

Seminari di Economia

Giovedì 27 ottobre 2022

Ore 12:00 – Aula Arcari

Facoltà di Scienze Economiche Giuridiche e Politiche - Viale Sant'Ignazio 84

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Books Go Public:

***The Consequences of Monastic Libraries
Expropriation on Innovation***

Abstract – Anticlerical legislation enacted in Italy shortly after the unification in 1866/67 suppressed religious houses, expropriated their properties, and their manuscripts were assigned to local libraries or served as basis for the establishment of new ones. In this paper, we examine whether public access to knowledge, previously stored in religious houses, affected innovative activity. We use data from a comprehensive survey of public libraries to reconstruct which municipality received volumes from monastic libraries. We link these data with newly digitized annual data on patents issued in Italy in the period 1863 to 1875. Using a difference-in-differences approach, we document that municipalities experiencing an increase in manuscripts availability significantly increased patenting activity. We show that the effect is driven by the expansion of the number of manuscripts in previously existing libraries and not by the institutions of new libraries. Additionally, we find that the effect is driven by the acquisition of books from general purpose libraries, as opposed to specific religious ones.