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WORKING PAPER SERIES

MAKE MATERIAL CULTURAL HERITAGE WORK

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Make Material Cultural Heritage Work

Managing Soft Industrial Design as a Policy Instrument[*]

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Abstract

As the first front of industrialization, the closest to local resources and traditional knowledge, and the least demanding in terms of financial capital and technological innovation, material culture-based goods have become a modern example of sustainable and endogenous growth based on small and micro cultural firms. For these reasons, goods based on material culture are, in relative economic terms, more important in developing countries, where technological innovation and industrial mass production are less common.
A brief discussion of the definition of material culture and a historical overview of the sector's evolution will be followed by an analysis of quantitative data on the economic importance of artisan goods on national and international markets.
The focus of the paper is to present a model on the transition from traditional handicraft production to soft industrial design and address the two main policies which should be adopted: the cultural district perspective and the assignment of collective trademarks.

Keywords

Material culture, soft industrial design, endogenous growth, industrial districts, collective intellectual property.

I. Introduction

Mainstream cultural economics largely neglects the anthropological, sociological and economic value of humankind's material culture, whose goods and services are beyond any doubt live witnesses to the evolution of every civilization or culture (Keesing, 1958; ITC/WIPO, 2003). Culture is not only made up of Leonardo's paintings or Thomas Mann's novels, as the Pharaohs' Pyramids, Armani fashion and traditional Chinese silk are real expressions of culture too.
Goods and services based on material cultural heritage, i.e. the special area bordering intangible-oral and tangible-natural cultural heritages, are also neglected because of the old stereotype about the low quality/low economic value of handicrafts and local traditions: the primary products of material culture. Material culture production was banished into the region of technological backwardness. Its captivating aesthetic side was blunted. As a result, material culture is subject to too little consideration in cultural programs and economic development strategies (Moreno, Santagata and Tabassum, 2005).

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