

# TESTING THE CONCEPT OF THE COMMONS IN URBAN PROJECTS AND CITIZEN INITIATIVES



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# FOREWORD

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**Leïla Kebir, Frédéric Wallet**

In the last few years, the concepts of the “commons” and of “common goods” have attracted unprecedented new interest in the field of urban development. The terms are extensively used whether to justify public operations or projects initiated by citizens, either as individuals or collectives. This fervour raises questions and invites special attention. Whether involving local groups or larger scale regional authorities, addressing issues as diverse as the energy transition, sustainable urban development, the management of natural resources or public spaces, the development of the circular economy or urban ecosystems, the protection of biodiversity, etc., these initiatives crystallise a number of crosscutting and trans-sectoral contemporary issues and anchor them within a purportedly new framework.

The strongly territorial nature of initiatives that lay claim to the creation or management of “common goods” suggests that what we have here – in the domain of urban development – is a pathway to action, and in particular to innovation, for territorial actors. It would also seem to reflect a shift in our society towards more collective, more participatory, ways of utilising and managing territorial resources, with the involvement of stakeholders and above all users. These approaches therefore seem to point to an aspiration towards development that is more localised, inclusive, sustainable and equitable, and which goes beyond the boundaries of the traditional divide between public intervention as the only embodi-

ment of the collective dimension and private initiative reduced to individual interests. This raises questions of several kinds: What are these “new” commons, what do they consist of concretely, how do they involve the territory, its resources, its activities and its proximities? What are their implications in terms of changes in the systems of actors, in coordination, in governance and legal frameworks? Do they point to the emergence of a new way of shaping territory? Finally, in terms of public action, what role do they aspire to in the setting of public policy and in the implementation of practical measures? To what extent does this alter the contours of these policies, the ways they are set and implemented? These are all questions that this research seeks to elucidate by identifying more than 140 local initiatives and analysing a dozen of them in depth. In so doing, it offers a close analysis of a phenomenon that is proliferating but has so far attracted little academic attention.





# INTRODUCTION

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## **A theoretical and practical success of “common goods”**

What do citizen laboratories, community gardens, GIS platforms, community energy systems, co-working spaces and event-based actions have in common? Whether the issue is urban farming (*Agrocité* in Gennevilliers, *Ferme des bouillons* in Rouen, *Disco Soupe* in several countries), participatory housing (Coordiaction, *Atelier populaire d'urbanisme* in Grenoble, *Fête la friche* in Lille), pop-up development projects (*Les Grands Voisins*), or temporary uses of buildings (*6b* in Saint-Denis, *Shakirail* in Paris, *Gare Remix* in Lyon), we are seeing a proliferation of local initiatives that claim to be involved in the creation or management of “common goods” relating to spatial development.

Indeed, this concept is currently enjoying a revival of interest if judged by the number of initiatives, but also by the number of symposiums and study days set aside by and for urban development actors around these notions. It also seems to interest the scientific community, as evidenced by recent publications relating to it (Coriat, 2015, Dardot and Laval 2014) as well as a multitude of dedicated seminars.

One explanation for the success of these concepts is undoubtedly that they seem to crystallise a number of contemporary cross-cutting and transectoral problems, such as the energy transition, sustainable urban development, the management of natural resources or public spaces, the development of the circular economy or urban ecosystems, the protection of biodiversity, etc. These are all questions that motivate or trigger the emergence of local groups and to which the concepts of the commons or of common goods seems to promise the beginnings of an answer.

Differing in kind, purpose and size, these common goods take forms that vary in their degree of inclusiveness, such as community

gardens, the social and solidarity-based economy, the collaborative or sharing economy, certain short food supply chains, shared consumption, the creative commons movement, etc. Other than this variety, what is meant by “common goods”? All these variants entail forms of pooled and hybrid management of resources (land, infrastructures, knowledge, etc.), which are partway between “public” and “private”, between the market and the hierarchy. Herein lies the main specificity of the use of the concept of the “common”: in the different initiatives mentioned above, the aim is to suggest, almost to “signal”, a use of urban resources that is attributable neither strictly to a public authority nor to a private company.

To avoid misunderstanding, let us begin by specifying our research standpoint. It is not our wish, at least at this stage, to begin a discussion on the different scientific definitions of the concepts of common goods and the commons, or the controversies around them, nor on the use made of these concepts, nor their potential “distortion” by one actor or another. While our research has several goals, which are set out below, we have chosen to identify and try to describe initiatives – whether ongoing or completed – that relate to the commons, without assigning any prior definition to this concept. For us, the aim of this open and non-normative approach is to understand how actors today employ the notions of the “commons”, of “common goods”, what they project into them, how they incorporate them into their practices and in so doing change, or fail to change, forms of territorial organisation or management. In our empirical approach, therefore, an initiative is considered to relate to the commons if it is identified as such by the instigators of the initiatives in question or by third parties.

## **Historical background of territorial common goods**

The commons have achieved this theoretical and practical success against a background of structural economic and technological crisis, decline in the public finances, and the development of communication technologies that encourage “sharing”. The appeal to the commons is a way of challenging conventional forms of management and, in so doing, trying out new methods. And this is occurring in ever wider domains.

The question of the handling of “nonprivate” (i.e. non-excludable and/or non-rivalrous) goods has prompted major debates and extensive investigation in economics. We can divide the progression of ideas into several main stages, which persist today with the extension of the concept to the handling of territorial and urban resources. It is to this latter stage that this research programme seeks to contribute.

The initial phase of research into the notion of “common goods” was marked by the seminal work in public economics of the 1950s-1970s (e.g. Samuelson, 1954 and Musgrave and Musgrave, 1973). The tasks of determining the most efficient scale of action for the management of public goods (then, more broadly, nonprivate goods), countering opportunistic and potentially resource-depleting practices (see Hardin’s “Tragedy of the Commons”, 1968)<sup>1</sup>, setting the level of public action, identifying the right management instruments, have been and remain central to this thinking. Then other voices emerged, and with them a new stage in the development of the ideas. Favouring institutional and constructed approaches to these resources (it is primarily the institutional regime that governs whether a good is private or not, and not its intrinsic qualities (Nahrath, 2015) and showing the relevance of collective and localised forms of resource management (compared with the preferred forms of privatisation), Ostrom and Ostrom (1977) and their team returned to the question of the management of common resources. Dealing with natural (or land) resources, and with the analysis and identification of the associated institutional regimes (common-pool resource), these ideas would then be extended to other common resources (commons), in particular to knowledge and informational resources. On this

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<sup>1</sup> In his 1968 article, based on the fictional example of a pasture, Hardin argues that, since individual and short-term interests take priority among individuals, the common management of resources inexorably leads to their overuse and destruction. Under these circumstances, private property (the enclosure) appears to be a solution because it has the effect of ensuring that individual owners take care of their section of pasture. However, in this article, which would be used to justify the promotion of resource privatisation, Hardin confuses free access and the common ownership that he criticises. He would return to his 1968 writings at the end of his career.

occasion, the field of knowledge mainly concerned was the development of patents on living organisms and of information technologies, which led in turn to a third wave of research (Coriat and Orsi, 2002; Hess and Ostrom, 2017).

The topic of the commons is reemerging again, this time with a focus on the need to find new approaches to the city and on urban objects such as community gardens, biodiversity, the recovery of process energy (potentially recoverable waste energy), public space, the data associated with the rollout of smart cities, etc. Some authors interested in urban issues go so far as to refer to the city itself as a common-pool resource (Foster and Iaione, 2015).

Finally, no discussion of the commons would be complete without recognising their connection with other linked disciplines and issues: political philosophy and the ethical question of the general interest (Thomas Aquinas), political science with the problem of defining institutional resource regimes (Nahrath, 2015). More recently, it is the fundamentals of the current system of management (privatisation or appropriation of resources by a small group of actors to the detriment of the others) which seem to under discussion through this notion, going so far as to open up the possibility of a “political alternative” (Dardot and Laval, 2014).

In consequence, thinking and speaking about the commons – beyond the question of resource management as such – is about a political vision of the place and role of the state, of companies, of citizens and of all stakeholders. However, resource pooling is not a neutral matter and raises many questions, in particular over governance.

### **A re-examination of the methods of managing territorial resources**

Undertaken by groups that vary in their forms and priorities, these systems challenge contemporary methods of managing territorial resources, in particular urban resources. Drawing on the notion of the commons, they entail a shift in the distribution of responsibilities largely towards the user and producer of the resource, instead of simply the owners or the state.

They also suggest a change in forms of development. Indeed, the use of this concept raises questions about how territorial development should nowadays be viewed. The processes associated with the commons seem in certain respects very similar to those described by the literature on territorial development (Camagni and Maillat, 2006; Capello, 2007; Courlet and Pecqueur, 2008; Gilly and Torre, 2000). In both cases, the key factor is a form of (re)appropriation of development by local actors, and a focus on collective processes for the creation and activation of local resources. With the difference that the economic dimensions – competitiveness and attractiveness (knowledge creation, productive resources, etc.) – now combine with societal priorities (ecological transition, well-being). Combining both productive and/or residential priorities, they no longer seem wedded to a strictly economic framework.

As a result, these issues are being more and more explicitly incorporated into development strategies. The commons-based approach that is emerging today thus seems to offer a way for territorial actors to act and above all to innovate. That is why we believe that the process merits exploration. What does the notion of the commons contribute? What does it imply in terms of the mobilisation of the territory, its resources and its stakeholders? What does its recent emergence mean for territorial development priorities? How is it applied? What opportunities and difficulties does it bring in terms of development, in particular in the current uncertain conditions and the ecological transition?





Site of the *Grands Voisins* urban project, Manuel Bouquet, Terra



# PART 1

## TOWARDS A TERRITORIALISATION OF THE COMMONS THROUGH THE PRISM OF URBAN DYNAMICS

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### **Varied research goals**

The research reflects the wish to develop a study programme, begun in 2015, on the issue of the “new commons” and their territorial links. There were three main components to the Biscote project.

The first goal was to develop a conceptual and operational framework for the analysis of the commons as understood today by the actors of territorial development. Although still useful references, the existing analytical frameworks needed broadening in order to encompass the variety of types and organisation in today’s commons (see the discussion of definitions below). According to Coriat (2015), a distinction needs to be made between the different forms they take and the specific issues they raise in terms of methods of management and governance (structures of organisation or coordination). In order to grasp the specificities associated with urban development, we thought it useful to add the territorial dimension, i.e. questions of embeddedness, mobility and proximity. Our aim was to grasp the links that exist between the commons and the territory. To what extent (if at all) is the territory, as a collective of actors and a matrix, a foundational element in the development of the commons.

An ad hoc analytical grid was developed as a basis for the conduct of the inventory proper. We drew up a list of existing “self-certified” projects or projects described as relating to the creation or the management of territorial commons (i.e. commons developed at regional and/or local scale). Though focused mainly on France, this inventory also included with European and international ex-

periments. Drawing on this analytical framework, its aim was to arrive at a better understanding of the current commons phenomenon. Ten case studies completed the analysis.

## Objectives

Based on a hypothetico-deductive method, the BISCOTE research programme pursues three complementary scientific goals.

The first, conceptual and theoretical, consists in analysing the implications of the commons, in particular urban commons. Adopting an institutionalist and evolutionary approach applied to spatial planning, the aim is to understand the reasons why choices are made, the modes of governance employed (definition of “community”, chosen scale, decision-making, sharing and redistribution systems, handling of the risks of opportunistic behaviours, etc.) and hence how they are currently changing approaches to territorial development.

The second aspect is linked with the first, but is empirical and operational, i.e. field-based. It draws on observations and analyses arising from practices and experiments in order to provide the actors concerned (public authorities, practitioners, project initiators, etc.) with tools for deliberation and action. The aim is to contribute to the debates and to identify difficulties and good practices, as well as to provide an operational framework of analysis.

The third, which focuses on public action, explores how the commons fit into territorial planning and development policies. How do they influence the setting of public policy? To what extent does the commons phenomenon alter the contours of these policies, the decision-making and implementation processes involved?

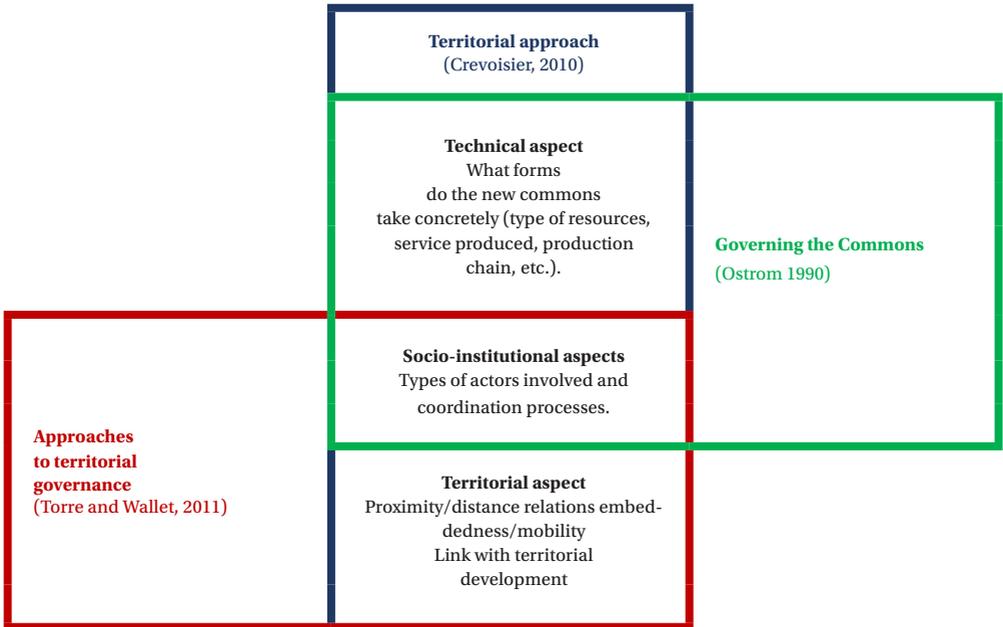
## Listing and classifying commons-related initiatives

One of the project’s main tasks was to draw up a list of commons-related initiatives. Before presenting the results of this inventory, we describe here above the interpretative framework and method used.

### Constructing an analytical grid that combines several approaches

In order to analyse the different cases identified, an ad hoc interpretative framework was created. Figure 1 below presents its architecture.

Figure 1 : Theoretical basis of the interpretative framework.



Based on a combination of several approaches, the interpretative framework is structured around the territorial approach developed in the work of the Research Group on Innovative Milieus (Crevoisier, 2010; Corpataux et al., 2009). This approach consists in analysing the phenomenon observed (the projects and initiatives listed) in terms of the following three dimensions:

- The technical dimension: concretely, what does the initiative or project consist of, what resources does it employ, what are the technical conditions of its implementation, etc.?
- The socio-institutional dimension: who are the actors involved, what are their types (public authority, civil society, SME, multinational, etc.) and what are the relations between them (one-off, long-term, horizontal, vertical, etc.)?
- The territorial dimension: what is the spatiotemporal dimension of the initiative or project rest on (local, multi-local, multiscale, permanent, temporary, one-off, etc.), what local and distance links are developed, to what extent is the common anchored and/or mobile?

A combined analysis of these three dimensions can help to reveal their interdependencies and to explain how the initiative fits into the territory and its effects on the local economic fabric.

Because these initiatives are structured around common resources, the approach to the commons taken by Elinor Ostrom (1990) and her followers is specifically employed to characterise the objects observed. In particular, we employ the operational definitions of “common-pool resources”, i.e. resources marked by rivalry phenomena, for which it is difficult or too costly to exclude potential users, as well as the definition of the “commons” according to which they are necessarily structured around a resource, a community and rules.

Finally, the approach to territorial governance (Torre and Wallet, 2011) is used to analyse the new commons' contribution to governance dynamics. So the role of the public authority, the initiative's integration and scope within the local fabric, are taken into account. The influence of kinds of governance arrangements on the

development trajectories of territories is therefore included. Particular attention is paid to the institutional dimensions through the kinds of coordination tools used to shape and steer collective action, but also to manage situations of conflict between categories of stakeholders or opposition to a given project. The linkage between arrangements that have been formalised to different degrees, and how they interlock at different scales, are considered in order to describe how governance processes are introduced into territories, influencing the engagement of stakeholders and their adjustment to public policies.

For each initiative identified as relating to the creation or management of territorial common goods, we aimed to identify:

- the characteristics (material or nonmaterial resource, artefact) and attributes of the resource around which the common is structured (exclusion or rivalry effects).
- factors relating to the stakeholders, to the community affected by the initiative (community in place before the rollout of the initiative, created ad hoc) and as well as any rules they may set for themselves.
- aspects relating to the initiative's territorial anchorage, i.e. relations of proximity and distance, of embeddedness and mobility brought into play by the initiative.

### **The choice of diversity**

The initiatives included in the inventory had to be either in progress or completed. The aim was to collect information on the phenomenon observed as experienced and as far as possible to avoid retrospective rationalisations. These initiatives had to be connected with the commons. It should be noted that we did not set a prior definition on the commons, since the aim was to understand how today's actors employ the notions of the "commons", of "common goods", what they project into them, how they incorporate them into their practices and in so doing change, or not, the forms of territorial organisation or management. An initiative was therefore considered to relate to the commons if it was identified as such by the instigators of the initiatives in question or by third

parties<sup>2</sup>.

The situations observed could take place in local territorial spaces but also abroad. Indeed, the aim was to understand the phenomenon as a whole, since it is active in many developed countries (particularly Italy, Greece, Spain).

However, we concentrated mainly on commons situated in urban areas and structured at territorial scale. We therefore excluded the analysis of “traditional” commons (pastures, forests, fisheries). Likewise, we did not look at global commons (ocean, air, Amazon forest, etc.) which have already been studied extensively and where the governance issues largely operate at national and international scale.

With respect to the spheres of action of these initiatives, we looked for diversity rather than specialising on one field or another. For example, the quest for initiatives initially led us mainly towards social commons (community groceries, etc.) which, since they are headed by social enterprise movements, have been extensively inventoried and promoted by specialist platforms. For this reason, we sought to broaden our investigations, particularly into the field of architecture and urban planning, in order to reflect the variety of the initiatives taking place.

### **Establishment of a database**

The case inventory was produced from:

- Scientific reading: we identified commons cited in scientific articles or books.
- Documents: we identified commons cited in grey literature sources (notably reports).

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<sup>2</sup> We therefore applied to the commons, by analogy, the principles of “actually existing sustainability” (Evans and Jones, 2008; Krueger and Aegyman, 2005). This approach applies sustainability to different social, political and economic contexts. It consists in analysing how sustainability is produced in reality, from observation of what the actors do and without applying any a priori definition. We therefore do the same here with the notions of commons and common goods currently applied by the actors in the context that interests us.

- Scientific conferences: we identified commons cited by scholars at conferences. In this case, additional research was carried out to give substance to the information gathered.
- Web searches: most of the inventory came from this source. Specialist platforms were identified: *Les Communs d'abord*, *Portail des communs* and the Remix the Commons Wiki. These platforms promote the commons movement and are a source of information and good practices of all kinds.

The goal of this exploratory inventory was to reflect the diversity of “common good initiatives” and not to look for some kind of representative weighting. To determine the size of the sample, therefore, we worked by saturation. Once additional cases brought no further diversity, we stopped the searches.

Through this inventory, we identified 145 initiatives. Around two thirds of them are located in France, while the remaining third are divided between Europe (mainly Spain and Belgium with one case in the Netherlands and in Germany), and the United States. The “other” category covers Internet platforms that are considered here to be global in the sense that the services they offer are available in a large number of countries and... potentially everywhere (e.g. the Couchsurfing hospitality platform). Other examples are also included in this category, because they were difficult to situate (e.g. Linux software).

## Ten case studies

Among the cases identified, 10 initiatives (located in the Paris region) were selected for in-depth case studies.

### Method adopted

The case studies were carried out by means of a qualitative survey. The project’s initiators were interviewed. A semistructured interview guide was constructed. It consists of general questions on the initiative (origin, start,...) and on the interviewee (role in the initiative...), then on the shared resource and how the sharing itself operates (degree of openness, relations between users...). It then focuses on the boundaries and identification of the community (of

users), on its governance, and on the management of the shared resource (who sets the rules and how?). Next, questions about ownership are raised, followed by the impacts on the territory where the initiative is located. After this, the economic model is discussed (funding, partnerships, budgets, projects, staff...), and the interview guide concludes by exploring the initiative's connection with the commons movement.

The interviews were supported by documentary research. It was not always easy to contact the people behind the initiatives. Indeed, since they were often run through very flimsy structures, staffed by civil society actors or volunteers, the information available was not always up to date and the people not available. In all, some 20 semistructured interviews were conducted in 2018 with project actors (founders, representatives, members of the boards of civil society entities, institutional actors).

### **Varying relations to territories**

The cases analysed were chosen to cover a wide variety of situations, whether in terms of resource types or connection with the territory. Connection with the territory is defined in terms of two criteria. The first is the degree of specificity and embeddedness: can the initiative be easily reproduced and replicated elsewhere? Does it employ resources that are specific to the territory? The second is the size of the community and therefore the initiative's potential footprint on the territory. When the initiative is strongly anchored and the community is large, socio-institutional intensity and territorial embeddedness are potentially high. Cross-linking these two criteria produces four archetypal cases (Figure 2):

| Community<br>Link to the territory  | Small community  | Big community  |
|---|--|--|
| High embeddedness and specificity<br>High institutional intensity ( <i>non-replicability, non-transferability</i> ) | <b>Specific productive projects</b> ( <i>productive sector</i> ) e.g. 6b<br><br><b>CASE III</b>                                | <b>Large scale initiatives</b> ( <i>productive and/or residential sector</i> ) e.g. Les Grands Voisins<br><br><b>CASE IV</b> |
| Low embeddedness and specificity<br>Low institutional intensity ( <i>replicability and transferability</i> )        | <b>Small neighbourhood initiatives</b> ( <i>residential sector, quality of life</i> ) e.g. Comm'un jardin<br><br><b>CASE I</b> | <b>Distributed projects</b> ( <i>residential sector, quality of life</i> ) e.g. Open Street map<br><br><b>CASE II</b>        |

**Small neighbourhood initiatives** (CASE I) are run by small communities and characterised by low embeddedness and specificity. They represent community projects that can at least be assumed to be easily replicable and reproducible in other places. The resources and assets employed are generic (in the sense of Colletis and Pecqueur, 1994)<sup>3</sup>. The typical example of these “small

<sup>3</sup> The term “generic”, according to these authors, relates to the fact that the resource (unused potential, e.g. urban wasteland) or the asset (used resource, e.g. surface area of allotments introduced into urban wasteland) can be easily replicated and transferred (e.g. a litre of oil). Its value is linked neither to the territory nor to a particular activity. It essentially depends on the market price. In contrast, specific resources and assets are intimately linked with the territory and with the activities in which they are employed (e.g. AOP wine production, skilled labour). The more specific it is, the more the value of the resources is linked to its territorial embeddedness, and the more difficult (or even impossible) and costly it is to replicate on other territories.

neighbourhood initiatives” is the community garden. Present in many cities, whether on wasteland or dedicated plots, community gardens have proliferated in recent years. The purpose of these projects is, among other things, to improve quality of life and strengthen social bonds (Scheromm, 2015). The belief is that they will enhance the areas where they are located. The goal here is essentially to make cities more attractive (in reference to the productive-residential systems identified by Davezies and Talandier, 2014) by improving residential quality. They bring local services which may or may not be commoditized. This quality enhancement is reflected in land values and can lead to gentrification processes (Mestdagh, 2015).

**The distributed initiatives** (CASE II) are undertaken by large communities and have low territorial embeddedness. The typical example is the Internet platform, which can potentially reach the entire global community. People can consult and contribute to Open Street Map anywhere in the world (provided they have Internet access), and can exchange goods or services via a trading platform wherever they are. The objective of most of the initiatives that fall into this category is the production, dissemination and exchange of knowledge. Often, this knowledge relates to the resources available in the territory and includes geolocation data (location of services, flagging of heritage and biodiversity sites, etc.). However, the knowledge shared can also be technical (mechanical drawings, building plans). These platforms help to reinforce people’s capacities/ capabilities, whether in everyday activities (the most common cases encountered) or potentially in productive projects.

**Specific productive initiatives** (CASE III) are projects undertaken by small communities that are strongly embedded in the territory because of the resources they employ and the actors involved. Typical examples are 6b (which describes itself as a “self-managed place of work, culture and exchange”)<sup>4</sup> or *La Pail-lassé* (“open citizen research laboratory where scientific, entrepre-

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4 [https://www.le6b.fr/presentation 17/08/2019 ; 23h28](https://www.le6b.fr/presentation%2017/08/2019%2023h28).

neurial and artistic projects are initiated and accelerated”<sup>5</sup>). These initiatives are primarily productive (artistic and cultural productions, development of innovations rooted in citizen science, etc.), but also characterised by local societal goals (event organisation, neighbourhood services, etc.). Specialising in a particular field, they contribute to the creation and exploitation of territorial resources (expertise, production networks, creative and cultural competences, etc.) and are embedded in local production networks (technology clusters, cultural production, etc.). In this respect, they reinforce the local economic system and its competitiveness.

**Large-scale initiatives** (CASE IV) involve a large community and are marked by strong territorial embeddedness. They include big projects for district development (e.g. *Les Grands Voisins* in Paris) or new parks (*Driemasterpark* in Gand). The territorial footprint of these projects is large because of the resources they employ (land, budget, skills, etc.), the variety of actors involved (institutions, businesses, civil society groups, etc.), and also because of their visibility. Difficult to reproduce, these projects are usually embodied in particular places which consolidate their embeddedness and make them even less transferable. As places of production and/or local services, they enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of the territory. In the present research, each of these four categories is covered by at least one in-depth case study.

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5 <https://lapaillasse.org/> 17/08/2019 ; 23h29.



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## Ten case studies

### Agrocité

is a micro-farm located in Gennevilliers, which offers community gardens, educational and cultural areas and a series of experimental projects (heating, rainwater collection, solar power production, phytoremediation). *Agrocité* is a unit of the R-URBAN (Urban Resilience Network) collective dedicated to urban farming, and is part of a broader strategy of “urban resilience based on an ecological and participatory approach”.



Source : Agrocité

## Comm'un jardin

is a teaching garden located in Paris's 19th arrondissement, under the *Halle Pajol*. Its goal is to raise awareness and to offer people the opportunity to practise and learn gardening with the organisers (members of *Vergers Urbains*, the structure that manages the garden). It is located in a public park and is open to all.



## Disco Soupe

is a civil-society movement dedicated to raising awareness about food waste. It promotes the organisation of “Disco Soups”, community events with music where soups are prepared entirely from unsold food items recovered from markets, groceries or supermarkets. The meals are organised in public space, and are usually free of charge or pay-what-you-can. Everyone is welcome and can contribute to the preparation of food during the event. This initiative exists in several countries.



©: Sophie Chapelle, Basta

## L'association ECObox (Jardin ECObox)

runs a community garden in Paris's 18th arrondissement, at impasse de la Chapelle. It promotes a variety of urban ecology activities (gardening, urban farming, training workshops, renewable energy experiments, urban waste recycling, etc.). It hosts a community supported agriculture organisation, as well as a community purchasing association.



©: ECObox Facebook page

## Tela Botanica

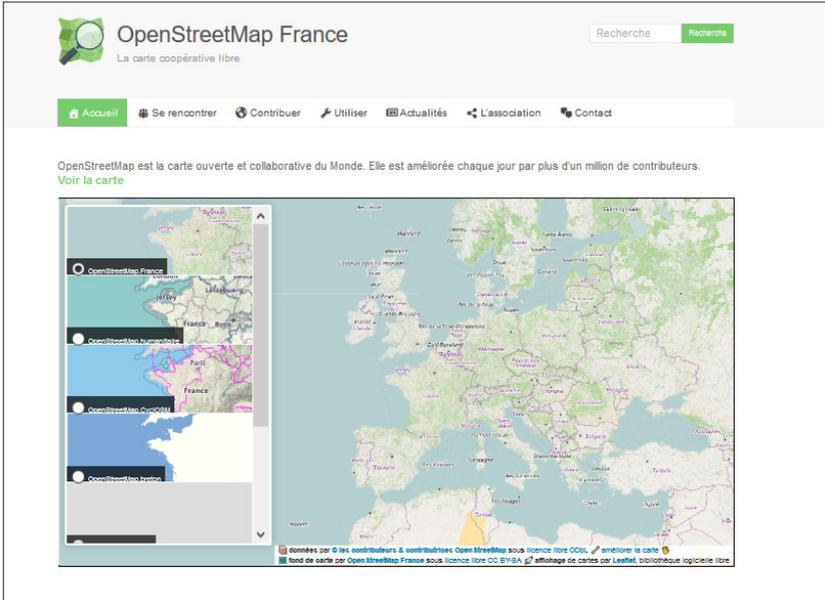
is a NGO primarily dedicated to running a creative, communication and discussion centre for French-speaking botanists and all plant enthusiasts. It holds a significant botany database, constructed via a collaborative national network.



©: streets-Tela-Botanica\_CC-BY-SA

## Open Street Map

is a mapping platform where the aim is for users to create a map of the world. Everyone can contribute to mapping their neighbourhood or their city as a volunteer, the aim being to provide data on amenities, services, shops, etc. present in the area. Open Street Map is an open data platform, which means that anyone can use the information it contains provided that they mention the source.



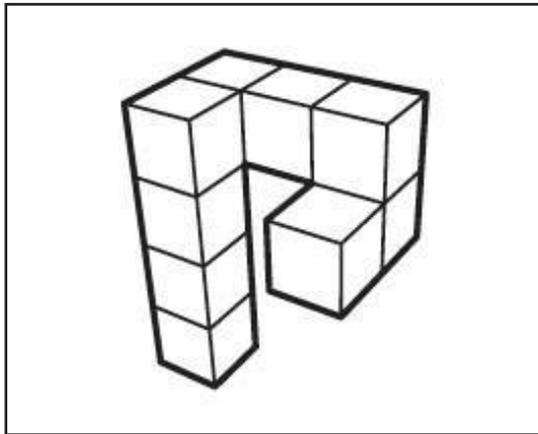
Source : openstreetmap.fr

## La Pailasse

is an open citizen research centre which conducts activities to initiate and accelerate scientific, entrepreneurial and artistic projects. It is the first open source community laboratory of this kind in France. An interdisciplinary initiative, it offers “without discrimination on age, qualifications or income”<sup>6</sup>, the technical, legal and ethical framework needed for the development of collaborative and open source projects. It is located in the centre of Paris and provides project initiators with meeting and co-working spaces, a laboratory and scientific equipment. The primary focus is on research on issues of health, the environment, diet, materials, art, and citizen powers.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://lapaillasse.org/> 18/08/2019, 17h50.



KissKissBankBank

## Le 6b

is a workspace shared and self-managed by its residents. Located in Saint Denis, in a former office building, it is now managed by the 6b Association, which has occupied it for several years. It is a place where people can rent an office or workshop, aimed mainly at artists and artisans, who are involved in the management and running of the place. The objective is also to “provide a culture that is within everyone’s reach, in the dynamic and fast-changing urban environment of Saint Denis”<sup>7</sup>.

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7 <https://www.le6b.fr/presentation/> 18/08/2019, 17h55.



## Les Robins des Villes

is an organisation that promotes the active involvement and participation of citizens in the making of the city. Present in Lyon, Marseille and Paris, it seeks to disseminate, share and discuss knowledge about the city. It organises educational activities (in situ workshops, training courses, etc.). The Parisian branch undertakes activities to convert and refurbish inclusive spaces where local people can go for support.



## Les Grands Voisins

is a mixed activity site that contains a mix of workspaces, emergency shelter, and leisure and relaxation areas. It is located in the former Saint-Vincent-de-Paul hospital, currently undergoing refurbishment, in Paris's 14th arrondissement. Run by three civil society organisations (Aurore, Yes We Camp and Plateau Urbain) and open to the public, this temporary space sees itself as a place of social and economic experiment.



## Convergence methodology and organisation

We undertook the analysis of these 10 case studies with the following objectives:

- **To identify the meaning assigned to the terms “commons” or “common goods”** by the creators of the initiatives.
- **To understand the background to the emergence of these initiatives**, i.e. the reasons for their creation (service shortages, exploitation of resources, opposition to a project, etc.).
- **To identify their goals, the nature of the community, the resources they employ, and the forms of governance they apply.** The aim in particular is to identify the aims and the material and nonmaterial resources (knowledge) employed in the initiative; the stakeholders and the nature of their involvement, in particular the role of the public authorities, and also to explore the rules of the common and their evolution.
- **To examine and observe the initiatives in their links to the territory:** identification of the geographical scales involved and the forms of embeddedness and mobility, and thereby the links formed with the territory, as well as to identify the timeframes of these initiatives.
- **To identify the challenges, opportunities and difficulties encountered by the instigators of these initiatives.** The aim here is to explore the trajectory of the initiative and its adjustments to success, to problems or to changing conditions.

### **Breakdown of analyses or meta-synthesis of results**

This text takes the form of a qualitative meta-synthesis (Fingeld, 2003). Once we were in possession of the inventory and the different case studies, we proceeded in three steps.

First, on the basis of the inventory, we established a definition of “commons”, i.e. the meaning assigned to it by practitioners.

Second, we reported on the research questions, drawing both on the information from the inventory and, from a comparative perspective, on the different case studies. This method was essentially used to identify the salient points.

Finally, we reinterpreted the results from a combined comparative and integrative perspective. This means that, rather than simply producing a comparative analysis of the results, we sought to arrive at a body of conceptual material with its own substance, beyond the investigation undertaken on each case (Fingeld, 2003).

In short, the aim is to develop an integrative vision that seeks to encompass and understand all the cases, in both their differences and similarities. The resulting body of conceptual material allows us to tackle the main research question, i.e. the nature and territorialities of commons-related initiatives. Its value lies in its capacity to make sense of the different case studies and to bring out their differences.

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## **PART 2**

# **COMMONS IN THE CITY: FEEDBACK FROM THE FIELD**

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One of the first aims of the research was to consider the commons phenomenon as it actually occurs and is interpreted and implemented in the real world. The inventory showed that there is a big gap between what is now called commons or common good, and established and recognised definitions. In line with our research approach, we will explore how the actors understand these terms and how this connects with the existing literature.

### **Common Good, Common Goods and Commons: initiatives that reveal different levels of collective action**

The projects and initiatives identified, as well as the scientific literature on the commons, are structured around several concepts that vary in the inclusiveness of their definitions and in the formalism of their practices. We propose to represent the world of commons-related initiatives in a set of projects that embody different levels of complexity and formalisation (figure 3).

Figure 3 : The Matriochka (Russian Doll) of commons-related initiatives



The first level concerns “common goods” (in the plural) as understood in the public economy (Musgrave and Musgrave, 1973) and above all the common-pool resources of the institutional economy identified by Elinor Ostrom (1990), who emphasises the socially constructed and institutional dimension of these resources. She identifies eight principles that characterise the conditions under which local communities are capable in their own right of establishing the rules for the sustainable management of the resources they use (pastures, fisheries, forests, water, etc.). Indeed, the existence of rivalry (subtractability) is fundamental to the commons, hence the need for coordination between users. The rules here are defined not on the basis of private property rights but through a bundle of rights (right of access and extraction, of management, of exclusion and of alienation) distributed incrementally within the community on the basis of each person’s position (simple user, holder of use and management rights, owner without alienation rights, owner) (Orsi, 2014; Schlager and Ostrom, 1992).

The second, looser level, is the commons as an arrangement linking a resource, a community and rules (Coriat, 2015). Less

restrictive, it encompasses a wider set of common-pool resources (Hess, 2008). This approach is now standard in the literature on the commons, and in particular on urban commons (Iaione, 2015). It loosens or even avoids certain constraints such as rivalry and non-exclusion. For example, using the knowledge produced by Wikipedia does not prevent anyone else doing the same. Just as a public space that is managed or protected by a group of citizens gains in value as the number of people (or users) increases, congestion effects only arise very late or not at all. The rules of good management of the commons are less specific here and the community is often less structured. The priority is mainly to enable users (in particular cities) to regain their resources and living spaces, and to fight enclosure and privatisation (Iaione, 2015).

Finally, the third level is that of collective and citizen action. These are arrangements that develop a collective resource or service, which in some sense work towards “the common good”. Here, the term common good (in the singular) has the meaning employed in political philosophy (Thomas Aquinas), according to which there is a “good” (health, education, biodiversity, etc.) that is to be maintained and safeguarded for the benefit of all (Lasida, 2014). In this case there is a desirable outcome, an aspiration to work for a common interest that goes beyond individual and state interests. In this sense, the scope of the common good is universal and permanent. Ideas about “global” or “social” common goods that we find here typically reflect this conception (Defalvard, 2015; Defalvard et al., 2013). The nature of the good or the resource employed, the existence of a structured group and of rules that ensure that everyone contributes, etc., are irrelevant. What counts is the fact that a collective works towards a goal that is greater than its individual members and that in some way proposes an alternative, a better way of living together and/or a solution to an existing problem. Often, these collective actions are structured through a network: a concept developed elsewhere is taken up and applied locally (e.g. “Les Incroyables Comestibles”).

The definitions of the commons presented here in “levels” are not mutually exclusive, they are nested like Russian dolls, with

the higher level encompassing the level below. Indeed, the goals of overcoming individual interests and fostering collective commitment are found at every level. The boundaries between these different definitions thus remain blurred, with the result that they often combine and occasionally conflict. The conceptual difficulty raised by the notion of the commons today, in particular with respect to our inventory, is that it applies to objects of different kinds (social commons, renewable natural resources, urban artefacts, nonmaterial resources, etc.) and involves communities (small civil society groups, neighbourhood cooperatives, virtual user communities on global web platforms, etc.) and systems of governance (self-organisation, public management, club type or private management) with very elastic characteristics.

However, as we have indicated elsewhere, “it should probably not be forgotten that these definitions emerge at different periods and relate to problems, conditions and political agendas that are in each case specific, though linked. (...) While sustainable resource management and the recognition of local communities as agents of sustainable management are very present in Ostrom’s works, objectification, awareness and action for the protection of universal and fundamental values and goods are for their part central in the literature on global or social common goods. Hence, the relative flexibility of the current definition of the commons seems, in these times of ecological transition, of structural economic crisis and state withdrawal, to offer the possibility of recognising and objectifying a whole ensemble of collective or citizen movements that contribute to the safeguarding of territorial and urban resources, as well as to the production of shared services (commercial or non-commercial) and values. [We will therefore define the commons as] all objects that can be used in common (exclusion is difficult) and that are fully or partially managed by a group or a community of users that are considered or self-declared to be legitimate.” (Kebir, Nahrath and Wallet, 2018, p.11).

Apart from the *Robins des villes*, the cases observed in our 10-project sample all fit within the category of the commons as encapsu-

lated in the Matriochka. As a collective of committed professionals (rather than users), the activity of the *Robins des villes*, within our typology, broadly fits into the category of collective and citizen action insofar as their core activity is to promote the “common good” (shared, inclusive city). They fight for city dwellers to participate in the making of the city, etc.

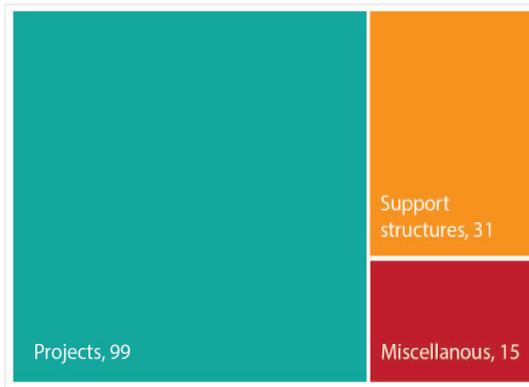
The other projects also promote collective goals: waste prevention, urban food supplies, experiments with sustainable forms of farming, the development of citizen science, etc. All of them are “open” spaces and seek to develop an inclusive social mix (this is explicitly stated in most cases). The resource (platform, workspace, service point, garden, etc.) around which they form is in principle non-exclusive (e.g. the annual subscriptions are very low, the sites are open to all, etc.) and marked by rivalry. This is evidenced by congestion effects (availability of space, of patches of land, etc.) or freeloader phenomena (theft of fruit and vegetables from gardens, benefits enjoyed without contribution to the community, etc.). In this sense, they are unquestionably forms of commons. However, we will not call them common-pool resources insofar as the community and associated rules are less structured than in the canonical model, and the principle of management is less focused on the preservation of the resource than on its development and distribution.

## **Commons-related initiatives: a widespread and multi-form phenomenon**

### **Arrangements of different kinds**

One of the first surprises of the inventory was that the name “commons” or “common good” was used both for the commons and for the structures that support or promote the commons without implementing them. They could, for example, be structures (association, agency, etc.) that promote shared housing by providing information and support for project instigators. We therefore divided the projects into common goods and support structures. Figure 5 gives a breakdown of the cases into categories.

Figure 5 : Breakdown of cases by category of initiative



The projects centred around a common resource are in a substantial majority (c. 68%). Support and promotion structures (SPS) account for 21% of the cases identified. The “miscellaneous” category (10% of the total) covers initiatives that do not fit into either of the other two categories. It includes, for example, projects run by public authorities (e.g. a platform promoting the establishment of a sustainable food network in the city of Ghent). Indeed, public authorities also seem to be embarking on “commons” type operations or at least to have altered their working models. This category also includes projects with a long history which, although very interesting in their goals, seem less useful to elucidating the phenomenon that we are concerned with (e.g. the Kokopelli Association, which is notably active in the protection of biodiversity in food and medicines).

Among the support structures identified, we first find organisations or collectives of a familiar kind:

- Collectives dedicated to the protection or defence of natural and cultural heritage. One of these is New Mexico Acequias, an organisation that protects traditional irrigation systems;
- Advocacy structures that seek to develop and support projects relating to the industrial or economic sectors (13 cases identified). What is specific here is the type of projects promoted,

i.e. projects that support collective or community projects in sectors usually dominated by corporations and/or the state (citizen powerplants, community gardens, shared housing, etc.). Such initiatives include *Terre de liens*, *Enercoop*, *Miel de quartier* and *Habicoop*, which respectively promote access to land for farmers, the development of citizen powerplants, resident programmes to plant pollen flowers for neighbourhood honey production (which is then shared with local people) and finally the building of shared housing.

There are also cases that are typical of urban commons such as groups opposing urban development projects (2 cases identified). There are citizen groups that develop alternative urban projects in opposition to state-run renovation projects, or which advocate participatory planning (e.g. the *Atelier d'urbanisme* in Grenoble or the *Fête la friche collective* in Lille).

In addition, there are less typical initiatives which nevertheless have links with urban commons. These include groups that seek to raise awareness and provide education and training on topics associated with the ecological transition or better community relations (6 cases identified). These groups, which can vary in their legal structure (civil society organisations, self-employed, groups) conduct activities that may be free, commercial or both. By supporting micro-projects, they seek to promote certain practices (cycling, commons, community gardens, waste prevention, organic food).

This category also includes hybrid organisations, ranging from think tanks to collectives of architects/urban designers. These organisations do not fit obviously into any standard category. The projects are multiple and may include production, demonstration, experimentation and/or education. The members of these groups may be of different kinds (private actors, public institutions, businesses, etc.) and they often operate through networks. They work for the pursuit of wider societal goals anchored in the idea of an ecological and societal transition founded on the participation of inhabitants/users in the making of the city.

- The first category of such organisations corresponds to think tanks and project accelerators (2 cases identified). Their goal is to develop and promote a new societal model to change the system or to foster the development of inter-actor relations within a territory, notably through a platform (e.g. Oui Share or Li-vin'coop and its platform communecter.org).
- The second category of this type encompasses designers and architects (7 cases identified). They include several Spanish citizen labs, as well as collectives like AAA (Ateliers d'architecture autogérée) and R-URBAN (cf. case study on *Agrocité*).

### **Equally varied spheres of activity**

Beyond these support structures, we identified 99 projects and initiatives. They break down into 11 categories structured around spheres of activity. Figure 6 summarises these spheres and, for information purposes, the number of cases identified.

Figure 6 : Spheres of activity of the projects

| <b>Spheres of activity</b>  | <b>Projects identified</b> |
|---|----------------------------|
| Urban farming   | 10                         |
| Urban planning  | 12                         |
| Energy (community energy systems)   | 6                          |
| Events  | 5                          |
| Finance and currencies  | 4                          |
| Community-housing   | 2                          |
| Collaborative tools   | 4                          |
| Platforms, including platforms for:<br><i>4 Swapping and exchange</i><br><i>10 Production of knowledge on the natural and built environment</i><br><i>2 Production of technical knowledge</i><br><i>2 Miscellaneous</i> | 18                         |
| Co-working services   | 6                          |
| Local services and activities   | 16                         |
| Spots, including:<br><i>3 Hot Spots</i><br><i>1 Farming spot</i><br><i>6 Art and Culture Spots 1 Eco-design Spot</i><br><i>5 Science and Innovation Spot</i>  | 16                         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>99</b>                  |

There is a first set of projects that relate to well identified domains: community housing, participatory finance and local currencies, and urban farming (community gardens and city farms). These projects have in common that they offer a collective and self-managed alternative to functions usually performed by private companies. They therefore claim to empower their communities (access to homeownership and housing in urban centres, to finance, to cultivable land, etc.). Alongside, we find projects for citizen energy systems which are also alternatives to traditional forms of industrial organisation and energy supply (decentralised management and renewable energy).

Then there are co-working services. Often described as commons because their use and sometimes their management are collective, their inclusion in this category is very disputable (Basile, 2019) in that they more closely resemble clubs in the economic sense of the term. These spaces are a good example of Level 3 of commons-related initiatives: they often have a stated collective goal of participation, sharing, emulation and sometimes comanagement, which probably explains the fact that some people see them as representing values that are now attributed to the commons.

Among the cases listed, some are involved in events such as festivals and one-off and temporary initiatives associated with happenings. The objective here may for example be to raise awareness about waste and to promote prevention practices, “common” culture and/or the opening up of knowledge and data, as well as peer-to-peer collaboration (e.g. *Disco Soupe*, *Occupai Vivat* or *Open Week*).

Collaborative tools provide alternative solutions to existing operational or management tools such as Linux, Github (a software hosting and development management platform extensively used by designers), Discourse (free open source discussion forum software) or Guifi.net (community telecommunications network operator). As well as the collective and/or collaborative aspects of these tools, there is the dimension of empowerment associated with their being open source and open to all.

The platforms are collaborative websites that provide services of different kinds and will be divided here into four categories. The first covers swapping and exchange platforms where people exchange objects and services (e.g. *La Machine du Voisin* or Welcome to BookCrossing in the US). The second consists of data creation and distribution platforms (DCDP) relating to the built and natural environment. As their name indicates, the purpose of these platforms is to generate and provide information on the natural environment (biodiversity, etc.) and the built environment (amenities, businesses, monuments, etc.). Examples include Open Street Map, TechOnMap, Telabotanica or the Jungle Bus app which provides bus route maps, in particular in cities where none exists. The third category covers platforms for the creation and distribution of specialist technical data such as architectural plans and drawings (e.g. Wikibuildings) or modelling and design drawings (e.g. Wikispeed, which sets out the principles for an entire car assembly line, for example). The final category covers “miscellaneous” initiatives, in this case the Open Food Facts and Open Law platforms.

The category of local services and activities encompasses a set of initiatives that provide services to residents and users of the territory. This category includes community groceries (e.g. *Superquinquin* in Lille and *La Louve*), initiatives linked with the hospitality and tourism sectors (e.g. *Hôtel du Nord* in Marseille or Couchsurfing), with telecommunications (e.g. free Wi-Fi in Bordeaux), mobility (e.g. *Pédibus*, the Coopcycle bike delivery service), as well as miscellaneous initiatives (community nursery, book box, etc.). Another, less traditional category covers hybrid activities that combine several complementary services structured around a concept or a goal. One typical example here is a cafe that, in addition to serving food and drink, offers a second hand store, a space for well-being related workshops or classes (yoga) or sustainability practices (repair workshop). These places are run by small businesses or collectives that promote an ideal beyond their core business (creating social bonds, generating a lively neighbourhood atmosphere, spreading sustainable practices, awareness raising, etc.). These are places where people can enjoy different expe-

riences (as defined by Pine and Gilmore, 1989)<sup>8</sup>, which increases the appeal of these places and their symbolic value. Examples of these are *Adda* in Nantes, the *Baraka Cooperative* in Roubaix, *Le Panier Rusé* in Hellemmes or the Bar Commun in Paris.

Spots are hybrid places where specialist activities of different kinds are combined (e.g. a “spot” specialising in art and culture, or in science and innovation). Self-managed, these places combine productive activities and openness to the city (open events, classes and services). Usually located in unused urban spaces they enable artists, small businesses or would-be inventors to find affordable places for work and experimentation in return for participation in community activities (maintenance, open access, choice of site priorities, etc.). These are places of interaction and learning as defined by Corolleur et al. (2000). The diversity of skills present (artists, designers, artisans) and proximity facilitate project cross-fertilisation, in which people become each other’s partners or subcontractors. In their openness to the community (one of the conditions of the “common” dimension), spots contribute to the image of the neighbourhood and/or the city (as cultural, avant-garde, alternative attractions) while promoting alternative forms of management and living together specific to urban commons (self-organisation, participation, etc.).

These spots can be divided into two categories: The first consists of spots specialising in a field of activity such as art and culture (e.g. 6b, *Shakirail* or *Volume Ouvert* in Lille), science and innovation (e.g. *La Paillasse* or *La Manufacture des Idées et des Nouvelles Expérimentations* in Rhône-Alpes), farming (*Agrocité*), eco-design (e.g. *Recyclab*). The second consists of so-called hotspots. Non-specialised, varying in their level of formality, these places symbolically represent flagship spaces for the expression of the alternative that the commons represent. Attracting extensive media coverage and notoriety, they have a much bigger aura and offer a

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<sup>8</sup> Pine and Gilmore identify 4 kinds of experience that can be found here: entertainment (listening to a concert), aesthetics (one can view an exhibition, enjoy a good meal), learning (one can follow classes, take part in workshops), escapism (one can join a games evening).

greater diversity of activities than the specialist spots and hence contribute to the spread of the model to a wide audience. Included in this category are *Les Grands Voisins*, *Common Josaphat* in Brussels and *La Condition Publique* in Roubaix which, though it has a cultural orientation, also hosts other kinds of activities.

The field of urban planning encompasses initiatives linked with the introduction of public planning and/or urban transformation projects. Two categories of initiatives are involved here. The first consists of initiatives for the recapture of urban spaces. These are projects undertaken by local people to restore value to urban sites, large or small, abandoned or active. One such initiative is Templehofer in Berlin (a former airport that has become a local leisure place), *Les Incroyables Comestibles* which promotes the development of urban farming in every corner of the city, the temporary swimming pool installed on a square in Madrid by a group that stages events there (*EL Campo de la Cebada*). The second category covers consultation-based development projects, i.e. projects of varying scale undertaken by public or private institutions. These initiatives include consultation activities that involve local populations and inhabitants. Examples are eco-neighbourhood projects at Loos-en-Gohelle, at *Friche de Fives* Cail in Lille, at *Gare remix* Lyon Saint Paul and at *ZAC Pajol* in Paris.

The initiatives identified, declared or touted as commons-related cover multiple aspects of urban life. They are structured around a wide variety of resources. They also differ in size and in kind (residents, locals, entrepreneurs, specialists, etc.). However, all are characterised by shared values of self-management, sustainability (ecological and/or social), commitment to the community and in particular to a local community. The crosscutting analysis that follows provides some insights into the connection between these initiatives and the territory.

The inventory and the case studies show the diversity of the kinds of initiatives relating to the commons (see the Matriochka on page 52) as well as a typology of these initiatives based on their relationship to the territory (see typology, Figure 2, page 30).

## Why create commons?

An examination of the factors that drive the emergence of these initiatives reveals three types of claims, which may overlap.

A first claim is that such initiatives can solve fundamental social problems when applied to issues such as access to housing or good food. It is expressed in a wide diversity of forms, ranging from local micro-networks to regional or even national structures. Characterised by porous boundaries with state and local authorities, they become present in the territory in response to failures in the traditional mechanisms of commercial regulation and/or public action. For this reason, it is not unusual to find local authorities trying to yoke these initiatives to their own systems (e.g. for housing or social support), or – more rarely – to see attempts by certain actors to “marketise” these initiatives in the belief that people will be willing to pay for the new service.

Another claim in support of experiments with alternative solutions is founded in the critique of capitalist modes of regulation. Challenging the principles that govern market exchange, capitalist accumulation and private property, these forms of collective action are the expression of a desire for exchanges based in social relations of another kind, where volunteering and giving are central. They often express a desire for greater solidarity, a desire to combat different forms of social and economic exclusion, and a desire for social inclusiveness. These initiatives are more firmly rooted in a political project, and claim to be testing methods of making society other than capitalism. Compared with the first type of motivation, the goal here is less to solve a problem or fulfil a need than to promote a system of values centred around the interests of the community and of all its members.

A final set of claim is linked with issues of democratic expression and decision-making within systems of collective action. Here, the mode of governance implemented in the management of the commons is a central priority, reflecting ideas drawn from the social economy and ways of organising debates that foster discussion and limit hierarchical forms of decision-making. While the civil society model is present in many of these initiatives, it is the

reference to sociocracy – understood as a method of governance structured by semiautonomous decision-making circles and a logic of member consent – that is the typical feature of many of these systems of managing the commons.

The commons-based approaches draw to varying degrees on the three types of claim, which are combined in ways that evolve over time. They share a desire to devise innovative schemes for managing resources and to disseminate alternative models of collective practice or indeed of lifestyle, and templates for new ways of creating society across territories.

To conduct the case studies, we selected ten initiatives that illustrate the diversity of territorial relations. They are:

- 1 Hot Spot: *Les Grands Voisins*
- 3 Specialist spots: *Agrocité* (farming); *La Paillasse* (scientific), 6b (cultural)
- 2 Internet platforms: *Open Street Map*, *Tela Botanica*
- 2 Community gardens: *Comm'un jardin*, *Jardin ECObox*
- 1 Event project: *Disco Soupe*
- 1 Support structure: *Les Robins des Villes*

These cases cover resources of very different kinds: material resources (unused urban space, arable land, etc.), nonmaterial resources (know-how, knowledge, information etc.), artefacts (buildings, events, educational tools, historical archives, etc.). Covering far more than standard forms of natural resource, they are clearly part of the “new commons” (Hess, 2008). The reasons for the emergence of these initiatives are various, but three standard situations can be identified. The first two correspond to those described by Farrell (2014), to which we add a third and final category:

- Protest against enclosure (for the protection of commons) or the resolution of conflicts of use and the protection of resources. This is one of the central motives identified by the recent literature on the commons (Coriat, 2013; Dardot and Laval, 2015). It has its roots in the movements of opposition to the privatisation of resources such as water (Commission Rodota), cultural he-

ritage in Italy (Festa, 2016), housing in Spain (Juan, 2018) and public space in Greece (Stavrvides, 2016). However, this motive emerges relatively little in the cases identified and studied. This is probably due to the method adopted (need for the initiative to be declared as a common good or commons-related by the project's instigator or a third party) and the French institutional and socio-economic context<sup>9</sup>. From a less conflictual perspective, there are also initiatives which aim to provide education in virtuous practices relating to sustainability and resource protection (*Disco Soupe, Les Robins des villes*). These projects organise street events or training courses, disseminate good practices, or propose alternative ways of doing things.

- Creating value from numerous sources (knowledge, know-how, data, etc.) or unused or underused resources (neglected urban sites, public spaces, wasteland). Several cases fit into this category. *Agrocité*, for example, creates value by converting existing objects (land); *Open Street Map, Tela Botanica, La Paillasse*, by producing new objects (data, platform, scientific know-how).
- Filling a gap in services in a context where the state is absent or has withdrawn (community-supported agriculture, shared housing, cultural spots, etc.). This final category that we added on the basis of the inventory and case studies encompasses a large number of initiatives. 6b, *La Paillasse, Les Grands Voisins* (providing an affordable workspace, exhibition space or experimental space for creatives or inventors) or else *ECObox garden*.

These three categories are not mutually exclusive. Filling a gap can lead to value creation (6b is now a place that is known and recognised on the European arts scene, innovations have emerged from *La Paillasse*, etc.) and vice versa. However, the original impulse, what motivates the project's initiators and the resources committed at the start will be different. So conversions of ob-

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<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, initiatives that are not identified or explicitly claimed as commons (and therefore not in our database), resemble them and are more explicitly associated with principles of opposition to the market. A typical example we might quote is the case of the free district of Lentillères in Dijon (<https://lentilleres.potager.org/>).

jects-resources can sometimes lead to real disruptions in uses (from industrial building to cultural centre), in actors (from industrial firm to creative community) and in organisation (opening of the site to the public, local embeddedness, etc.).

### **Communities with different degrees of structure and providing services following diverse dynamics**

The initiatives we studied all provide combinations of activities that mix services (access to workspaces, advocacy, access to laboratories, vegetable baskets, events and promotional activities, platforms, etc.) with educational or informative activities linked with the initiative's overall objective (inclusive education, organisation of events, classes and workshops, social activities). These activities are an integral part of the "model", indeed its core purpose (*Disco Soupe* exists to fight waste, *Les Robins des Villes* to create a livable city...). These are all activities that combine production with services to the community.

The multiplication of activities within a single initiative is also related to the business models, which draw on diverse sources of funding for greater independence and robustness. Memberships, volunteering, subsidies, contribution to costs by residents (for renting space), income from activities (catering, bar), donations in cash or in kind, various services (expertise, MOOC, support with projects, etc.), crowdfunding (KissKissBankBank) and partnerships are all tools employed to balance budgets.

The communities associated with the initiatives analysed, i.e. regular users and active participants, obviously vary in size, from less than a hundred people to more than 2000. These figures should be understood as orders of magnitude, since the definition of a community would need to be refined and specified for a more accurate count.

Most of the projects' initiators are people from higher social categories (mainly architects and urban designers, but also specialist engineers). Around them forms a circle of users with very varied backgrounds (professionals, neighbours, regular visitors, migrants, etc.). As described above, a commitment to openness and

social inclusion is an integral part of these projects.

This means that the symbolic resources (the story around the project, the communication tools) are an element that appears and can in some cases be particularly sophisticated and polished (*Disco Soupe, Les Grands Voisins*).

Indeed, the capacity to enact and spread the commons depends on it, because it is these symbolic resource that define the identity of the initiative, express its objectives and its approach, attract adherents, constitute the common denominator of the community, justify the project and, where relevant, extend its influence. There are two models of propagation and reproduction at work in these projects: budding and swarming.

The budding form of propagation is apparent in several initiatives (*Comm'un jardin, ECObox garden, Disco Soupe*) and operates as illustrated in Figure 7 below:

Figure 7 : The budding dynamic

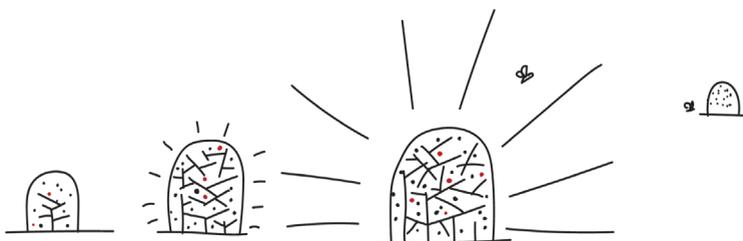


In this form of propagation, a parent organisation invests in or encourages the creation of initiatives that implement its goal (e.g. development of self-run community gardens to improve quality of life in the city). An urban authority grants access to a piece of urban wasteland, and it builds a community garden with the assistance of neighbours and neighbourhood residents, passes on its knowledge, its methods, its approach and its vision. Its goal is to generate a community, a local group that takes over its role and continues to run the garden autonomously. The parent structure can then withdraw and pursue its activities elsewhere. Its objective is not to grow and manage a multitude of sites, but to propagate, reproduce and replicate its concept, its approach, around the territory. To this end, it operates by encouraging the creation

of new communities to disseminate its activity, through thick and thin and in total independence. It should be noted that the transition to autonomy is not always easy for the new collective. Human resources are sometimes lacking, or there may not be enough users ready to commit themselves over time and with the skills and know-how to run the collective or the activity once the parent structure withdraws.

The hive dynamic is very different. This is the dynamic found, for example, in *Les Grands Voisins*, the 6b or *La Paillasse*. It can be encapsulated as follows (Figure 8):

Figure 8 : The hive dynamic



The parent association develops a project that crystallises around a structure (building, platform, large urban waste plot, etc.). It occupies or develops a structure to begin operations there. This structure grows, takes shape and becomes denser over time. Emulation and relations between the members of the community develop within the structure. The degree of organisation becomes more complex, rules are specified and the impact of the project - i.e. its influence on its immediate environment and in its sphere of action (e.g. the arts scene, the urban planning world, etc.) - continues to grow. This structure is unique, not intended for reproduction or replication. It is not a prototype. On the other hand, anyone wishing to develop this kind of approach can draw inspiration from it. Propagation occurs through individuals who, at some point, may leave the structure (the hive) to pursue their activities and in their turn found a colony that is independent of the parent structure.

In both these dynamics, what is propagated and reproduced is above all the idea, the concept, the approach, the objective of the parent structure. The more constructive, precise and thought out these are, the more the dynamic is able to function and persist over time.

Most of the initiatives studied operate at different scales. They maintain relations of proximity through their community (neighbourhood), through regional partnerships that reinforce their service capacity (for example, *ECObox garden* hosts a community supported agriculture organisation) and also through their links with local authorities.

They also maintain remote relations as part of their activity (participatory funding, bidding for European funds, links with initiatives of the same kind, etc.), from the networks in which they originated (*Disco Soupe* is the French offshoot of a German initiative) but also from their impact, which can be international (e.g. 6b, *La Paillasse*, *Les Grands Voisins*). The platforms studied are an interesting case, because although they operate at global scale, there are spatial differences in their impact (some cities and territories are heavily involved, others less). This depends on the level of activity of the local communities and on the platform's penetration (some public institutions use them, others do not). Also, the national associations organise meetings and workshops to foster the community. So these initiatives are far from deterritorialised...

This leads us to another factor, which is institutional intensity. In the cases studied, this intensity is notably reflected in the fact that some projects are part of larger initiatives undertaken by local authorities: *Agrocité*, for example, is one of the components of a large-scale development project (*Agnettes district* in Gennevilliers), *Les Grands Voisins* is one part of the refurbishment of the former Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Hospital, 6b is a resource that is recognised both by the landlord (a private developer) and the local authority (it is now included in the Urban Master Plan), and *La Paillasse* has links with the Silicon Sentier cluster. This integration into the institutional framework has the effect of anchoring the initiatives in their territory.

## What these initiatives say about the making of the city

The commons movement seems to be bringing about a change in the “making” of the city, typically characterised by change around the modes of governance exercised on common resources, and the quest for greater inclusion, fairness and deliberative democracy. The claim is that these commons-related initiatives have the potential to contribute to the reinforcement of local dynamics in the spheres where they operate. Their contribution relates to quality of life (residential/presential economy) but also to innovation (productive economy). They are characterised by greater attention to user involvement, and the creation of original resource management systems founded on the formation of networks which evolve with successive developments and through the tackling of problems from the perspective of experimentation and learning linked with collective action.

However a closer examination reveals territorial links of varying closeness, ranging from location in a particular place – though the activity in question is not genuinely anchored in urban space – to more open configurations based on an approach whereby the common is integrated into its neighbourhood (*Les Grands Voisins, Agrocité...*)

With respect to the forms of collective action that link urban development and the commons, three approaches to the making of the city can be identified.

- **The “city augmented”** by the commons, characterised by initiatives that emerge in response to a need that is not met by the market and by public services. Experimental approaches are often linked with issues of well-being (access to resources, to new services...). ICT offers significant potential for the invention of new forms of expression for these commons.

- **The “city contested”** by the commons is characterised by initiatives that take shape in opposition to traditional ways of structuring the city, i.e. the enclosure of spaces, the privatisation of services and the individuation of lifestyles. It takes shape, for example, through now emblematic new commons operations

such as movements in favour of an alternative system of water management in Bologna or Naples, or shared housing in Barcelona.

- **The “city recaptured”** by the commons is characterised by initiatives that emerge in the interstices of the city (community gardens, *Les Grands Voisins*). They often occupy spaces left vacant as a result of the capitalist dynamics of return on investment and capital movement, which abandons spaces that have undergone technical or economic obsolescence.

However, these initiatives are often fragile and temporary, raising questions about the viability of their business model, which is largely founded on a combination of volunteering and subsidy, in some cases accompanied by modest membership subscriptions. No standard model of public subsidy allocation can be discerned. Sometimes subsidies are granted to pilot community structures, regardless of the approach to the commons, and then employed within this framework. Sometimes, they are directly and explicitly allocated within the context of a particular operation, either in advance or on start-up, or conversely after a certain period of activity, in a second phase in the project’s life. In other cases, the absence of any public subsidy is even celebrated as a guarantee of independence from the public authorities. These authorities may also support commons initiatives by other means, the first of which is making premises available. Some initiatives also develop income generating activities in order to maintain or extend their experiments, either directly in their projects, or by providing a space where members of the commons community can undertake income generating activities.

Beyond the risks associated with the economic fragility of the models identified, it is the underlying need for citizen engagement that raises questions about the long-term survival potential of commons initiatives. A corollary of the central role of volunteering is the risk of rapid turnover in personnel, which is also likely to be associated with an erosion in commitment. This means that there needs to be a certain level of dynamism in the governance and management system employed to sustain stakeholder motivation.

The success of the commons movement also poses the risk of “commons-washing”, i.e. the attempt to exploit the virtues of collaboration, openness and sharing associated with these initiatives in order for purposes of financial profit and image promotion. An attempt of this kind was made, for example, by a private company that tried to exploit and usurp the aura of the *Disco Soupe* model. The community had to act quickly with a campaign to debunk this operation. However, other forms of exploitation can occur, notably on the part of local authorities.

The proliferation and diversity of the initiatives that make up the commons movement produce a mosaic of situations where the boundaries and relations with the dominant institutional forms of commercial regulation and public intervention can be hard to discern. This diversity raises questions about the varying relations between these initiatives and the development models that they seek to challenge and their capacity to offer alternatives that are more than niche social experiments. In other words, it provides a framework for the formulation of possible future scenarios for the commons movement.

- The first scenario is that of continuing opposition between this commons movement and the commercial and public institutional forms that underpin the capitalist model of development in its current configuration. The commons can therefore be interpreted as the expression of socio-economic fragmentation and as a reaction to the dominant mode of regulation.
- In the second scenario, the commons movement will be gradually absorbed into the dominant economic model, confirming the latter’s resilience in its capacity to incorporate social, economic and institutional innovations that develop on its edges in order to maintain its capacity to adapt. The hybridisation of dominant modes of resource governance by the incorporation of principles advanced by the commons is essentially a form of institutional innovation in which the current fervour for the commons is ultimately destined to become no more than an epiphenomenon.

- The third scenario is that commons-related initiatives will persist over time, establishing a lasting coexistence between this movement and the institutions of neoliberalism. As a pressure valve for the dominant economic model, all the initiatives that relate to the commons, in their formal variety, can therefore be considered as a haven space and/or expression of opposition for those excluded from the heartland of the capitalist model or who do not espouse its values and its principles of operation, where they nevertheless remain confined to the margins of the system.
- In the fourth and final scenario, the commons movement ushers in a large-scale transition that will produce an in-depth transformation of the dominant economic model and form the bases of an economy that combines a new relationship to property, the establishment of more inclusive modes of governance, and the invention of new forms of resource management which will reduce competition between uses and pressure on ecosystems.

Of course, it is currently difficult to predict the likelihood of one or other of these scenarios being realised, and as with every exercise of this kind the construction of hypothetical futures is primarily a way to explore the present. In particular, they can be recruited to further understanding of the challenges of institutional coherence for the commons movement as a whole and its relationship to the dominant systems of regulation, notably with a view to tackling issues of territorial cohesion and fulfilling sustainable development goals.

Indeed, in view of the ongoing processes of privatisation and commercialisation of public space, and the rise in socio-territorial inequalities, the claim is that the commons are an instrument for the democratic reinvention of urban governance on the basis of territorial synergies. As tools of mobilisation and self-legitimation in response to a widespread sense of the injustice of public action, they advocate community interest as a structural social space where the public interest is defended in the absence of the protection previously afforded by public authorities. This principled po-

sition nevertheless highlights the risk of territorial resources being exclusively monopolised by the members of the community that manages the common sphere to the detriment of the rest of the population, posing the risk of a potential process of “club” formation that has already been flagged in certain studies on the commons.

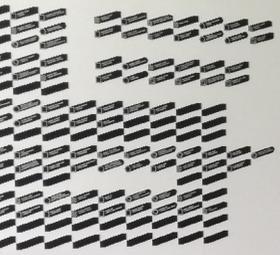
In parallel, in circumstances where the local authorities are hard put to find solutions to the challenges faced by cities and more broadly by territories, the dynamism of commons-related initiatives, the creativity of the solutions they have introduced, and the undeniable success of many of them, are all reasons that might prompt the public authorities to seek to incorporate them into their systems of intervention, or even to reappropriate them, by allocating them additional resources and offering them greater territorial involvement, or else to control them with the aim of preventing them from becoming too large and overweening.

In fact, the case studies conducted in the Biscote project show both well-intentioned support by certain local authorities for these kinds of initiatives, or conversely a lack of involvement or even the implementation of strategies that will prevent their survival over time.

There are also examples of commons-related initiatives seeking to reappropriate resources. Here, access and management possibilities no longer reside in property rights held by individuals or private forms of organisation, but instead are dependent on membership of the community. That community therefore establishes the conditions of entry, the nature of the rights in their functional diversity and the status associated with them, based on principles and deliberative methods of self-regulation that broadly recall the conceptual models tested by Ostrom. In these situations, the value of the resource is closely linked with the quality of the community’s management and the potential uses it permits, much more than to its potential for commercial exchange.



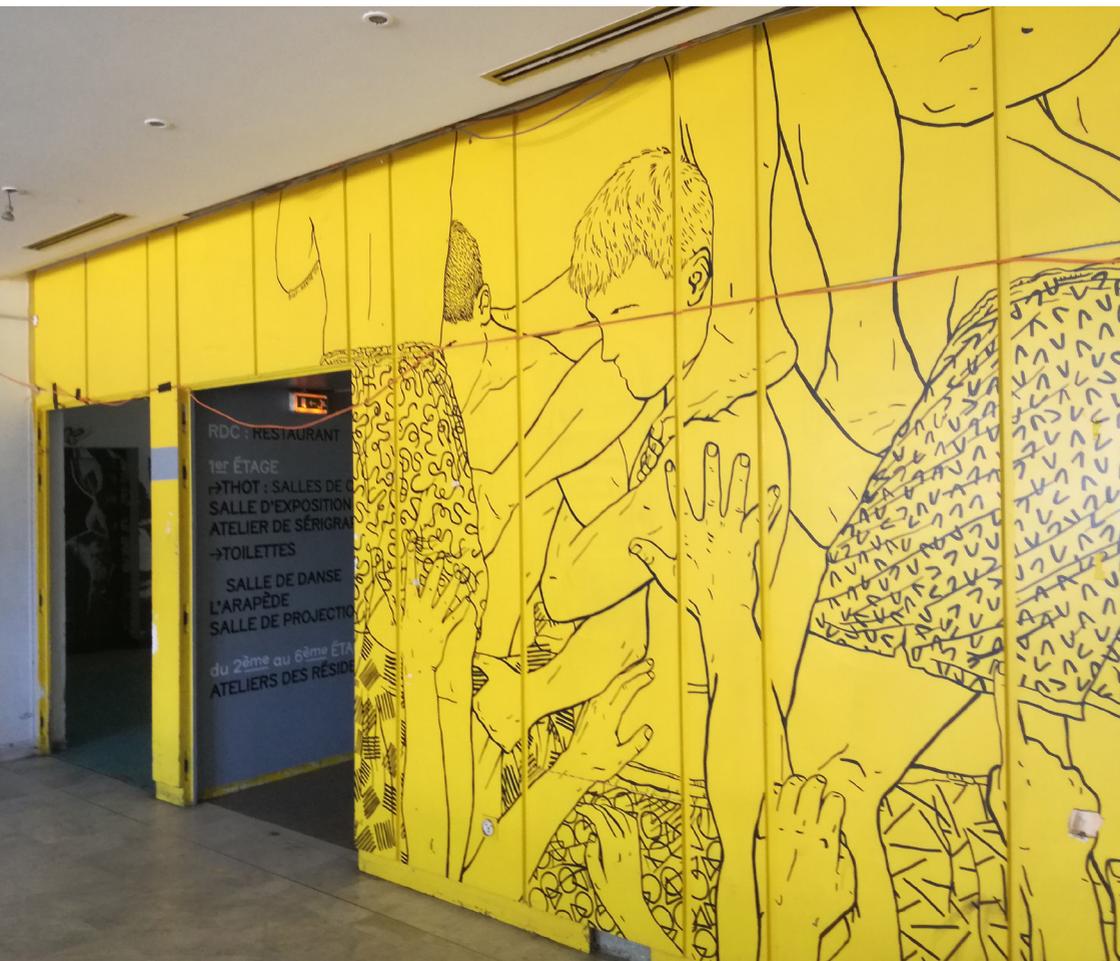
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RDC : RESTAURANT  
1er ÉTAGE  
→ THOT : SALLES DE C...  
SALLE D'EXPOSITION  
ATELIER DE SÉRIGRAPHIE  
→ TOILETTES  
SALLE DE DANSE  
L'ARAPÈDE  
SALLE DE PROJECTION  
du 2ème au 6ème ÉTAGE  
ATELIERS DES RÉSIDANTS

Le 6B, ©: Léa Canevet



## PART 3

# CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

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This research has used the typologies derived from the database and the in-depth case studies to carry out a close examination of a growing phenomenon that has so far attracted relatively little scholarly attention. In particular, it has revealed the hybrid nature of initiatives that form a variegated family which, far from falling into line with a canonical conception of the commons, takes on multiple facets, borrowing from the market economy and the world of the start-up, from social economy models or models of public intervention, in order to evolve original configurations of resource management.

They are also made up of often complex and disparate assemblages of actors, testing alternative forms of resource production and management, who draw on urban dynamics (and their deficiencies) and the institutions that constitute them (and their omissions) in order to develop. And conversely, which offer, through their contribution to the commons movement, resources that contribute to a new way of conceiving the making of the city.

Beyond the initiatives identified and explored here, the dynamism of the commons movement raises questions about the potential territorial impact of these operations. Generally ranging between small discreet communities and a phenomenon with substantial symbolic power but limited spatial scope, commons projects can be approached in terms of their potential for upscaling to increase their influence on urban dynamics, and in terms of the opportunity available to pursue this type of growth strategy and of the methods of doing so.

Examining the contribution of the commons to a new model of territorial development also raises questions about the process of transition from a resource managed by a community according to self-established rules of governance to the systemic complexity of territorial development, along with the methods of connecting these different objects and the associated forms of organisation

and management. Should we consider the idea that “clusters of commons” might emerge within neighbourhoods or territories? Collections of complementary resources, managed through compatible methods of governance, leading to the emergence of a new way of making the city? Will we have to consider the possibility that the commons may need to develop a hierarchy to organise the multiplicity of initiatives? Is there a risk of competition between communities which might promote collective forms of resource management? For example, what would have happened if an alternative commons project had been proposed in response to Les Grands Voisins initiative? In their capacity to advance innovative modes of governance, and through the opportunities for marketing and tourism that these spots bring, it might be envisaged that the local authority might make it a strategic priority to support a given project.

### **Three types of challenges can be identified for the future of the commons**

- **Governance challenges.** The examination of governance systems is central to an understanding of how commons-related resources are managed. The new forms of coordination that are emerging in the context of urban commons still constitute a disparate, evolving and little-known ensemble, whose operating rules take shape as this new way of making the city progresses. Marked by “bottom-up”, decentralised and adaptive modes of governance and “flexible rules”, by network-based organisation and by the principles of stakeholder integration, the commons are a source of original forms of resource management. They raise questions about a new relationship to ownership with respect to resources like public space that are facing new forms of enclosure or that are becoming strategic assets for municipal authorities like digital data.

It is also important to think about the scalability of commons-related initiatives, in other words how they will be able to adapt and manage their growth and development across territories. The upscaling of an initiative, or its reproduction within the same or other territories, raises questions about its resilience, its capacity

to move out of its context and the initial conditions of its emergence. Finally, there are also challenges around the control and appropriation of the commons by public authorities, who see in these initiatives the possibility of innovating their management practices with respect to resources that are strategic for the development of the territories under their charge.

- **Territorial development challenges.** In their potential for inclusion and territorial scale expansion, the commons can be conceived as vehicles of territorial construction, founded notably on their capacity to reinforce the sense of belonging and to reappropriate and build a collective territorial identity. However, the linkage between the commons and the development priorities operating in the territory, and their contribution to development goals, need to be considered more closely. Another thing to consider is how different commons-related initiatives can adjust within the territory, both to potential synergies but also to the possibility of competition or even incompatibility between them, whether in their operating modes and rules of governance, or in their use of resources.

- **Transition challenges.** Given the need to rethink territorial development models in order to bring their dynamics into line with sustainable development objectives, what part can the commons movement play? Can it be an instrument of process acceleration or, conversely, will it divert resources and energies in a suboptimal way at a key moment in the quest for innovative ways of making the city?



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# BISCOTE

BIENS COMMUNS ET TERRITOIRES · ENJEUX ET PERSPECTIVES



The objective of the “BienS COmmuns et Territoire” (BISCOTE) project is to explore the emerging theme of common goods as a new approach to the creation and management of urban and territorial resources.

The project has two components:

- a theoretical and conceptual component structured around seminars and discussions between academics and with practitioners.
- a more empirical and operational component constructed around the identification and analysis of these “new commons” and related initiatives in France and abroad. The goal is to contribute to debate, to understand the principles and processes at work, and above all to identify difficulties and good practices in this domain.

What are these “new” common goods, what do they consist of? What is the reason for their current momentum? What are their implications in terms of actors, coordination, governance and legal frameworks? In particular in terms of fairness and the long-term management of the resource-objects concerned? How do they contribute to the development of urban territories in particular (but not solely)? In what way are they bringing about (or failing to bring about) changes in approaches to and conceptions of territorial development and hence in systems of public action?

## Structures responsible for the BISCOTE Project

### **PUCA**

Puca (Plan Urbanisme Construction Architecture) is an interministerial agency set up in 1998 to develop knowledge about the regions and cities and to inform public action. PUCA initiates programmes in incentive research, and in research-action and experimentation, and supports innovation and implementation in the field of spatial planning, urbanism, housing, architecture and construction.

### **EIVP, Lab'urba**

Lab'urba is a host team (EA3482) set up in 2008. A multidisciplinary structure, it brings together researchers in human and social sciences and in engineering sciences working on urban zones and in the field of spatial planning, urban design and urban engineering. Since 2015, it depends on, Université de Marne la Vallée, Université de Créteil and École des Ingénieurs de la Ville de Paris (EIVP). The latter, which hosted the project, is both an advanced engineering school and a research centre specialising in urban issues. It is an educational institution that teaches students to degree and higher degree level, and also a centre of research.

### **INRAE (ex INRA), Proximités, UMR SAD-APT, UPS**

The Proximités team is a component of the Sad-apt mixed research unit (INRAE-AgroParisTech), a member of Paris-Saclay University. The focus of its work is territorial development dynamics from the perspective of the processes of innovation and regulation in food production and land systems, as well as norms and knowledge relating to land, soil and natural resource management.





## GOUVERNEMENT

*Liberté  
Égalité  
Fraternité*

The objective of the “BlenS COMmuns et Territoire” (BISCOTE) project is to explore the emerging theme of common goods as a new approach to the creation and management of urban and territorial resources.

What are these “new” commons, what do they consist of concretely, how do they involve the territory, its resources, its activities and its proximities? What are their implications in terms of changes in the systems of actors, in coordination, in governance and in legal frameworks? Do they suggest the outlines of a new form of territory making? Finally, in terms of public action, what role do they aspire to in the setting of public policy and in the implementation of practical programmes of action? To what extent does this alter the contours of these policies, the methods of policy setting and implementation?

These are all questions that this research seeks to elucidate by identifying more than 140 local initiatives and analysing ten of them in depth. In so doing, it offers a close analysis of a phenomenon that is proliferating but has still received little scholarly attention.

# BISCOTE

BIENS COMMUNS ET TERRITOIRES · ENJEUX ET PERSPECTIVES

## PUCA

plan  
urbanisme  
construction  
architecture

A national body for research and experimentation, PUCA develops programmes in incentive research, research-action and experimentation. It supports innovation and scientific and technical implementation in the fields of spatial planning, housing, construction and architectural and urban design