

Endogenous Growth and the Rubens Workshop

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws a parallel between the way Pieter Paul Rubens led his successful workshop, in Antwerp, and the modern theories of endogenous growth. Ruben's workshop is viewed as a micro (economic) system which experienced tremendous growth, much of it thanks to continued innovation and related technology creation. We claim that, without such a process, which surprisingly mimics recipes from modern endogenous growth theory, the workshop's tremendous success wouldn't have been possible. Though the workshop production system was not restricted to Rubens's, partially similar units existing in the Low Countries and in the main Italian cities (like Venice or Florence), this "modern" approach to growth seems to have been employed only by Rubens. Some statistical evidence, based on the frequency of standardised motives in the workshop production, tries to add quantitative support to the logical argument. The paper closes in a broader perspective, in which Rubens' behaviour is explained under Baldassari Castiglione's ideal of the *cortigiano*. Economic theory, it seems, sometimes re-invents wheels which, in earlier advanced societies or elite groups, were part of a global approach to life.