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THE VITALITY OF PEOPLE AND PLACES

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THE VITALITY OF PEOPLE AND PLACES[♣]

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Abstract

The idea of vitality is the ability of an actor or collectivity of actors to put in place a series of actions that reflect their creativeness and are consistent with self and other actualising outcomes. Such actions—through appropriate processes—reflect positive self and other-regarding values. We identify an original typology, confronting situations of unreceptive dynamicity and diffused vitality. We then hypothesize factors that support the latter, namely inclusive organising, cooperative behaviour, balanced relations, adaptive governance, low lock-in. We illustrate using examples from music education in the Trentino province, Italy. We see the focus on vitality as very contemporary, as the more standard notions of competitiveness, creativity and innovation suffer from being either extraordinarily optimistic cures for our economies, or as fast and easy recommendation that neo-liberal proponents pass on to managers and policymakers.

Keywords

Capabilities; Creativeness; Self-actualisation; Inclusive governance; Cooperative behaviour; Network of relations; Adaptive governance; Path dependence; Lock-in

JEL Codes

O1; O15; L2

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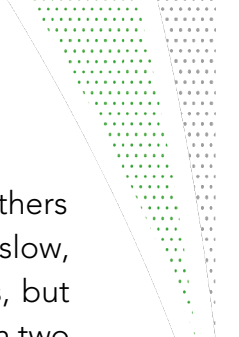
1. Introduction: why vitality?

This work addresses the question of how to study wellbeing, bringing together economic literature, psychology as well as education. In particular we offer a perspective on vitality and an understanding of its meaning and implications for how to look at the effects of economic coordination.

The idea of vitality belongs primarily to the natural and medical sciences, since it has to do with life and the ability of an organism to remain alive and thrive. Plants are vital if they can root deeply into the soil and independently find the nourishment they need to grow, or if they can link their roots with those of other plants, cooperating with the intent to complement each other. Borrowing from the natural sciences, the idea of vitality provides us with a key to interpreting human activities, and economic activities in particular, seeking for the *trait d'union* between what we are and what we would like to be and what supports that search. Taking a Deweyan approach (Dewey, 1927), our perspective explores this question with a focus on human activities, and socio-economic activities in particular, assessing vitality in terms of the capability to undertake activities that reflect creativeness, for the wellbeing of individual actors and for relevant publics. We also reflect on the ecosystem that may support vitality, hence the relationship between the individual, its context, and the passing of time.

Our interest for vitality is rooted in a concern for the current reality of economic development, as in Sacchetti and Sugden (2009), where the concentration of strategic control and the exclusion of publics from decision of interest perpetuated by prevalent forms of organisational governance generate widespread inertia, loss of critical thinking and creativeness with respect to socio-economic challenges and human needs. The preference towards the exclusion of the interests of publics and communities that is implemented through prevalent modes of organisational governance may maximize the interests of the controlling stakeholder (usually the investor, but not necessarily), but has the effect of limiting if not preventing the use of creativeness and individual wellbeing, and likewise the production of public value (Sacchetti, 2015). One of the reasons, as observed, is that exclusion—when the market fails to coordinate heterogeneous interests—increases costs for the excluded and more broadly it hinders the capability of excluded actors to identify opportunities and choose (Sacchetti, 2015; Sacchetti and Borzaga, 2021). The effect is disempowerment and a perception of not counting (Sacchetti and Sugden, 2009), leading to a widespread loss of vitality, a loss of the intentionality, interaction, and ultimately use of one's own creative intelligence.

So, while—despite failures—exclusive organising (and overall an economic system dominated by exclusive modes) may be consistent with competitiveness and economic growth objectives, it cannot be associated with vitality. A policy and strategic focus on competitiveness, from a vitality perspective, may benefit individuals, organisations and regions to the extent that it does not constrain people's attitudes towards creativeness, use of imagination and cooperation with others. These behavioural attitudes have been associated with inclusion and participation in the organisation of economic activities,



which are argued to enhance self-actualisation without causing negative effects on others (and in the long run increase organisations' and territorial performance) (Maslow, 1965/1998). We preferably use a concept that does not originate from economics, but from psychology. The actualising-self is different from the interested self. They act on two different bases. The first individual (actualising) integrates the other person in his quest for well-being. The second individual (interested) does not necessarily do so.

Competitiveness and growth do not support vitality when they are aimed at value appropriation for the few (for instance it becomes instrumental to the consolidation of market power for the appropriation of value, even at the expense of other actors and collective welfare) or when they justify the exclusion of stakeholders and use command-and-control organising, since they restrain opportunities to exert creativeness and develop meaningful competences and relations (Granovetter, 1991; Mazzucato, 2018). To illustrate: if to increase the competitiveness of regions and firms, policy makers rely on low wages or lower environmental and safety standards, vitality is eroded. An organisation (private or public) that, to improve competitiveness, increases the use of exchange for gain (e.g., arm-length outsourcing), even where this harms workers and subcontractors, does not help vitality. A school or higher education institution that maximizes growth and revenues from tuition fees at the expense of the teaching and learning experience for staff and students is eroding vitality. An individual that in order to build a competitive advantage for herself adopts opportunistic behaviours erodes vitality for herself and for others, since it will encourage more opportunistic behaviours from others and discourage cooperative behaviours overall (Hardin, 1968). Trade-offs may exist with other classic economic policy and strategic goals typically associated with competitiveness and growth, such as innovation, competitive advantage, diversification, cost reduction. The logic is the same: to critically assess each economic action towards these goals with respect to vitality.

The utility of this approach to vitality is to provide a perspective on the state of our economies, on the extent to which our way of organising activities matches:

- a) with the state of things, that is with current, widely recognized societal challenges, such as those identified by the United Nations development goals;
- b) with the capability of people, individually and collectively, to genuinely imagine and act using their creativeness and consistent with inclusive, other-regarding preferences.

To articulate the idea of vitality we first position it within economic thinking. We then sketch an original definition, discuss how vitality can be observed along an original typology, and hypothesise determinants. We illustrate using examples from music education in the Trentino province, Italy.

2. Vitality and economics

As mentioned, the idea of vitality is far from new, and its use or meaning has changed over time. Medical sciences consider vitality in terms of the physical health of the person, which is related also to nutrition and to the quality of the environment where the person lives. Applied to the idea of a healthy individual, vitality has been at points controversial, especially in the early twentieth century, when there have been instances in which vitality has been pursued to improve the “biological citizenship” of groups of the population (such as African Black in the US) attempting and changing lifestyle habits or using those habits to limit welfare rights (Knadler, 2013). More generally vitality was aimed at fostering the “human capital” of a region or nation, considering people’s vitality as functional to the success of an economy or to the security of a nation (in 1907 in the USA, the Theodor Roosevelt’s commission on national health; *ibid.*).

More recently, vital regions in economics have been associated with the innovation potential and competitiveness of territorial economic actors, leading to economic growth. Regional innovation theory and policies have focused on the institutional environment and on the synergies between institutional levels and entrepreneurial initiatives that best support innovation and regional competitiveness, often focusing on specific sectors’ opportunities for change and on their capacity to develop strategic competences. Innovations strategies (for instance the EU Smart Specialisation Strategy, presented in Barzotto et al., 2019) are more successful in “vital” regions, where the production system and its activities already integrate new technologies (e.g., digitalization) and knowledge-intensive sectors, where knowledge creation and knowledge transfer networks are denser, and entrepreneurial resources are in place. So, when policy makers talk about “re-vitalising” regions (*ibid.*), they refer to policies aimed at improving innovation and competitive advantage, which can attract highly skilled human capital. As a consequence, productivity increases and likewise salaries. In this sense, GDP is the main indicator of a region’s performance.

This has been flanked by a variety of indicators of a population’s wellbeing. These indicators aim at enriching the aspects of human life measured by GDP (the value of the goods and services produced by a community) with other aspects of human existence (such as health, education, life satisfaction, the quality of the environment) (Fleurbaey and Blanchet, 2013). Recently, taking a more sophisticated and sustainable view on GDP measures, the Ecological Footprint is used to assess the environmental sustainability of economies and to make GDP measures greener. By measuring the footprint of present generations, the attempt is to indirectly assess also the opportunities for the future generations to remain vital. Hence, the production of material wealth must be consistent with the sustainable use of resources and the resilience of the natural environment (*ibid.*).

Although the ecological approach has taken centre stage recently, still the Human Development index (HDI) is the most popular alternative measure to pure GDP. It was introduced in the 1990 UNDP report, and flanks household income aspects indicating the unemployment, health, education, poverty of people. According to this take on economic

performance, the pre-conditions for a vital individual or a vital community would exist where people are free of material necessities, in good health, and educated.

Our take on vitality would not necessarily overlap with the existing economic/HDI focus. Firstly, a take on vitality has a collective other-regarding perspective, so that it is not considered vital an individual action that causes harm to others or to society at large. A second but not less relevant order of considerations pertains situations in which individuals with access to resources (e.g., a good income level, social capital, health and education, financial credit) are not vital, meaning that, despite their endowments, they do not express their potential creative capacity to make events happen, even when this is desirable for them and for others. This discrepancy between endowments and vitality is consistent with the happiness paradox, which emphasizes that a rise of per-capita income does not necessarily correspond to a rise in average happiness (Gasper, 2005; Esterlin, 2010). Frey and Stutzer (2005), to illustrate, report that although women have on average lower salaries than men, they do not report lower levels of satisfaction (although this could be due to some extent also in so-called western countries to the “acceptance” of an unequal order, as illustrated by the problem of adaptive preferences in Elster, 1983, and Teschl and Comim, 2005).

The idea that individual preferences matter takes us to the capability approach, which follows Sen’s studies (Sen, 1985) and is reflected in the work of the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission (2009). Sen’s take is focused on preferences and what people “have reason to value” for their development rather than on the predefined features measured by the HDI. Individuals hold multiple motives. Aspirations, on the other hand, depend on the perception of opportunities or, in Sen’s words, on the possibility of accessing “different kinds of alternative lives” (Sen, 2008: 23). For this reason, the capability approach is the closest to the idea of vitality expressed here. It clearly identifies some of the preconditions to vitality, that is to be able to undertake actions that are valued and not necessarily predefined, and paves the way for justifying the strong emphasis on the institutional and organisational elements (objective measures of wellbeing) that enable people to use their creativeness for their own self-actualisation and consistent with positive other-regarding preferences and consequences.

We consider creativeness in relation with the ability to bring something into existence, not only with the primary aim of building competitive advantage and market power, which may reflect exclusively self-interested preferences and lead to a series of market failures at collective level, but also for people self-actualisation and for the overall efficiency of an economy, where efficient economic organising recognizes the social costs of concentrated strategic control, and aims at preventing their generation by including stakeholders and the public interest in economic decisions (Sacchetti, 2015). In business literature, which usefully talks of creativity within organisations with respect to innovation and competitiveness (Amabile, 1988; George, 2007; Dell’Era et al., 2020), this is an unusual focus. We point to creativeness because it is a way for people to self-actualise (e.g., in life and work—Maslow, 1965/1998) and create positive effects on others, and it can be relevant transversally for regions, production sectors, organisations.

3. A definition of vitality

The idea of vitality that we propose here reads as follows: *vitality is the ability of an actor or collectivity of actors to put in place a series of actions that reflect their creativeness and are consistent with self and other actualising outcomes.* Our definition of vitality implies that vital individuals—empowered by capabilities at individual and collective level—can undertake actions which allow for creativeness and human fulfilment. Such actions—through appropriate processes—reflect positive self and other-regarding values, hence generate positive outcomes for self and others. We see the focus on vitality as an aspect of value fulfilment (Gasper, 2005) and as very contemporary, as the more standard notions of competitiveness, creativity and innovation suffer from being either extraordinarily positive and optimistic (as a cure for our organisations, cities, and economies), or as a recommendation that neo-liberal proponents pass on to managers and policymakers as what may seem a fast and easy solution for prevalent economic growth strategies and policies.

3.1. Creativeness that fuses self and others

We use creativeness differently from creativity. There are several definitions of creativity, mostly developed in psychology, education, management and economics. In general, they refer to a cognitive process that brings something new into existence as a solution to a problem (usefulness) (Amabile, 1988; George, 2007). Economics and businesses, in particular, tend to emphasize the commercial viability of the novelty (i.e., the output of creativity); that is, the possibility to transform the novelty into an innovative product or service. The commercial output also defines the capacity of creativity (and likewise other aspects of individuals—e.g., attitudes—or collectives—e.g., teamwork relational quality) to create a competitive advantage on others and generate value, essentially conceived as economic surplus. This idea of creativity demands that the features that enable individual creativity are identified at multiple levels, including the individual, the team, the organisation, and the region (as in regional innovation studies). Without pretending to be exhaustive of a vast literature, some features of the creativity debate can be summarized according to explanations of: (a) why and how it happens, (b) at what level, (c) what it requires and (d) its output.

Different from prevailing views in organisational and economic studies, the approach we present here detaches the creative process from the broad scale, collective recognition of its innovative outcomes. This implies that, in general, the outcomes of creativeness do not need to have an impact on society, an audience or a commercial demand, although they might have one. Likewise, creativeness does not apply only to the arts or to those professions (Florida's creative class—cf. Florida, 2002) and roles (e.g., leaders or—as in Dasgupta, 2019—writers, artists, scientists, engineers) that are typically classified as creative, but it also applies to any human activity (Joas, 1996). Likewise, anyone who directs an organisation, a team, or sculpts, paints and writes poems or music is not equated with the creative person.

Our view on creativeness finds a consistent definition in self-actualisation psychology (Maslow, 1965/1998), and Maslow in particular, for whom creativeness is conceived as the spontaneous action that occurs without pretentiousness and fits the moment without having to be forced. The person loves what they are doing, and this can lead them towards self-actualisation. It was Maslow (1963: 4) who concluded that:

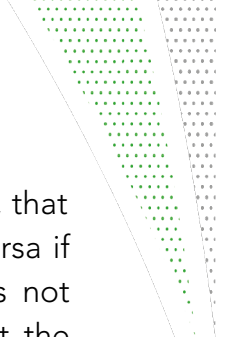
“My feeling is that the concept of creativeness and the concept of healthy, self-actualizing, fully human person seem to be coming closer and closer together and may perhaps turn out to be the same thing.”

This view fits with the thoughts developed by pragmatist thinkers in philosophy, for whom greater creativeness can generate novel possibilities that are beneficial for the collective, as well as to a fulfilling life (Follett, 1924; Dewey, 1927).

As an illustration, consider the 1950s short story narrated by Jean Giono (1996), *The man who planted trees*. In this short story, the main character, Elzéard Bouffier, observes a vast and drawn land, and the state of despair and conflict that this has brought to the people. He very quietly spends his life selecting and sowing thousands of acorns, bringing beauty, a renewed life, harmony and the possibility for a different life. His act is what, here, we call creativeness. There is nothing innovative, as we currently understand it in business innovation, in planting trees. But Bouffier’s act follows his imagination. He could see that land already physically transformed as he was doing something very simple: seeding acorns. It is a genuine act because it shows honesty towards himself, it recognizes the state of things (the consequences of careless use of land), it is spontaneous, and transformative for self and others.

More generally, creativeness may come from the presence of a need or a constraint (either material or immaterial). However, it is used not only for replying to “what is wrong”, but also for identifying or framing such needs in the first place or, more proactively, to imagine new possibilities (“what is right”) even when there are no specific problems that call for a solution. It does not have to involve rational thinking necessarily but can emerge from breakthroughs, or what Maslow called individual “peak experiences”, that is the capacity to imagine new possibilities. This, as Maslow reminded us, requires a sense of honesty, of being themselves without acting in a particular pre-defined way or within the limits drawn by a particular historical time, culture or technological trajectory.

Bouffier’s fictional experience suggests that, to support vitality, the actions put in place as a result of creativeness must have included some sense of desirability for the self and others (including non-humans and nature in this specific case). Self-actualisation works simultaneously on the inner and outer dimension, that is for the individual and for others. Hence, a focus on the search for self-actualisation bypasses the inner-outer dichotomy because the individual introjects the outer that matches with their self (an argument which has been developed lately by self-determination theory, cf. Deci and Ryan, 2008) or vice versa, as Giono’s story suggests, the person creates the outer reality that matches with their inner self. This reality, in turn, feeds back on the individual. This raises an issue of



causality, similarly emphasized by Frey and Stutzer (2005) for happiness economics, that is whether self-actualised persons are likely to put in place vital actions or vice versa if vital actions conduce to self-actualisation. The search for self-actualisation does not separate the inner and the outer, they are fused and con-fused to indicate that the actualising self does not exist out of a real context where, as Adam Smith's idea of sympathy first and happiness economics later indicates, the individual's actions affect others while the wellbeing of others feedbacks on self (Bruni and Zamagni, 2016).

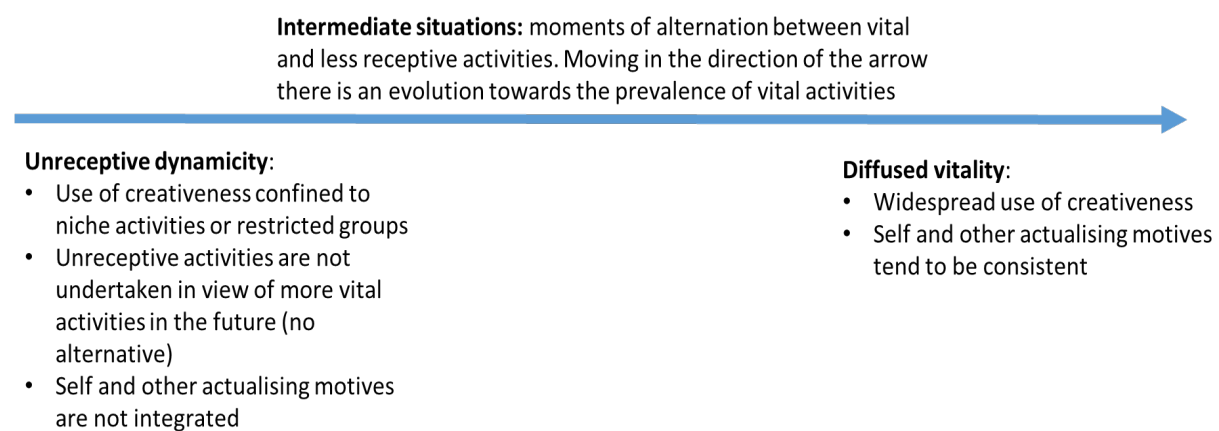
From the self-actualising angle, creativeness is about the ability of "being" by bringing something into existence and using sense, honesty, imagination, knowledge and experience, whatever the collective impact of the creative outcome. Bringing something into existence is the change process that derives from the individual's genuine willingness of being, by experiencing doing and infusing action with meaning, which belongs to any individual in any role. Creativeness is about an act of change that is meaningful for the person because it builds on their unique experience. Meaning, according to pragmatist thinkers, is determined by the subjective perception of the situation in which people find themselves. It follows that the type of relations and contexts where individuals are situated is relevant to the development of a creative attitude. In its essence, our approach highlights the intra-subjectivity of creativeness as well as its inter-subjectivity: creativeness is about change, which occurs primarily in the individual; through the way they can make sense of reality and transform it; and by means of interaction with other individuals and with situational contexts that have the power to bring individual creativeness to life (Follett, 1924). In this sense creativeness is multi-level (Drazin, Glynn and Kazanjian, 1999), since it is engrained in the solo activity of the individual (this is especially evident in Elzéard Bouffier's fictional experience), in their own intuition and pace, as well as in the interaction with others and with the context, which is a source of otherness, multiple sensitivities and experiential routes.

In this vein, education scholars have extensively enquired on the models that can support creativeness and hence vitality. Among others, the pedagogist Bertin (1968) looked at education as a project that enables people (both teachers and students) to manifest their critical thinking, imagination and innovative energy, their social, emotional, and aesthetic sensitivity (Dewey, 1927; Frabboni, 2012). Diffused education (as a policy objective aimed at public good creation) would therefore support people's personal life projects, while preserving its intrinsic critical and utopian function (ibid.) towards existing models (educational, social, cultural, economic), improving consistency between human actions and their desirability (which assumes identity and self-love but also inter-subjectivity and love for others). The approach supports a type of vitality which is at the same time "affective, cultural, and creative" (Frabboni, 2012: 16). From this educational perspective, vitality emerges from a way of behaving and engaging with the state of things that assumes diversity, creativeness and change, in contrast with isomorphic pressures towards conformity and standardization (Sacchetti, 2020), and hence against the conceptualization of the individual suggested by standard economics.

4. Diffused vitality vs. unreceptive dynamicity

Diffused vitality is associated with economies where there exist widespread opportunities to exert creativeness, from which positive outcomes for individuals and for the collectivity originate, as Figure 1 illustrates. Vitality can be hence measured combining indicators that assess the presence of activities, the creativeness that people associate to the activities undertaken, and to the self-actualisation and sense of others attached to these actions. Like other measures in economics such as GDP, vitality, over time, is to be considered both an outcome and an input into the same process that feeds its production.

Figure 1. The vitality of actions



The presence of activities (e.g., measured in terms of outcomes, e.g., number of projects, number of hours worked, number of units produced, etc.) is the pre-condition to observe vitality. A very low level of activities or no activity would be associated with inertia or low vitality in the first place. Being few, even when they reflect creativeness and consideration for self and others, activities may fail to generate scale and scope economies, as well as network externalities. We therefore consider a context where there is a significant degree of activities that tie actors with linkages of diverse natures. To position activities with respect to vitality, Figure 1 pinpoints two types of extreme situations.

At the extreme left of the continuum we have a dynamic context, rich in activities but unreceptive of people's creativeness and/or dominated by choices that do not properly account for the integration of others and self-actualisation. Hence, on this side, the state of the economy is one of unreceptive dynamism, with no or low vitality. The marginalization of values that express awareness and concern for what happens to others (and feedback on self) leads to the exclusion of relevant communities of interest from economic organising, that is to decisions that allocate capital, labour, knowledge and other resources across aims and activities. This limits the peoples' opportunity to use their creativeness, it reinforces power imbalances in networks of relations at micro and meso level, leaving prominent space to activities that are functional to objectives that disregard

the implications for others (Sacchetti and Sugden, 2009), that disconnect the self-actualising individual from others.

Conversely, at the extreme right of the continuum we find a dynamic context where activities embody people's creativeness, self and others. This is a situation of diffused vitality, with a high number of activities that interact with each other positively and consistently, building on cooperative behavioural attitudes and processes.

Having identified a typology of vitality, we can ask why actors may position closer to one extreme rather than another. What sort of specific behaviours and contextual situations empower vitality, that is, what conduces to initiative and action consistent with use of creativeness and the actualising self who has integrated regard for others? By understanding the extent to which creativeness and actualising motives can be combined with enabling resources we can explain vitality, that is we can interpret what factors (independent variables) support or hinder the realization of activities. Over time, actors can move along the continuum, moving closer to situations of unreceptive dynamism or diffused vitality due—as hypothesized in what follows—to changing enabling conditions that pertain the individual or its context.

Based on our discussion, we identify the following individual features:

- a) positive energy and intrinsically motivated actions through autonomy, competence and relatedness;
- b) cooperative behavioural attitudes;

and the following contextual features:

- c) inclusive and participatory organisational features;
- d) balanced and fair relations;
- e) adaptive governance, or the coexistence of layered institutions, complementary on some functions and redundant on others, linked by multiple ways of coordinating and organising and forming a polycentric system;
- f) locally rooted knowledge but low lock-in when conditions change.

The hypothesis is that these elements define the way in which humans organise activities, and they effect the vitality of people and their environment.

4.1. Positive energy and intrinsically motivated actions

Psychology uses the idea of "subjective vitality" (SV), or the experience of feeling alive and full of energies which derives from self-determination (Ryan and Frederick, 1997). This vital energy belongs to the intrinsically driven individual who can satisfy their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as against controlled, externally determined activities. In general, self-determination theory indicates that intrinsically motivated actions (through volition and autonomy, such as volitional recreational activities) improve energy, while extrinsically driven actions (through controlled regulation) drain energy.

Clearly SV refers to the good energy available to the individual. It does not overlap with energy more generally but only with positive emotions, while negative emotions are unrelated or negatively related (Ryan and Frederick, 1997). While control or the effort to control oneself drains vitality, autonomous self-regulation does not erode it (Ryan and Deci, 2008). Hence, "vitality represents energy that one can harness or regulate for purposive actions" (Ryan and Deci, 2008: 703). This "energy" take on vitality is used also in economics, at country level, for advanced comparative life satisfaction measures (Becchetti, Corrado and Samà, 2016). At organisational level, the question of how to maintain and renew this positive energy is addressed by Tortia, Sacchetti and Valentinov (2020) with a focus on the renewal of motivations amongst social workers. Specifically, in organisational psychology, SV and intrinsic motives are functional to the effort that workers provide when undertaking their tasks and activities (Karkkola, Kuitinen and Hintsala, 2019).

4.2. Behavioural attitudes

Vitality implies that individuals are not passive, isolated recipients of decisions taken elsewhere, but rather can use their creativeness, intentionality, judgment and competence to undertake actions. The balance between the actualising self and the actualisation of others is identified individually, by the work that the individual undertakes by themselves, as well as collectively, by exchanging knowledge and ideas with others, which requires an attitude to cooperate and, hence, communicate. From this perspective, one's own creativeness develops with the constant crossing of the borders between the self and the other and ultimately their integration, and is enabled by the capability to develop at the same time one's own ideas as well as to engage (Dewey, 1927; Sacchetti and Sugden, 2009).

Using case materials and experiments, institutional economists have emphasized that over time cooperation can benefit all, and that under the appropriate institutional settings this value is recognized also by non-cooperators, thus ensuring greater compliance and public value creation (Tyler and Blader, 2000). Ostrom (1990) identifies open and non-opportunistic communication as a precondition for this, and experimental results support the idea that agreements are more likely to be honoured when actors can communicate (Sacconi and Faillo, 2010). By means of communication, moreover, cooperative attitudes can be passed also to non-cooperators (Grimalda and Sacconi, 2005).

Consistently, Hirschman's seminal work on voice and exit, has addressed the importance of communication from the point of view of the efficiency of markets, organisations and political systems (Hirschman, 1970). Vitality, however, is even more observable in context where there is no slack or inefficiency requiring a reaction (e.g., through voice or exit), where actors proactively chose to create a course of actions, a new project or organisation for instance, following their imagination and creativeness, not necessarily because of a reaction to inefficiencies. Sacchetti and Campbell (2014), especially, highlight the public

value produced by active citizenship in originating and developing collective actions that improve individual and community prosperity when, through cooperation, people take ownership of their needs and desirable ends. Oppositely—in the absence of space for initiative and cooperative attitudes—conflict, disillusion and mistrust, as well as disengagement and erosion of civic virtues (Hirschman, 1977; Melucci, 1996; Fillieule, 2015), would contribute to reduced vitality.

4.3. Organising modalities

We have opened our reflection with a critical view on our economies and on the publicly born failures caused by prevailing economic organising. One way to look at these failures is to consider the degree of separation between self and other-regarding values, and how such dichotomy has been falsely perpetuated. In economic literature, preferences are typically divided in self-regarding and the other-regarding, where the first are contextualized in a purely private domain, whilst the second denote individual dispositions towards others or towards society at large (Ben-Ner and Putterman, 1998). However, as argued in Dewey (1927) and more recently in Sacchetti (2015), preferences and actions are never purely private since they hold some degree of external effects on others. The relevant point would be to identify rules that prevent exclusion of relevant publics from actions of interest and minimize the rise of social costs.

More generally, organisational solutions must be assessed in terms of their distributional consequences, and according to the type of attitudes that they contribute to reproducing. Cooperative attitudes and communication may guide the creation of specific modes of organising, and be embodied into rules designed to favour the inclusion of relevant publics in decision-making and participatory practices for day-to-day actions (Sacchetti and Borzaga, 2021). By means of inclusion and participatory processes, individuals can contribute their knowledge and experience, build and expand their capability to imagine, choose and undertake projects, and regain a sense of their own self-efficacy, potential, and opportunities (Ostrom, 1990; Perkins, Brown and Taylor, 1996). An inclusive and participatory approach to the creation and co-creation of activities of interest generates opportunities for individuals to engage in events that come from the genuine expression of what they can envisage, know and value, for their self and others' wellbeing. Inclusive and participatory contexts moreover activate a feedback effect on cooperative attitudes, reinforcing a culture of participation and engagement at collective level (Bowles, 1998). Examples of empowering conditions that lead to vitality come from community organising through social economy organisations whereby citizens self-manage the organisation for the production of meritorious services (such as cultural and educational activities, social services, environmental or energy services), often collaborating and co-creating with the public sector (Pestoff, 2009; Osborne, 2010). Likewise, we can observe the use of creativeness as well as high congruence between the actualising self and others in self-managed communities of artists (Basov and Kholodova, 2022), in self-managed communities of farmers (Ostrom, 1990), or more generally in

communities of practice gathered around shared values and aims (Melucci, 1996; Wenger, 2001) and supported by cybermediary platforms (Chadna and Salimath, 2020).

4.4. Relational networks

Further, vitality recognizes interconnectedness among actors and communities of actors. Empowering conditions for vitality are not meant to be for some and not for others, not only because of distributional reasons and social justice, but also because the capability of one depends furthermore on the capabilities of others, and the self-actualisation of one is intertwined with that of others. Hence the vitality of one is related with the vitality of other actors.

Networks of relations among cooperators support vitality when they amplify opportunities and possibilities for creativeness, to undertake desirable actions towards shared aims and self-actualisation (Sacchetti and Sugden, 2009); the same applies to activists pursuing collective goals in multiple grassroots groups or associations (Diani, 2015; Tindall, 2015). Also business theory, within a competitiveness framework, has acknowledged the importance of resource and knowledge complementarities when explaining inter-firm linkages and value creation for cooperating firms (Richardson, 1972; Casciaro and Piskorski, 2016). Conversely, command-and-control relations would not empower vitality.

This take is consistent with literature on social capital, which associates individual, organisational, and community prosperity with cooperative networks ties that work towards the common good (cf. Cento Bull and Jones, 2006; Coalter, 2007; Cornelius and Wallace, 2010). Trust takes central stage in the emergence of social capital, and supports close bonds as well as links among different groups or levels of organising (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001). In a recent study on music school teachers, Sacchetti and Diani (2022) indicate that a balanced mix of linkages between localized and extra territorial ties among musicians is associated with higher artistic activity.

4.5. Adaptive governance

In her work, Ostrom identifies adaptive multi-layered governance as the core feature of human institutions which can support the vitality of a localized system (Ostrom, 1990). First, this involves “analytic deliberation”, that is constant communication among interested publics and communities of scientists and users, as well as key informants (Dietz and Burns, 1992). The construction of understanding and knowledge, by means of deliberation, builds trust among participants and produces consensus, thus creating the environmental conditions for vitality to develop. Secondly, it requires nested institutional solutions, which are not confined to market exchange for profit, or concentrated decision making and command and control coordination, which has negative effects both on creativeness and actualising goals. Third, it needs institutional variety. Combinations of coordination solutions that coexist to back each other, working with diverse rules to fit

with diverse motivations of people, thus creating more and varied contexts that can support actualising goals (Sacchetti, Borzaga and Tortia, 2023).

Varied and complementary institutional arrangements require multiple centre of decision-making coordinating with each other (a polycentric system—Ostrom, 2010), and provide the resources (monetary and non-monetary, such as access to finance and funding, knowledge and motivation, relations, capabilities to include relevant publics) and the infrastructure (such as technology and knowledge creation systems) that combined with human creativeness and actualising motives can influence the level of vitality.

An excellent example of this is the music education system in the Trentino province (Italy), which we have studied since 2019. Music education can be interpreted from an economic point of view as a system that aims to produce a particular type of meritorious service, i.e., a service that can in principle be produced by private for-profit organisations, but can be also produced by the public sector or co-produced with private nonprofits in order to make the service accessible to the greatest number of people. This is a choice of economic policy that in the case of the Trentino province was defined through a partnership between the public actor and 13 private nonprofit schools (henceforth CAMS, Cooperative and Associative Music Schools), which were funded by the province authority to offer basic to pre-academic music education for all ages, teaching a variety of instruments and genres, including modern music, with sites in urban as well as in rural areas. The decision to coordinate resources through a mix of private nonprofit music schools and the provincial administration was formalized with Law 12 in 1987, when the Autonomous Province of Trento (PAT from here on) established a school register. Later, in 1997, a shared educational approach and curriculum were agreed among CAMS and with PAT. CAMS that met certain requirements could be listed, if endowed to meet the educational standards and the rules of accountability and transparency set by the regulator. This governance solution was built according to what the province called a “negotiated approach,” which was developed using specific agreements to share both the design of projects as well as their implementation and management. The negotiated approach, cooperative in nature, was opposed to the alternative competitive bid mechanism. Agreements were instituted mainly with those nonprofit music schools that were able to meet the regulatory requirements and service production standards. These were “strong” schools, to whom the province authority could trust and delegate the production of public value.

This institutional solution was not alternative but complementary to the traditional public sector solution to the production of music education, based on the conservatoire and its associated music-oriented junior schools (called SMIM, age 11-13) and music lyceums (age 14-19). This fully publicly run solution has the advantage of offering the service at no or very low cost (school enrolment fees) and therefore of guaranteeing maximum access with respect to price, but only to those of school age who want to follow a pathway based on the study of music at a young age, to then possibly continue their studies at an academic level at the conservatoire. This system therefore has benefits, but also barriers


with respect to the possibilities of students and teachers to use their creativeness and move towards self and others' actualisation.

- a) First of all, the junior school-lyceum filière allows musical training only within the school age group or within an academic pathway, thus excluding the adult population or those who, in general, are not interested in academic musical training.
- b) Second, it gives access prior to an entry test (testing both musical competences and attitudes).
- c) Third, it is a system that has traditionally been slow to recognise novelties, for example offering teaching activities on a limited number of music instruments and musical genres, thus excluding those interested in other areas.
- d) Forth, the geographical distribution of public music schools is concentrated in medium to large urban centres, excluding pupils who are unable to travel to attend lessons.

Nesting the two solutions, traditional conservatoire's education and the public-private nonprofit partnership for pre-academic education has increased institutional variety, offering different but complementary educational path, to meet different needs and of music students, mostly professionalizing for conservatoire's students, mostly amatorial for CAMS' students. The borders between the two systems are however quite fluid for students, with movements from one system to the other, depending on results achieved and changing aspirations.

4.6. Path-dependence and lock-in

As expressed by the capacity to create activities consistent with self and other actualising aims, vitality may, but not necessarily, involve actions that mark a more or less accentuated discontinuity with the past. Hence, vitality can retain consolidated knowledge from the past (Dyer and Singh, 1998), while acknowledging contextual changes and outbreaking path dependence to generate actions in accordance to novel paradigms and trajectories (Dosi, 1982). This requires an attitude towards change and uncertainty not only for the individual person. At organisational level, specific organisational routines or capabilities can "fill the gap between intention and outcome" (Dosi, Nelson and Winter, 2001: 2). A firm's capabilities, as Nelson and Winter (1982) argued, are the constellations of routines that organisations are able to create, in a way that is complementary and consistent with the technologies and the specificities of activities and demand heterogeneity (Adner and Levinthal, 2001). Routines, in this view, are considered as patterns of reactions to specific stimuli (which may come from within or from the environment) which are put in place by groups of actors within the organisation. Vitality problematizes lock-in, i.e., dependence on specific ways of doing things defined in the past and which were suitable for the circumstances and situational contexts of that time, but which risk precluding people's opportunities for creativeness



and actualisation, especially when contextual conditions and knowledge available change. To avoid this, rules and ways of organising must therefore allow for flexibility and change, and adapt to new needs and bodies of knowledge that may become available.

For evolutionary economics, established technologies, ways of governing and organising resources create close interdependencies between capital investments, human capital, and collective outcomes. When idiosyncrasies are present, network externalities make the costs of change very high. In other words, the possibilities of introducing different solutions are defined and constrained by the interdependencies and contingencies inherited from the past. This is the theory of path-dependence, which can lead to lock-in situations (David, 1985). Historical antecedents, initial choices based on the expectations that were in place at the beginning of a specific process influence the competition between rules, standards, technologies, modes of coordination, and production systems. This implies that past choices define opportunities and reproduce action patterns that may not fit with new contextual elements; for example, with new needs, new knowledge about the effects of existing technologies or modes of resource coordination and production of services. Path dependence, in this sense, can be associated with unreceptive dynamicity, because it may obstruct the introduction of new modes to allocate and combine resources (Hay and Wincott, 1998; Kay, 2005).

Going back to the music education example, we can observe a time path and locate the introduction of the public-private partnership at a time when new needs emerged which could not find an answer within the existing modes of music education offered by the conservatoire's filière. Music education has long been circumscribed to creating musicians at academic level, and vocational public schools were serving that purpose. The lock-in within this system has last, within Trentino, since 1987, with the introduction of an innovative coordination solution which was not alternative to the old system, but complementary since it was addressing a broad public need of music education. The persisting lack of collaboration that we have observed between the music school system and the conservatoire (the academic level) is an indicator of the gap between the popularization of music culture and the academic conception of cultured music.

What was new in 1987 however has created its own trajectory as well. Rules were shared and discussed with CAMS since their institution, and became embedded in the system's structures and practices, precisely because the organisations that are part of it have set up their organisational capacities on those rules and standards. Once adopted, the rules and standards applied to the production of basic music education have been taken as a reference for organisational, professional and study choices by a critical mass of managers, teachers and users, generating a high degree of isomorphism and to some extent network effects.

For the reasons highlighted by path-dependence theory, it may be costly to move to a different way of coordinating and organisational practices, even if a potential new combination—after years of operations and changed cultural circumstances—should

prove to be more efficient or more effective with respect to the needs of the actors involved (public and private).

To understand how lock-in is to some extent re-emerging, consider that the CAMS function to the extent that:

- a) the public-private nonprofit relationship is sustained by the schools' adherence to the provincial regulation to which the funding of the service is conditional;
- b) the schools are structured as enterprises for the production of a service, which means that they have organisational structures and processes that support service production consistent with music educational standards and the necessary administrative reporting;
- c) the educational action of schools can reach students also by supporting widespread music education by exceeding their boundaries, cooperating with public non-vocational educational institutions (generic primary and junior schools), while shaping music culture and at the same time adapting to the users' preferences for multiple music genres (from classic to pop, rap, jazz, folk, etc.) across ages;
- d) the educational action is nourished by the renewed motivation of the teachers, which is in part related to the material conditions of work (a satisfactory salary) and in part on the space of interaction between teaching and artistic activity. This is in turn subject to the legitimization that the CAMS has within the community and the community of musicians more specifically, but also to the changing taste and demand for musical production, to the choices of external actors within the performing arts sector and music industry.

The last two points in the list address the dynamic conditions of the CAMS. They can be challenged by the first point in the list, that is by what defines the paradigm (i.e., the set of initially shared standards and rules) and the technological trajectory (that is the range of opportunities for schools, students, and teachers).

Interdependence has developed over time between the rules of the provincial system and the music schools, which are complex structured organisations that can give implementation to the rules of the system. If without these schools, the effectiveness of the public-private collaboration and regulatory system would also lapse, it is also realistic to think that without public support the financial sustainability of the schools would evaporate. There is, in other words, a strong degree of mutual dependence between PAT's educational aims and CAMS. At the beginning of the process, for the public actor the possibility of achieving its educational and cultural objectives required interfacing with organisations that were already present and capable of implementing the educational system defined by the regulations. This required on the part of the schools a process of pedagogical and managerial learning, and an organisational structure with a more articulated division of labour and greater investments than those found in organisational experiences that are not part of this system. If, therefore, the schools are

sunk with respect to the model defined by the province, it is also plausible that the province depends on the schools for the implementation of an efficient music education service. In this sense we speak of interdependence rather than dependence.

Network externalities are also relevant to the reproduction of diffused music education. The demand for this service and its desirability depends on the reputation of the schools, that is on the number of its users, which indicates the level of preference for this service expressed by the collectivity. The positive feedback effect is expressed when the use of the service by an individual can lead to increased consumption by other individuals. The decision to enrol in music school, in fact, may be related to reasons linked to reputational aspects (the reputation of the school and its teachers), identity (wanting to be part of a community of musicians), relations (wanting to be part of a community of friends). These elements have cumulative features that generate network externalities.

This effect was supported:

- a) by the shared educational standard which proved to be capable of musically educating thousands of users each year;
- b) by collaborative projects between CAMS and general public schools, funded by PAT, which have however now stopped. These projects would contribute to fill the deficiencies of music education in non-vocational public schools and encourage students who were interested to continue their music education to enrol into CAMS once they exit the public school system.

The end of funded projects that took the expertise of CAMS teachers into general public schools is reducing the visibility of CAMS amongst children and families, thus potentially impacting over time on the number of students that schools may attract, also by virtue of the many competing recreational activities offered to young people. Other challenges may also impact on the presence of positive network externalities, among which: declining public resources, low salaries, generational change within school staff, the changing role of the conservatoire in providing qualifications beyond classic music education (i.e., pop and jazz) that can be spent professionally (a role that CAMS do not have).

5. Conclusions

We have looked at socio-economic activities from the neglected point of view of creativeness and self/other actualisation, supported by specific factors. As we consider specific activities or events of interest, a research on vitality would ask whether these activities are consistent with people's creativeness and actualisation. Forty years ago, it seemed that economic growth was the main goal, to be reached by means of higher competitiveness and profit. However, this has been driven by governance choices that reflect a will to exclude from choices and action of interest. This caused a big failure in

terms of disconnecting people from their own creativeness and actualising possibilities. The creation of a vital context, where people can develop their skills and ideas, is polycentric, with multiple organisations that are inclusive and participatory and where ties among nested institutional levels and communities of actors offer balanced opportunities, as the music school example indicates.

An important challenge is to find ways of coordinating vitality of different systems, on a regional and global scale. More research is needed to understand what type of institutional combinations are needed when the vitality of one system may conflict, at least in the short run, with that of another system. Part of the challenge is to address connections beyond the local area, nationally and internationally to build networks among communities of interest who can support creativeness reciprocally. This requires (in general and especially with regard to communities of interests such as artists, researchers, professionals, service users) the creation of cooperative spaces or platforms that facilitate communication and the development of a dialogue on the goals, structures and practices used, including the interactions along the entire service production filière.

Although this novel approach is just arising, further research can effectively focus on the idea of vitality. Our discussion has identified the dependent variables of future empirical studies (creativeness, self-actualisation and sense for others) which combined in synthetic indexes can provide a measure of vitality. We have also identified some enabling factors that may support vitality, to be operationalized as independent variables in coming applied research: intrinsically driven action and positive energy, cooperative behavioural attitudes, communication and participation, inclusive organisational governance, relational networks that can expand opportunities for self and other, the possibility to elude lock-in when necessary and use past knowledge when this is more likely to support people and their vitality, the combination of diverse and complementary institutional solutions and resources. All these elements are not sufficient on their own and may find diverse balances over time, depending on the changing state of things. Further empirical research is currently being developed to apply this framework to the study of the vitality of music schools, their teachers and students.

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