

# Commons: rediscovering new collective action

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# Why are commons relevant concept?

- Buzzword of different progressive movements and thinkers especially in Europe and Latin America
- Common point, uniting factor for various struggles of social actors with different shades of green and red
- concept has also appeal outside of the green and left ideologies and penetrated to mainstream mostly through Elinor Ostrom receiving a Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009

# Commons historically

- Aristotle, *Politics*

“What is common to the greatest has the least care bestowed upon him. Everyone thinks chiefly of his own, hardly at all of the common interest”

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Commons in state of nature lead to destruction of natural resources and the state needed to protect them

- Marx, *Capital*

Enclosure of commons from 16th to 18th century crucial for transformation of feudalism to capitalism

# Tragedy of the commons

- Hardin, G (1968) *Tragedy of the Commons*, Science  
“imagine a pasture open to all”
- Ostrom, E (1990) *Governing the Commons*  
demonstrating empirically that (natural) resources  
could be sustainably managed without the market  
(privatisation) and state (central regulation)
- Tragedy of the Private
- Tragedy of the Public

# What are commons?

- Definition: *practice of governing resources by community of users rather than by the government or through market exchanges*
- Three elements:
  - Resource
  - Community
  - Governance

# Resource

- All what is useful to humans
- Material and non-material
- Natural and cultural
- Socially determined

# Community

- Traditional concept
- Based before on geography and kinship
- harmony, equality – oppression, hierarchy
- Community – shared identity, values and rules among members
- Community and society
- “communities of individuals”
- Multi-membership of community

# Governance

- Regime
- Institutions – rules and organisations
- Model
- Decision – making process
- Regulation
- Sanction for freeriding



# Commons – Commoning - Commoners

- Social process
- Social relation
- Dynamic
- Unstable
- Self-inventing and recreating
- Depends on actors – no commons without commoners (stewards)
- Not all users are commoners, but all commoners are users - Wikipedia

# Positivist or normative concept

- Positivist approach – analysing commons, ideological neutrality, apolitical
- Normative concept – using commons for social transformation, interpreting commons as mostly positive, political
- Three normative criteria (Helfrich, 2012):
  - Fair access (social justice)
  - Collective control (democracy)
  - Sustainable use (inter-generational solidarity)

# Commons as radical democracy

- Dolenc, D (2012) *Commons as Radical Democratic Project*
- Extending political democracy to socio-economic sphere of resources
- Extending representative democracy to direct, participatory and deliberative democracy
- Against outsourcing of governance and governance exclusively by specialists
- Against New Public Management

# Difference between public and common goods

- Common goods managed by community of users while public goods managed by public sector
- **Managed better than governed** as public hospitals would be public goods while private hospitals not although also governed by public sector in terms of regulation
- Public goods can be also extended as normative concept when saying that goods are not just managed by public sector but also managed in **public interest** (?!?)
- Commons ask if there is fair access to public goods like education, health, if there is collective control and if there is sustainable use
- Whole spectrum between commons and public goods - non-profit concessions to public-civic partnerships

# Commons VS states, commons VS markets

- Commons against markets and states
- Commons beyond markets and states
- Commons outside of markets and states
- Commons within and without markets and states

# Commons and property

- Public and private property duopoly
- No social property, no commons property
- Nominal less important – effective control important
- Examples – Saquapac and Eau de Grenoble

# Commons and collective action

- Theory of the firm
- Theory of the state
  
- Totalitarianism of commons - commonism
  
- Collective human rights – Right to the City

# Commons - tensions

- Urban – rural
- Traditional (land) and modern (digital)
- Material and non-material
- Natural and cultural



# Commons in regional context

- anglo-saxonic concept so difficult to translate but as became trendy it helps to rediscover collective practices from past or today
- common point for different struggles - climate justice, free Internet, open source technology, commodification of nature, welfare state services, economic democracy
- important concept to legitimise defensive against privatisation of public but also for offensive on constructing new democratic, socially just and sustainable model
- beyond public - private ownership dichotomy
- commonisation of the state and commonisation of the market - especially in Balkans- democratisation of public services
- important to rebuild the ruptured social fabric of neoliberal policies – increasing social capital

# Limits of commons

- Scale
- Cooptation
- Voluntary engagement

# Common challenges

- How to create commons?
- How to recreate commons?
- How to sustain commons?
- How to protect commons?
- How to commonise the state?
- How to commonise the market?