

REVIEW

ON NINA BANDELJ AND FREDERICK F. WHERRY (2011), THE CULTURAL WEALTH OF NATIONS, STANFORD, STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, PP. 281

ZSÓFIA BAUER¹

The authors of this volume investigate their posed questions about the cultural wealth of nations by relying on the traditions of Viviana A. Zelizer and Alejandro Portes, who had ‘visions of an economic sociology that enfolds culture and development into its core’ (p. x.). Cultural economic sociology seeks to analyze the effects that culture, cultural differences and cultural heritage can have on economies through using sociological methods and theories to dissect how (intentionally or unintentionally) cultural advantages/cultural wealth can contribute to economic growth and local development.

The editors, Nina Bandelj (University of California) and Frederick F. Wherry (University of Michigan), address various theories and methods related to the cultural wealth of nations. They claim that a focus on cultural wealth will generate significant benefits and advance the field of cultural economic sociology, which has already benefited from the work of several prominent contributors to the body of knowledge in the last decades (Abolafia, Bandelj, Beckert, Biernacki, Wherry, etc.). In the publication they review several theoretical frameworks (theoretical plurality) about how the concept of the cultural wealth of nations can be understood and how the relationship between culture and economy can be conceived. They have also collected a number of case studies which specifically describe how this value is successfully and unsuccessfully constructed: “our inquiry into the cultural wealth of nations focuses on cultural objects, narratives, symbols, and reputations to examine cultural effects on the economy at the macrolevel of analysis” (p. 5). The editors posit that the study of the cultural wealth of nations also offers “an alternative to standard economic explanations for the wealth and poverty of

¹ Zsófia Bauer is a Ph.D. student at the Corvinus Sociology Doctoral School; e-mail: zsbauer@yahoo.com

nations” (p. 18). The volume is a unique compilation which encompasses the different theoretical perspectives through a number of case studies conducted around the globe, and gives a comprehensive view of the cultural wealth of nations.

The concept of cultural wealth is investigated throughout the publication, relying on a mutually-accepted understanding of the term. In the first study the authors (Centeno, Bandelj and Wherry) introduce a definition of cultural wealth that is applied in the subsequent works of the publication; namely: “the value added derived from the intangible qualities of products and services emanating in part from the perceived cultural heritage of the people engaged in their production” (p. 26).

The book is organized in the following way: After the introductory chapter, Part I. takes into account the empirical and theoretical motivations that lay behind the study of the cultural wealth of nations. These works also aim to set an agenda for researchers interested in cultural economic sociology. Part II. consists of three chapters which attempt to look at the constructing and managing of cultural wealth. Part III. deals with unique endeavors that have been adopted in order to convert cultural wealth into economic wealth, showcasing three rather diverse attempts from around the globe. The last section, Part IV., contains three chapters that explore how symbolic and cultural wealth can help with advancement in positioning in the global value chain.

In accordance with this organizational structure there are also four applied theoretical perspectives introduced in the volume: (1) the political economy perspective; this “emphasizes how traditional understandings of power and economic wealth map onto distributions of cultural wealth” (p. 10), mutually affecting each other; (2) the perspective of impression management (drawing from the concepts and ideas of Erving Goffman) looks at how cultural attributes of countries must be strategically presented to enhance their value and thus the possibilities of capital conversion; (3) the cultural sociology perspective looks at the deeper meaning of constructed cultural wealth, arguing that it is not merely a tool which can be manipulated, nor can it be utilized strategically; and (4) the global value chain perspective (GVC), which recognizes that the symbolic resources attributed to cultural wealth are not created or distributed in equal measure along the chain, and which emphasizes how members of the developing world can be both helped or hindered along the value chain if it is they who create the symbolic resources. The theoretical overview, described above, provides the organizational frame for this article. The review looks at the individual chapters (cases) not only separately but also as parts of clusters that apply similar theoretical perspectives. The aim of this approach is to

examine how the individual case studies have contributed to the body of both theoretical and empirical knowledge within the burgeoning field of cultural economic sociology. This structure also allows the reviewer to reflect on the analyzed nations themselves in terms of their emergent inequalities and see how the nations under study achieved their advantages (or disadvantages) because of “their location and by the virtue in the meanings encased in place” (p. 1).

The first cluster of chapters addresses the question of cultural wealth production within the framework of the political economic perspective through focusing on the relationship between cultural wealth and economic growth. While the authors of both chapters intend to motivate further research into the field, Richard Swedberg seems to be more critical and highlights what he sees as a gap in theory in economic sociology. In *The Political Economy of Cultural Wealth* Miguel A. Centeno, Nina Bandelj and Frederick F. Wherry demonstrate how the distribution of cultural wealth shows significant inequalities, relying on an array of empirical data about acknowledged cultural wealth and aspects of tourism. Through applying the mentioned political economy perspective, Centeno, Bandelj and Wherry examine the relationship between culture and economy and pose and answer the question: “what is the relationship between global political economy and global cultural wealth?” (p. 27). And if there is, has a global class system emerged? To address their subject of interest they evoke a debate between two positions: cultural universalism and cultural relativism. The evidence presented (based on statistics about world heritage sites and the distribution of brands and prestige exports) suggests the existence of a strongly West-centric hierarchy in cultural value. Similar tendencies were found when they analyzed the different motivations of tourists, in doing so making a distinction between ‘bells, beaches and bars’ tourism. Local economic wealth from tourism can mainly be gathered from cultural tourism (dubbed ‘bells’ tourism). The stated aim of their work was to map the geographical distribution of inequalities and motivate further inquiry into the consequences of these inequalities. The listed inequalities are further supported by the evidence gathered in the following studies of the compilation.

The motivation for further studies in the field is also one of the focal points of the second chapter within this theoretical cluster. Richard Swedberg, leading author in the discipline of economic sociology, calls for the missing growth theory of the field to be established. Although he highlights this gap, the author also sees that the developments in the inquiry into the cultural wealth of nations are a positive step towards this desired direction. In his study, which concentrates on prior (and unjustly less well-interpreted)

theories, he considers several elements of less well-known works of the iconic thinkers Adam Smith and Pierre Bourdieu that have yet to be incorporated into mainstream sociological discourse. The author proposes that the authors have become social facts or symbols instead of pure thinkers, and Swedberg attempts to deconstruct these existing images. He states that some of their notions can be (and should be!) brought together, noting that there are elements that are complementary and those that are contrasting, and there are some that show continuity. Swedberg chose the topics of interests, market and firms for his analysis because he argues that one cannot theorize the cultural wealth of nations without this triad, and through such an original pairing of the two authors he implies that both “material *and* symbolic inequalities explain growth” (p. 68.). Swedberg’s arguments should resonate in the referenced works of already wide-ranging curricula and provide motivation for researchers, lecturers and students,

The second theoretical cluster that can be identified within the compilation is connected to the successful and unsuccessful management of nations’ cultural wealth. The three diverging case studies are entwined through the concepts of representation and impression management: how selected nations are able to market their cultural assets or divert attention from shortcomings. The theoretical foundation that links the diverging case studies may be found in the works of Erving Goffman (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959); *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963)). The mutual novelty of the selected studies is that while the original texts of Goffman view impression management and self-presentation as a micro sociological phenomenon (studying them at the level of the individual) and thus rely on micro sociological concepts, the chapters of the reviewed volume adapt his original framework to macro level issues (through studies that examine collectives and nations). The theoretical relevance of these chapters is the successful transformation of micro level theories into analytical bases for addressing macro level issues or problems. All the studies make this adaptation of Goffmanian ideas and concepts successfully.

The difference in representation and capabilities regarding impression management is addressed in the first chapter of this three case study sequence. In *When Cultural Capitalization Became Global Practice*, Alexandra Kowalski attempts to answer the question of how national policies contribute to cultural wealth production (she looks at the mechanisms and processes that contribute to inequalities of nations’ cultural wealth, some of which are unintended, theoretically drawing foremost on the eventful sociology of William Sewell (1996)). Throughout her investigation she views the 1972 World Heritage Convention as a critical event, in the wake of which the rules

of symbolic and cultural value production were created. The process entailed an accumulation of contingent strategies and power struggles (documented in detail by the author) which had several unintended consequences. One of them is the structural advantage of established and well-trained cultural and environmental administrations. One can easily see the analyzed case as an example of the Matthew effect. The accumulated advantages of wealth conversion and the West-centric distribution of cultural wealth have already been exemplified by the various salient statistics of the first study. As formerly mentioned, the original micro level statements of impression management are converted in order to fit the macro level phenomena, and in accordance with this the author concludes that the main contributory factor to the success of impression management (or its failure) lies in structural differences.

A similar theoretical perspective is represented in the framework which connects the subsequent texts of this cluster and provides investigations into how iconic status can be achieved. Converting an icon's symbolic value into economic value (profit) through branding (and constructing authenticity) is the main topic of Dario Gaggio's *Selling Beauty*. Referring to Goffman's scheme for impression management, Gaggio sees the formation of the particular landscape as being interlaced with strategic reproductions and negotiations. He takes into account how the landscape icon of Tuscany was constructed into an iconic brand through historical, social and political processes (the convergence between these factors was largely unintended, according to the author). The brand was constructed through a series of negotiations; the value forming nature of the landscape was at the heart of its authenticity (which is, as the author notes, the main resource, although the value was paradoxically created).

Lauren A. Rivera applies another microsociological framework from Goffman's *Stigma* (1963). This study of stigma management and the 'self-preservation' of a nation attempting to reclaim its position within the tourism market is one of the most exciting texts in the volume. She proposes that Croatia, a stigmatized nation with a 'tarnished reputation' (p. 114) mobilizes its cultural wealth in order to acquire economic and political gain. Drawing on Goffmanian ideas from *Stigma* (1963), Rivera presents three possible methods of coping, originally introduced as a model for individuals dealing with stigmas in society. She proposes that Goffman's coping mechanisms can be applied in the macro realms of nations equally effectively. In Goffman's *Stigma* the individual bearer of the stigma could react by (1) isolating themselves and severing contact from other individuals within society. Rivera posits that, by adapting the concept to the macro level, the isolation of a nation could come when they cut themselves off from the international circuit. (2)

Continuing disclosure of the historical stigma is another method analyzed in detail by Goffman and adapted by Rivera. In the macro realm she claims that public acknowledgment of the causes of the tarnished reputation can in fact be healing and beneficial and emerge in the form of ‘dark tourism’. (3) The last technique, mentioned by both authors, is ‘covering’, meaning strategic self-presentation through covering up negative associations. As Rivera concluded, macro actor Croatia has adopted this third method, achieving control over the competing narratives by completely discarding any mention of the negative periods of its history and solely emphasizing its European roots. The reviewer sees this study as the most interesting example of how micro concepts can logically and aptly be transformed into the study of phenomena on a national, macro level.

The chapters which contribute to the third identified theoretical cluster put strong emphasis on the importance of collecting empirical evidence to see how capital conversion may (or may not) work in different societies. The main message of the cases is that converting cultural wealth into economic resources is not a simple process: in fact there are several contributory factors that have hitherto not been highlighted. The most significant contribution of these works is to highlight some of these mechanisms.

The boundaries of the conversion of cultural wealth into economic wealth are portrayed through the case of The Culture Bank of Mali, entitled *The Culture Bank - Symbolic Capital and Local Economic Development*, written by Frederick F. Wherry and Todd V. Crosby. The main idea behind the institution described in the case study was to use symbolic capital as the basis of microlending and as a tool for local development. Drawing on thoughts about totemism (Durkheim), bounded solidarity (Portes and Sensenbrenner) and empirical evidence (based on the observations of Crosby) with regard to special cultural artifacts (sold rather than deposited), the authors conclude that: “[the] strategic use of symbols does not replace material resources ... “[this approach] fails not because symbolic capital cannot be converted into economic capital but rather because symbolic capital does not work like a financial instrument” (p. 155). Existing and working circuits of commerce also cannot be neglected (Zelizer, 2005). The main relevance of the study is that it highlights the need for further investigation into the operations and mechanisms behind cultural capital.

Another check on the effectiveness of the conversion is presented in the second case in the cluster and further ‘complicating mechanisms’ are exposed. The effects of cultural management and official promotion are the main issues addressed in the chapter, which is written by Madina Regnault (*Converting (or Not) Cultural Wealth into Tourism Profits. Case studies of*

Reunion Island and Mayotte). While the two territories described possess the same characteristics, the case studies still show that one was successful in converting its intangible cultural heritage into profit, whilst the other failed to do so. While Reunion Island enjoys cooperation with the policymakers of the cultural and touristic sectors, Mayotte has no such coordination, resulting in less success at conversion. Strategic impression management in Mayotte was unsuccessful because it was never prioritized. The chapter also emphasizes power relations in its analysis, relying on the ideas of Macleod and Carrier (2010).

The theoretical background for the last cluster of case studies is rooted in the perspective of global value chains (GVC). According to literature (Gereffi and others), intangible qualities (such as heritage) have become increasingly important. Hence, the selected studies focus less on production itself, and more on how capital is created from specific cultural values. The cases also aim to highlight the inequalities within the chain while flagging up how these inequalities are not necessarily related to quality but more to a nations' position within the global economy.

Jennifer Bair's *Constructing Scarcity, Creating Value* examines how the development and marketing of Mundo Maya could be seen as a method of upgrading along the tourism value chain (although the evidence of the positive effect is far from conclusive). In terms of tourism this resonates with the statements made in the first chapter, namely that 'bells tourism' is the most profitable type of tourism. The goal of successfully marketing Mundo Maya as a destination for heritage tourism relies on how well its scarcity (and through this, its value) is constructed. Bair claims that further research is necessary to support claims of advancement along the GVC. The theoretical novelty here is that the theoretical background of GVC can be applied to other areas where the created value is not tangible.

Stefano Ponte and Benoit Daviron, following Ulin's (1995) tradition of placing emphasis on the creation of cultural capital within wine production, turn to the case of South African wine in *Creating and Controlling Symbolic Value*. Their theoretical framework diverges from Ulin's. In their case the applied theoretical perspective is GVC and the highlighting of structural inequalities in the wine production and distribution process, whilst Ulin focused more on the historical processes of cultural capital production in the Bordeaux wine region. The authors reference the theoretical literature on quality, relying on authors such as Bourdieu and also formerly gained knowledge about the functions of brands and trademarks. In the case study (which investigates South Africa), symbolic value is created for products through the use of trademarks, geographic indicators and sustainability labels.

In this way they become a competitive force on the markets of the North (this depicts the still-influential divide between North and South quite well). Methods of value production also include ‘lack branding’ or the controversial ‘black winemaker showcasing’ (p. 218) approach, as pointed out by the authors. The inequalities along the GVC are perhaps the most unequivocally visible in terms of realization of profit: the economic value converted from the symbolic value is mainly realized in the UK and not in South Africa, where the wine is produced.

Adding to the existing knowledge about inequalities along the chain, the concluding study investigates changes in the Thai silk industry. In *Cultural Brokers, the Internet, and Value Chains*, Mark Graham reports on the changes that have come to the industry, with the internet now enabling silk producers to enter the global market. Graham challenges the thought that internet access will restructure the traditional chain, as well as offer better opportunities to producers. The original idea was that the introduction of internet commerce would ‘disintermediate’ the chain, bringing profit to impoverished regions. But those who actually used the electronic tool were not producers but merchants and intermediaries. Thus, in reality the change did not lead to disassembling of the chain but its restructuring, making it less and less transparent. Buyers relied on the knowledge of these cultural brokers (‘embedded knowledge’ (p. 238)), and they created and profited from symbolic value.

The reviewed volume is a fine example of how the perspectives of cultural economic sociology can provoke classical economic analyses and interpretations of development. By offering an alternative perspective and new set of methods the case studies also highlight the issue of structural inequality; of how nations are differently able to take advantages of their cultural heritage, and, keeping these differences in mind, how cultural wealth can still be a vessel, a source of local development. The works contained in the volume are also significant from the perspective of theory building, bringing forth new ideas and evidence within their respective theoretical clusters.

REFERENCES

- Bandelj, Nina – Wherry, Frederick F. (eds.) (2011), *The Cultural Wealth of Nations* Stanford, Stanford University Press
- Goffman, Erving [1959] (1990), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London, Penguin Books
- Goffman, Erving (1963), *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Prentice-Hall
- Ulin, R.C. (1995), ”Invention and representation as cultural capital: Southwest French winegrowing history”, *American Anthropologist* 97 (3), pp. 519 – 27.