

Demonstration of the Hands-on Experiments

Introductionary lecture of the cross-media textbook on Economics of Culture

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Abstract. *The introduction of cross media in education is a new promising experiment aimed at adjusting the modern technologies for better understanding of knowledge by the young generations. The modest practice already indicates that when properly organized it can contribute significantly the clearer perception of the teaching material. This is especially useful in the courses which have cross-disciplinary application. Economics of Culture is one among many examples. It is part of so called process of humanization of education, aimed at acquainting students with the global dimensions of human behavior, habits, and traditions for better awareness and overcoming of barriers of communication created by the cultural differences. The paper presents the introductionary lecture of the Economics of Culture course as a part of the project of cross-media textbook and comment the technology of its preparation.*

Keywords. Economics of culture, Culture as a good, Economic principles, Public Economics, Welfare theory, cross-media.

1. Introduction

The presented paper is a short version of the introductionary lecture of the textbook named after Economics of Culture to be published after it passed tests with students. It includes the discussion of the following topics:

1. The technology of our joint work or how to have high grade in our classes.
2. What is Economics of Culture? The Origin of Economics of Culture. Culture as an economic good.
3. Basic principles of analyzing economic problems of culture: ceteris paribus, comparative statics. Rationality. Decision makers: household, firm, government.

2. The technology of our joint work

This is the first problem which I discuss with the students when new lesson starts. In my opinion the good economist (and not only he) always is comparing the benefits and costs of a given activity. It means that since the very beginning the students must know what they can expect from the instructor as knowledge and what they should demonstrate on the exams to prove that the knowledge that has been given to them is properly and critically worked out.

As I normally teach foreign students instead of explaining who I am and my origin I show my CV in picture fixing the most substantial moments in my academic carrier.

In the Istanbul campus of Fatih University where I am teaching the last 10 years there are stairs we cross almost every day when we visit our library, cafeteria, and sport centers. These stairs are very good illustration of the road the students and me have to pass during the semester. To grasp with this metaphor better I prepare a short video where climbing up and down I explain the basic stages of our joint work during the semester.

I compare this work with various sport disciplines in which the sportsmen are to collect scores for the final classification. This metaphor is a good illustration for the estimation of the students final results as I give the grades for groups more than 10 -15 students on a relative bases using special distribution calculated by Excel file. In such a way the highest grade is given to the students which first reach the final line that is which collect maximum scores during the semester.

2. Methodology of the study

Teaching in universities, where the students groups were composed by representatives from many countries with various levels of English understanding I came to

conclusion that often they spent a lot of time in preparing their lessons due to the fact that the new knowledge was presented in a language, which was different from their mother language. So called “mother” effect of learning can be observed even in students with high level of proficiency in English especially in social sciences. Often in these courses there are many abstract categories, difficult to understand when they are presented not only in perfect English, but even in the native language of the students. This is the one side of the problem.

The other motivation to initiate a video-textbook on Economics of Culture is that this is a topic neglected into the university curricula. The pumping students in Economics with mathematical formula, undoubtedly necessary in our age of intensive information exchange, starts already to produce inverse results. The students forget that their object of study is society and living people with their everyday troubles and needs and start thinking of society in abstract mathematical terms far from reality. This is a dangerous indicator. But it is results of our teaching activity, when unintentionally we try to turn our object of teaching from social to such an exact science as mathematics [1].

The attitude to the inclusion of mathematics in social sciences is often controversial. Mathematics is mainly instrument for modeling, for simplification of the complex social problems into linear and non-linear scheme to capture the essence of the problem. Even the application of the most up-to-date dynamic stochastic approach is often not sufficient to grasp with the essence of the complexity of social life.

With this controversial background the presentation of the introductory lecture of Economics of Culture in a new form is definitely a challenge. I would be very happy to observe and discuss the reaction on this challenge for finding the best way to reach the minds of the students and by means of my lessons to help them to cope better with the complicated life they have to live in after their graduation. My belief is that studying economic issues of culture would contribute to it.

This is emphasized in the introductory words of the lecture. After it I present the structure of the proposed course and explain the needs of such studies. Next the lecture gives short overview of the basic categories envisaged for discussion in the course. Our experience indicates that the best

educational effect is reached, when the lectures (45 – 50 minutes) are presented in PowerPoint slides with inclusion of no more than 2 -3 video illustrations of the most essential and difficult problems with duration maximum to 3-5 minutes. This makes the lecture dynamic and capturing interest even of the least motivated students. This is actually the logic, on which the whole course is constructed.

2. What is Economics of Culture?

It is traditional to start the lesson with explanation of the quintessence of the course. Correspondingly I explain what it is aimed at and what the advantage for the students to pass it is. “Cultures do not change overnight” [2] and this is what the students need to know since the very beginning.

First we need to define what culture is. Several alternative definitions are presented to the students. Culture is defined as “the total way of life shared by everyone in the same speech community” [3], “the cultivated behavior; that is the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly, behavior through social learning [4].

Correspondingly the Economics of Culture is part of the economic science which aims are to explain the economic dimensions of culture and its effect. Looking on Economics not only as some summation of numbers but as a science to explain the behavior of the economic agents we extend the scope of our discussions including in them the roots of culture, its non-monetary dimensions and global significance. Essential elements in these discussions are the economic assessment of costs and benefits of any action related to culture. In particular we try to explain the category “consumer surplus”, which is basic in the valuation of benefits from the protection of cultural-historic monuments. It is not difficult to imagine how important such discussion even for non-economists is as it opens the eyes to understand how we should spend our limited resources dividing them between cultural and non-cultural goods.

The introduction of Economics of Culture courses became feasible after some evolution in the methodology of education. It took time to understand the importance of culture to the socio-economic development and to include this issue in the academic curricula although this was a topic discussed even before the time of the classical economics. Few

examples are sufficient to illustrate the present recognition of the link between culture and development at all levels. Explaining the analysis of household – the initial elements in discussing Economics Chowdhury [5] indicates that “A household is never a complete entity unless the cultural context is taken into account but models fail to integrate these aspects in the description of households”. Dubhashi P.R., [6] writes that “cultural norms, in addition to markets and governments, turn individual choices into collective action”.

Many universities have made substantial contribution in cultural economics studies, which helped to outline the course and define its basic categories. CSERGE – the Center of Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment at the UCL – London carried out during the 1990s pioneering works in this direction [7] by publishing studies allowing to complete the course of Economics of Culture with valuable sources and ideas.

Two directions of studies are interesting for the further discussion: turning culture into business or culture as economic good and cultural dimensions of business illustrating “how difficult it is to disentangle “economic” from other cultural categories in “economically relevant practices” [8]. It was the reasons to concentrate since the very beginning of the explanation of culture perception as an economic good.

3. On the nature of culture as economic good

Culture and cultural products are very specific kind of goods combining properties of private and public goods. In this aspect they can be regarded as part of Public Economics analyzing normative aspects of social life.

A good way to present the discussion of the culture as an economic good is to use the popular in Public Economics classes scheme of the transition between private and public goods presented in figure 1.

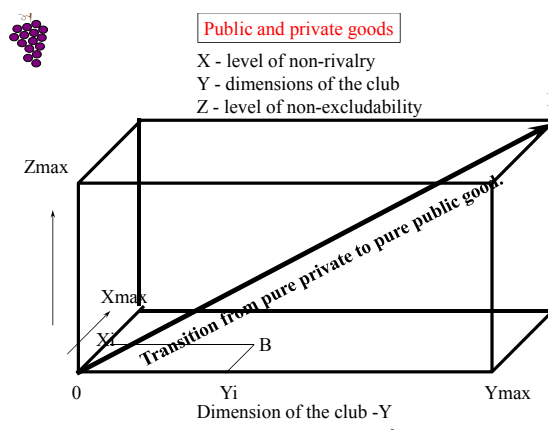


Figure 1. Private and public goods

This scheme allows explaining excludability and rivalry as important features of culture as economic good. Besides it combines the problems of congestion and aggregation which makes it attractive educational instrument.

4. Basic principles of analyzing economic problems of culture

Economics of Culture is part of Economics and as such it follows the logic of economic studies and approaches. As we explain to the Economics' students such fundamental principles as *ceteris paribus*, comparative statics, rationality so we need to put in the core the same elements in our Economics of Culture classes. This is very important as being elective such course may be the only source of economic knowledge for non-economists. On the other hand if this course is presented to students in Economics it would allow repeating these fundamental questions from other perspective illustrated by such unusual goods as culture.

Taking into account the difficulties in understanding these categories even for students in economic departments we use illustrations with suitable short video clips.

We would like to introduce an Economics of Culture course as related to the normative economics that is the economic in which we not only describe the problems but also indicate the alternatives for their solution. This approach opens the door to the Welfare Economics and Pareto optimality approach to explain the reallocation of resources between cultural and non-cultural goods. This is approach applied in Public Economics and Economics of Culture may be regarded in some aspect as part of it.

This gives the opportunity to present the allocation of resources in the whole economy

between cultural and non-cultural goods starting with a given endowment. By means of the well-known Edgeworth box the students will find out the theoretical base of the trading process and optimality in re-allocation of resources taking into account social preferences. Jumping deeper into the Economics water they may find out the link between Pareto optimality and the competitive markets by means of both theorems of Welfare Economics.

In the next last part we explain the role of decision-makers in the creation and conservation of cultural goods starting with the household and ending with the government as economic agent in the distribution and allocation of resources. This opens the door to present to the students such fundamental economic topics as utility maximization of consumption by the households including discounted cultural goods consumption. The last merit of this introduction is the put the fundament of theoretical discussion of the cultural policy as a part of the overall economic policy on government level.

Very important for the success of the course is certainly the interest of the students in its election. To attract them normally I put a short introductory clip in my website where the students see what they can expect from this course as knowledge and which are their obligations to receive high grades. In our pragmatic world this works well but even such seemingly eye-catching measure is often not sufficient to attract the interest in studying economic problems of culture. Students as a rule prefer financial and international issues. The reason is in the misunderstanding how important is culture for our progress and successful development in future. This drawback of the modern education is common for almost all universities all over the world. Our attempts are to break it and to make the perception of culture as such a necessary good as bread and water.

5. Acknowledgments

We express my thanks to Fatih University – Istanbul for the ability to test the Economics of Culture with our students and also to the Pearson education representatives for their supportive role in my endeavors.

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