



Sixteen Years of *Economia Politica*: A Contribution to the Scientific Debate **By the Editors**

The analysis of articles published in scientific economic journals represents an important exercise with many implications. Identifying the subjects at the centre of economic debate in a given period, and their evolution over time (e.g. Heck-Zalesky, 1991), mapping the knowledge ‘spillovers’ which occur between different economic sub-disciplines (e.g. Leontief, 1996), determining the ‘core’ journals in the diffusion of economic ideas (e.g. Diamond, 1989), are some of the most important opportunities offered by an increasingly growing body of ‘biblio-metric’ literature.

Just as relevant, but unfortunately not as diffuse, is a ‘self-contained’ kind of analysis of a specific economic journal. Digging into the subjects to which most of its articles refer, bringing to light their ‘surplus’, appreciating their methodology and analytical tools, evaluating the different nature of their contributions (e.g. analysis, survey or review), and the ‘academic status’ of their authors, is extremely relevant. The economic debate can in this way be socially and historically contestualised, while the *pros* and the *cons* of a certain ‘style’ of producing economic literature can be isolated, spurring either its emendation, or confirmation, if not even its emulation. However, such an analysis is quite demanding, as it requires something more than superficial descriptive statistics regarding the most represented topics, and an investigation of the characteristic structure, contents and editorial aspects of a certain journal.

These arguments make the analysis of *Economia Politica* which appears in this issue quite original. Indeed, although the article has benefited from previous work by Pini - Segnana (1988), this is the first attempt to build up an extended and critical ‘cumulative index’ of an Italian economic journal. Given the primary role that, for the last sixteen years, *Economia Politica* has been playing for the evolution and diffusion of both economic theory and analysis, the study published here can be of great help in delineating the main research lines and the most important steps of the Italian debate, which has found in this journal a natural place to develop. However, its relevance is not only ‘local’. On the contrary, although the examples of systematic studies of this nature are in general quite rare (e.g. Hey-Winch, 1990; Schwert, 1993; Altman *et al.*, 1997), interesting comparisons can be undertaken in order to detect the relative position of a certain national body of literature with respect to the international debate, along with their reciprocal influence. In this last respect, the present analysis provides an interesting example that might be well worth extending and replicating.

The study draws on a very detailed original dataset. On the basis of it, by integrating an articulated quantitative analysis with a critical reading of the relative articles (i.e. by approaching the journal from the 'outside'), an external observer has identified and commented on a series of stimulating aspects.

That *Economia Politica* is a sufficiently 'well-balanced' means of diffusion of economic ideas emerges at different levels: its characteristic structure of different types of articles offers the reader a division of labour which proves to be useful for his specific research activity; the declared openness to different theoretical positions grants it an appreciable comparative advantage in subjects which are not as accurately dealt with in other journals; a distinctive specialisation is also reached in questions of history of economic thought and economic methodology, whose founding role is not as widely recognised elsewhere; finally, the division of labour between authors with a different academic status reveals a notable openness to the contribution of young researchers, especially in the most recent issues.

In all these respects, therefore, the 'policy' recommendation seems to be that of pursuing an editorial line which is quite well established. Other results which attracted the attention of the observer provide a useful opportunity for debate and stimulate discussion, both inside and outside the editorial board. This is especially the case of the background that most inspires the macroeconomic and microeconomic articles, for which a 'heterodox' kind of theories appears to be dominant. The same argument applies, in particular, to some core issues (such as information and uncertainty, technology, and institutions), with respect to which appreciable advancements have been recently reached, mainly in the form of surveys.

Although very concise, these comments suggest how the importance of an analysis of the kind here proposed can actually be twofold, as specific, 'internal' editorial questions emerge along with more general, 'external' economic issues. In both respects, therefore, the same type of exercise should be encouraged, and the present one hopefully welcomed.

References

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