning is that future generations have the right to a heritage that guarantees them a level of well-being that is no less than that of the present generation. We require an inter-generational social contract that is founded on the premise of "justice as an opportunity" and that can guarantee the same opportunities in the present as in the future.

This reasoning can only stand if one assumes that the conservation of cultural heritage is a value that is felt by all generations that does not change over time. Likewise, in conditions of uncertainty, the present generation chooses its own path between conservation and whether the other uses of cultural heritage are more important than the possibility of the option being transmitted to future generations. If these two suppositions are removed, conservation can paradoxically be a cost for the current generation that sacrifices alternative uses of public resources without producing the expected benefits for future generations.

The principle of intra-generational equity has been discussed in terms of the influence of public policy (Baer & Snickars, 2001), economic valuation of heritage (Throsby, 2002) and sustainability (Cassar, 2003). Throsby (2002) defines it as follows: "the intra-generational equity dilemma is a classic inter-temporal allocation problem - that is, a choice between present and future consumption". Both present and future consumption entail costs with respect to preservation and maintenance, but is it possible to define the first or second best option within this scenario? The point is to decide how far the principle of intra-generational equity and its authority should be applied, and what

exactly the impact on the present generation is. As Taylor (2013) points out, the problem that arises in any intra-generational consideration is whether an action or resource will be valued in the future. Is it possible to understand the needs of future generations that are not concurrent with our own? And should we accept that inter-generational equity should be limited by the intra-generational one?

There is one more matter to deal with: how important is cultural heritage compared to the satisfaction of a society's basic needs, or compared to any financial operation on this heritage? What could the substitution terms of an investment between the protection and destruction of heritage be?

The fact that an individual generally tends to prefer well-being in the present to well-being in the future is rational, but it might prove unequal on the basis of the principle of equal treatment that imposes an "agent-neutral behaviour" that is impartial between the diverse figures who benefit. In a cooperative scheme, nobody has the right to act so that they themselves are advantaged, whilst damaging others: "The futures of ourselves are something similar to those of future generations. We can damage their destiny and as they do not yet exist, they are unable to defend themselves. Just like the future generations, the futures of ourselves have no right to vote and their future interests need to be protected" (Parfit, 1984: 45). Inter-generational and intra-generational equity must be established.<sup>3</sup>

The objective is to protect the diversity of cultural heritage so as to avoid the problem of its irreversible destruction. This process allows us to propose a specific placement of heritage in relation to culture. The first can be considered as a stock accumulated over time that transforms under the influence of cultural factors that are constantly developing in accordance with the evolution of the place and the relationship between the actors involved. Heritage is therefore the realisation of a permanently held flow that is subject to its appropriation by certain local actors to the service of the spatial construction of a specific place. Heritage, however, is not only a stock but also a resource whose specification is to be the collective composition of knowledge and past tangible and intangible assets.

<sup>3</sup> "[...] the inter-generational equity principle requires the interests of future generations in the project outcomes to be acknowledged. This might be pursued in several different ways. In quantitative terms, respect for inter-generational concerns might suggest adoption of a lower discount rate than might be otherwise accepted on time-preference or opportunity-cost grounds in the process of reducing both economic and cultural benefits streams to present value terms. In qualitative terms, the issue of fairness itself should be explicitly considered in terms of the ethical or moral dimensions of Taking account of the likely effect of the project on future generations. [...], the principle of intra-generational equity would recognize the welfare effects of the heritage project on the present generation. Consideration might be given to the distributional impacts of the capital costs of the investment project under study, to identify whether any regressive effects might be present" (Throsby, D. (2001), *Economics and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 87). See also: Turner, R.K., Pearce, D.W., & Bateman, I.J. (1994), *Environmental Economics: An Elementary Introduction* (pp. 47-48). Baltimore: Harvester Wheatsheaf and John Hopkins University



It is not simply the "transformation of the digestive resources into stock products but includes the creative capacity of humans [...] to renew their relationship with culture and nature" (Barel, 1981: 34).

Heritage as a resource undergoes a double evolution. On the one hand, we assist in the continuous extension of the application and definition of the field. It includes, other than monuments, natural heritage, sceneries, and systems of representation (Vecco, 2007: 37). On the other hand, the extension movement is dependent on concerned actors and institutions, from heritage specialists to conservators through to institutions such as local authorities and associations. This evolution of heritage can "be compared to that of a place. The expansion is accompanied by all use of heritage as a producer of meaning that informs either the forms of sociability, or their relationship with industrial, political and economic forms" (Vecco, 2007: 37). A heritage resource structures itself in a given territory by allowing for the representation of the history and symbols of a place. A useful example to help us understand this logic is the Canal Midi. Classified as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1996, it holds different stages of representation. It is a symbol of XVIII century commerce in the south of France, and the relationship between Toulouse and Languedoc. Still in use today, especially in the context of tourism, this canal gains a supplemental value in relation to its initial value due to tourism exploitation. This example shows heritage as a resource, for it does not exist unless it is "perceived to have use value. It must be socialised. In this sense, a resource is a social relation" (Brunet, Ferras & Therry, 1996: 433). This evokes the notion of value as well as communication and education exchange. Heritage as a transmitted object can be selected for its use in satisfying the construction and development of a place. Its status is characterised by its evolution from a given object to a common good (Klamer, 2003). It is not exclusive: its use by one actor does not prohibit the use of another actor with different objectives. Cultural heritage can represent an economic resource that qualifies and characterises the benefiting place. In the following section we analyse this resource as a product and as a means of valorising other products.

## Handcraft as a driver of resource valorisation

It is important to understand the role of handcrafts in the process of specification and connotation of territorial resources. This supposes the understanding of what a

place or space reveals to the actors implicated in the process of coordination (Colletis & Pecqueur, 2004). With this perspective, the notion of local rootedness signifies the results of productive reunions that have lasted due to the coordination of established memories. We can therefore identify different potential forms of coordination:

- handcraft as a component in the mobilisation of new resources;
- handcraft as a component in the link between a territory's different resources;
- and finally, handcraft as a component in the attractiveness of a territory (Colletis & Pecqueur, 2004).

The example of the Prealps Mediterranean Zone, where typically lavender and its bi-products are derived, illustrates the first form of coordination. Over the years, a complete industry was established with distillers occupying a role at the technical and economic level due to their capacity to stock and destock lavender as required. During the 1980s, the sector was affected by an unprecedented crisis caused by the importing of lavender essence from China and Bulgaria and by the introduction of chemically transformed scented goods in the hygiene industry. This culture faced a strong decline and no public aid was given to stabilise the market. Despite the difficulties faced, the urbanites that arrived in the region in the 1960s had integrated into agricultural life and embraced traditional agricultural methods. Amongst them was a Dutch couple that used their linguistic skills and urban connections to seize the opportunity of increasing demand in the well-being industry and started cultivating herbs such as thyme and lemon balm. Production was characterised by challenges but the commercialisation of these products was not. To overcome production obstacles, they created a cooperative that regrouped local producers who had the knowledge of collection and conservation techniques. Over time, a complete channel was established; upstream based on local know-how and downstream based on a viable commercial plan for market penetration.

Economic analyses suggest that what the notion of territory and by extension place have in common is that they do not consider space to be an administrative or physical reality but one that is a result of human action and based on social relations. As a result, space is not a receptacle or a measure of distance, rather a collection of "technical reports, economic and social relations between agents located in various areas"

(Aydalot, 1986: 361). This implies something more than empty spaces that can be modelled by the actions of enterprises, but rather regions, villages and places with their unique histories and genius loci. These spaces, more or less rich in interactions between agents, give rise to processes of collective learning. These characteristics define the notion of place, a privileged space of non-commercial relations between agents (Benko & Lipietz, 2000: 346).

A final approach proposes placing handcraft as an element of territorial attraction. Although competition between territories expresses itself most often through criteria of economics of available natural resources, some territories have constructed a positioning based on their handcrafts.

## Conclusion

This article proposes to better define the role of handcrafts in the process of constructing a place and defining its genius loci, with the goal of understanding the conditions in which handcrafts can become a resource as well as a product. The entry-point to this process is represented by the features characterising a place that permit the transformation of a potential resource to an asset. A region rich from a cultural and handcrafts perspective will not function without territorial organisation by its people. On the other hand, a strong territorial organisation cannot function without a solid cultural/handcrafts base.

The present article takes into consideration the relationship between the heritage of a place and local handcrafts. The first acts as a stock of opportunities, not simply there to be mobilised but to continually transform under the effect of a double process of transmission and selection. Local handcraft cultures are expressed through local actors who also determine this process of selection and at the same time, intervene in order to make these territorial/local heritage resources. Finally, handcrafts can also function to mobilise other resources. It allows us to distinguish between a specific and generic resource and to make use of them anew.

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