



ANALYSIS

Exploring cultural capital and its importance in sustainable development

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Abstract

This paper explores the concept of cultural capital and suggests a framework for assessing its influence in the management and use of natural capital. Cultural capital has been described as the underlying factors that provide human societies with the means and adaptations to maintain themselves in their environment. Sustainable development calls for a shift in the way in which natural capital is managed and used and much effort has gone into discussing and analysing the sustainable development process and mechanisms by which natural capital levels can be maintained. Cultural capital is an important, but much neglected, element in this process. There have been attempts to analyse the role of culture in development, but these have been few and isolated. This paper identifies three key areas in which cultural capital has influence: ‘management objectives’, ‘efficiency of process’ and ‘demand’. These three areas form the basis of an analysis framework, designed to assess the presence of various cultural traits with regard to the main functions of natural capital—the provision of: raw materials, sinks, environmental services and amenity services.

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1. Sustainable development and capital

1.1. Sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development has come to dominate the debate regarding economic development (Edwards-Jones et al., 2000). It has its origins in the Commission on Environment and Development which was formed by the UN in 1983 to investigate

environmental issues regarding economic development. In 1987, the Commission published *Our Common Future* (also known as the Brundtland Report). This report is now acknowledged as a landmark publication in the development of environmental awareness and particularly the need for environmental concerns to be integrated into all aspects of successful development. The report defines sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. The Earth Summit in 1992 reinforced the concept of sustainable

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development which has since become widely embraced and integrated into policies and procedures. There is a growing, global consensus that attempts to acknowledge the interests of future generations and other species. Central to sustainable development is how we use the Earth's natural resources and the processes by which they are transformed. This can be described in terms of capital.

1.2. *The capital issue*

Capital is the material needed for production of valuable goods and services, and productive capital of some sort is needed to satisfy needs. Capital takes several forms and the distribution of different types of capital represents the set of constraints that determine what production activities are possible (Bourdieu, 1986). Classical economics identified three types of capital: land, labour and human-made capital (often referred to as just 'capital'). Neo-classical production functions often omitted land and only focussed on labour and capital. For ecological economists, natural capital is a key concept and is considered one of the forms of capital. There is no consensus on a definitive division of types of capital. Costanza and Daly (1992) used the terms natural capital, human capital and manufactured capital to correspond to the traditional economic production factors. Ekin (1992) disaggregated the capital stock into four types: natural, human, social/organisational and manufactured. In this paper we will use three types: natural, cultural and human-made capital which are described in more detail below.

Human-made capital, or manufactured capital, is capital generated through economic activity, human ingenuity and technological change—the produced means of production. It comprises material goods such as tools, machines, buildings and infrastructure which contribute to the production process but do not become embodied in the output.

Natural capital, sometimes called ecological capital, performs four distinct functions. It provides a resource for production—the raw materials that become timber, fuel or food. As a source of raw materials, natural capital can be renewable or non-renewable and the harvesting of these stocks is the basis of much economic activity. Secondly, it acts as a sink for waste products, both from the process of

production and the products themselves. Thirdly, it provides a range of life support functions, or environmental services, such as flood or erosion control and climate stability. Fourth, it contributes to human welfare directly through amenity services such as attractive landscapes.

There is a large sub-category of natural capital, 'cultivated natural capital', that is intermediate between natural and human-made capital. This consists of things such as plantation forests, agricultural crops or livestock herds. Cultivated natural capital supplies the raw material input but generally provides less of the wide range of natural ecological services characteristic of natural capital.

In addition, there is another area of capital, also fundamental to the production of goods and services. Veblen, writing in 1908, was one of the first to identify the existence of a form of capital other than those commonly considered at that time (McCormick, 2002). He noted that the productivity of capital (i.e. human-made capital) was intimately linked to society's pool of knowledge which is produced and possessed by the community as a whole. In the 1960's, neo-classical economists such as Becker and Schultz introduced the concept of human capital, arguing that the society's endowment of educated, trained and healthy workers determined productivity (Becker, 1962; Schultz, 1963). The term human capital is now sometimes used to mean education and skills (Costanza et al., 1997) or labour (Edwards-Jones et al., 2000). The World Bank distinguishes between human capital, which is determined by levels of nutrition, health and education, and social capital. Social capital has been widely used to cover social networks, contacts and trust (Coleman, 1990; Putman et al., 1993). Kliksberg (1999) notes that studies show that it is human and social capital (as opposed to natural capital and constructed capital) that were responsible for most economic development in the later years of the twentieth century and that they are key to technical progress, competitiveness, sustained growth, good governance and stable democracies. Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between social capital, which is the actual or potential resources linked to membership of a group, and cultural capital, which can be 'embodied' as a state of the mind/body, 'objectified' in the form of cultural goods, or 'institutionalised'. Berkes and Folke (1994) use the term cultural capital

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