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# **Regenerate the urban space as a common / generate commons through urban space: a reflection on the comparison of urban commoning tools in France and Italy**

Teresa Carlone (<https://www.unibo.it/sitoweb/teresa.carlone2/en>)  
[teresa.carlone2@unibo.it](mailto:teresa.carlone2@unibo.it)

University of Bologna, Department of Sociology and Business Law.

Sociology Ph.D., research fellow at University of Bologna interested in marginal adolescence, civic engagement and participatory processes; social innovation and public policies based on co-creation and co-design approach. Currently engaged in academic research activity at University of Bologna, she also works as consultant and collaborator with public institutions such as Region District and Municipalities, profit and non-profit organizations in the field of participative processes for collaborative policy-making guidelines.

Federica Gatta (<https://www.pacte-grenoble.fr/en/membres/federica-gatta>)  
[federica.gatta@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr](mailto:federica.gatta@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr)

University Grenoble Alpes, PACTE.

Architect, Ph.D. in urbanism and urban planning, Federica Gatta is associate professor at Urban Planning and Alpine Geography Institute. Her research focuses on the anthropological analysis of urban transformation implying complex interactions between institutional and non-institutional actors. In 2018 she published the book *(Contre)pouvoirs urbains? Éléments pour une critique anthropologique de l'urbanisme participatif* (Éditions Donner Lieu). Currently, related to this topic she is coordinating the research project “GrinnUrb”.

Cécile Léonardi (<https://culturesconstructives-aecc.com/equipe/cecile-leonardi/>)  
[leonardi.c@grenoble.archi.fr](mailto:leonardi.c@grenoble.archi.fr)

University Grenoble-Alpes, National School of Architecture, Research unity AE&CC.

PhD in sociology, Cécile Léonardi is associate professor at the National School of Architecture of Grenoble. She's currently focusing her researches on the care issues in the urban renewal projects, especially in the reuse and design of vacant buildings. Engaged in the GrinnUrb project, she develops an ethnographic approach of the commoning processes on these issues within different design projects investigated in the Grenoble context.

Ianira Vassallo ([https://www.dist.polito.it/personale/scheda/\(nominativo\)/ianira.vassallo](https://www.dist.polito.it/personale/scheda/(nominativo)/ianira.vassallo))  
[ianira.vassallo@polito.it](mailto:ianira.vassallo@polito.it)

Polytechnic of Turin, Interuniversity Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning

Architect, Ph.D. in Regional Planning and Public Policies, she is associate professor in Urbanism. Her research focuses on the relationship between social practices and institutional urban transformation projects in the contemporary city. In 2017 she published the book *Tensioni Urbane* (Lettera22). Currently, related to this topic she is coordinating the teaching project “Dialoghi Immunitari. Città, territorio, comunità”.

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# **Regenerate the urban space as a common / generate commons through urban space: a reflection on the comparison of urban commoning tools in France and Italy**

## **Abstract**

Taking in account the difficulties to define what is an urban common, this proposal wishes to focus on the relations between commoning processes and urban regeneration. In the last few years we can see emerging different experimental public policies and urban transformation processes that aim not only to give citizens the possibility to manage public properties in a common interest, but also to encourage private groups to take charge of the architectural transformation of public buildings. This proposal will be focused on the extents and limits of the comparison between two European countries, Italy and France, more precisely between the cities of Turin, Bologna and Grenoble. In the three cities we find similar case studies in terms of actors, stakes and urban impacts. To enquire on those similarities and differences needs to reflect on a methodology that can question the production of discourses, spaces, knowledge and values related to commoning processes. Those topics allow us to question not only the impacts of commons on city governance, but also on how spaces are reshaped and redesigned.

**Keywords:** Commoning processes; urban commons tools; urban regeneration; comparison methodology; Italian and French case studies; austerity urbanism

## **1. Urban commons, urban regeneration and austerity urbanism**

The public debate on urban planning and city-making, in the last fifteen years has witnessed a wide spread of the concept of common, even if there is still a controversial debate among academics, practitioners and civil society to design the perimeter of this concept. As affirmed by Daniela Festa (2017: 285), if the “the renewal of the debate on commons since the 2000s is deeply linked to the development of capital in its neoliberal phase”, the “urban” commons have instead emerged from citizens’ mobilizations in urban contexts directly affected by the 2008 and 2011 financial crisis. Those heterogeneous forms of mobilization have played a central role in the definition of commons as a process. What defines a common would then not be the kind of property or the nature of a resource, but the commoning practices that act for protecting a resource from the neoliberal forces that try to capture it (*ibid.*). In this sense “commoning thus involves establishing rules or protocols for access and use, taking care of and accepting responsibility for a resource, and distributing the benefits in ways that take into account the well-being of others”(Gibson-Graham & al., 2016: 195).

This article wishes to underline how this process of protection and care is attracting more and more the interest of local institutions struggling for survival in the context of austerity devolution constraints (Ségas, 2017). Urban commons are then becoming a new field of urban public policies. Going beyond the recognition of citizens’ actions or of immaterial commons, in the last few years we can see emerging different experimental public policies that aim not only to encourage the management of public properties in a common interest, but also to put private groups in charge of the architectural renovation of those properties. These approaches based on space design open up a drastic transformation of the role and the power balance between institution and civil society in the governance model of the city and its spaces (Vicari Haddock & Mingione, 2017) reshaping ways in which societal needs and requirements are addressed and taken care of. Commons generate then a renovated distribution of power based on competences, material and immaterial resources (time, ability, knowledge...) able to deconstruct the traditional power given by the authority, the role and the technical competences and by the market economic values (Stavrides, 2016; Fox & al., 2019). Going beyond the classical participatory urban policies approaches, urban commons require a reflection on the creation of conditions for “the collective activity of pooling and caring of something for the common use” (Sauvêtre, 2020: 298) requiring a pragmatic action based on a shared vision of the general interest.

Moreover the redefinition of governance model potentially impacts the direction of the city development and, in this scenario, commons can create tensions and contradictions inside the urban regeneration processes. Those tensions concern different issues going from the definition of urban needs, to the financing issues, to the distribution of roles and competences, to the design and

transformation actions. When the space transformation becomes a variable in the equation between policies and commons, the acknowledgment and regulation of conditions and devices is more complex. In fact, while for immaterial and digital common the process of acquisition among administrative tools has been more agile and less hindered, urban commons challenge the production of knowledge and value in the field of planning. This is even truer in the context of an austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012) that seems to have spread in public policy making in the last twenty years. Answering the reduction of State allocations, the austerity urbanism would actually be a response which is not only based on the classical neoliberal urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989), but also on a specific management and optimization of public properties and services (Adisson & Artioli, 2020). Our hypothesis is that urban commoning tools are at the same time a product and a possible answer to this form of urbanism.

## **2. Cities and tools**

But how do public policies let public space needs emerge? Which are their financial constraints? How do public instruments and traditional urban transformation tools allow new form of collaboration and the sharing of competences between citizens and experts? Which is the role and the “burden” given to citizens in commoning processes? Which political devices are created to manage not only the issue of property but also of physical intervention on the space?

The hereby-presented work will question the role of commons in transforming urban spaces and the role of urban spaces in redefining the commoning process. This starting from three case study cities, two Italian and one French, that in the course of the last decades used commons as a driver to implement regenerative processes in the urban areas, this contribution pursues a theoretical and pragmatic reflection that re-conceptualizes the concept of urban commons within urban planning tools. However with different policy approaches: in Italy explicitly oriented to the regulation of commons although producing indirectly urban regeneration, in France oriented to the delegation of urban regeneration to private actors although producing indirectly a debate on commons regulation. Moreover it is necessary to underline that there are sub-understandings regarding how this term, urban common, is conceptualized in France and in Italy: in the latter, the debate is highly politicized and carried out by movements and national networks starting from some big political petition (Mattei, Reviglio & Rodotà 2010; Rodotà 2018; Capone 2019) and originates from the challenging of administrative law respect to the division between private and public property also in relation to the possible use of spaces, while in France, the concept is largely explored in the intellectual (Dardot & Laval, 2014) and activist debate but it is still not much integrated in public policies.

The cities chosen, Bologna, Torino and Grenoble, are not comparable in terms of political history, size, urban and social dynamics, but they are testing similar tools acting on similar objects.

Moreover the three cities have a certain family resemblance in the relation that municipalities have with the association and third sector historically. Taking into account similarities and differences, it seemed interesting to reflect on a methodology that can question the production of discourses, spaces, knowledge and values related to commoning processes among the three cities. In this section we will present shortly the historical development of urban regeneration policies and initiatives in each city, underling the role of local regulation and projects in facilitating and promoting the spread of common approach. Starting from the visible results and the challenges that emerged the last section will be dedicated to identify to what extent a comparison between the three cities is possible and which are the issues that those cases study let emerge.

## **2.1 Bologna**

The recent history of the city of Bologna shows how civic participation and collaborative decision-making processes have long been a distinctive feature of urban policy making. The first steps were already taken in the 1950s with the structuring of the city into Districts, implementing the “democratic decentralization” that allowed institutions to get closer to the needs of local communities. In this scenario, the involvement of citizens in decisions concerning public spaces and policies begins to consolidate a model of territorial management that will help to give the city of Bologna a record in the Italian scenario in regards to political innovation, democratic and, not least, urban planning (Carlone & Landi, 2020). The participation of citizens in the city decision making process becomes a widespread way of managing the life of the neighbourhoods, thanks also to a network of “intermediate bodies” (social formations that represent a particular sectors or places of civil society, placing themselves in an “intermediate” position between private and public), which played the role of aggregators and stakeholders of the various souls of the city. Political parties, associations, cooperatives - even if with a strong vocation for the economic and working panorama (Fabbri, 1990) - become strategic protagonists of this new model of governance.

Civic centers, party headquarters and civic committees were established and proliferated in Bologna, representing permanent presidia and spaces for community participation in the development of the city. In the ‘80s, as a result of the intense urban and social transformations that Bologna has experienced - expansion of the peripheral areas, important migration flows from southern Italy - greater administrative power and management was granted to the districts, with the goal of facilitating the exercise of democratic forms of participation and civic activation. This urban configuration constituted a decision-making polycentrism that feeds, in the successive two decades, an increasing use of urban development tools and programs, promoting the structuring of collaborative decision-making processes that see decision makers and planners work together with a plurality of actors who bring new knowledge, competences and differentiated skills (Ces.co.Com,

2018). The new millennium marks a fundamental step in the participatory model that has distinguished the city of Bologna: in 2005 the Urban Center, an institution funded, managed, and operated through public-private partnership was created, with the principal role to activate paths of citizen involvement and establish processes of participatory urban planning (Ginocchini, 2009; Ginocchini & Petrei, 2018). Public spaces become the real protagonists of the “Bologna model of participation”, to the extent that the interventions planned in that period focus highly on public parks and abandoned buildings. Urban regeneration thus becomes the key concept on which decisions to transform public space are based and undertaken, with a specific focus on the concepts of common good and “extended governance” (Evagelisti & Capuzzimati, 2009). There is therefore a semantic shift whereby public goods, whose decisions on the matter could envisage citizens’ involvement but whose management was highly centralized and institutional, become commons, whose governance is shared between the administration and civil society, according to agreements built within participation processes. The causes of this shift can be traced in part to the increasing desire of citizens to play a leading role, and in part to the increasing difficulty of administrations to be able to guarantee tutelage and management of the common good, crushed under the weight of heavy cuts in human and financial resources, austerity policies and increasing complexity of administrative tools (Vicari Haddock & Mingione, 2017). The development and diffusion of the commons in urban regeneration has been strongly intertwined with another hot topic in urban studies: social innovation (Moulaert & al., 2003; Ostanel, 2017; Moralli, 2019). The decade 2010-2020 witnesses the golden age of urban regeneration and the commons that ground the approach that intends to transform the city. Bologna then becomes a laboratory for experimentation of participation that aims to activate processes of change whose main driver is social innovation as a method capable of enacting complex processes and producing change in the social and economic fabric of the city (Ostanel 2017).

In a brief overview of the relationship between Bologna and commons, one of the founding moments is undoubtedly 2014 with the approval of the “Regolamento sulla collaborazione tra cittadini e amministrazione della cura dei beni comuni” **(1)** and the activation of the administrative tool “Patti di Collaborazione” for the regeneration and governance of material, immaterial and digital urban commons (Labsus 2014, Ostanel 2017). The commons thus become the ground on which the partnership and collaboration between administration and citizens (individual or in groups), third sector entities, universities, private social, associations and committees is based. The great success of the tool of the “Patti di Collaborazione”, supporting local communities in taking charge of the common good, has amplified and enriched the plurality of tools through which the administration recognizes and supports the proactive drive of communities to become active. At the same time, and because of the important mobilization of civil society, the administration has

adopted other ways to support experiences of urban regeneration and innovation: funding and public tenders for projects increasingly oriented to urban regeneration and social cultural innovation (Incredibol Call, funding PON Metro, Participative Budgeting, Horizon 2020 funds) that have consolidated the role of associations and the third sector already very present in the city. Bologna became the city of the Commons and turned into a national reference point to which many municipalities look with interest, to learn management methodologies and to learn administration practices.

However in 2019, at the end of a tumultuous period of evictions and forced closing of self-organized social spaces, resulting from administrative choices that were anything but conciliatory, in a perspective of settlement of urban conflict, the city finds itself at an uncomfortable crossroads, where the “Regolamento dei beni comuni” seems to fail to support the reasons for political choices such as those that the administration decided to pursue. To overcome this gridlock, the government of the city commissioned the Foundation for Urban Innovation - successor to the aforementioned Urban Center - to project, manage and supervise a process for the definition of administrative tools for the allocation of city spaces: the “Laboratorio spazi”(2). The aim of the process was to redesign policies and tools for the allocation and management of real estate owned by the Municipality and/or to promote temporary use of buildings and abandoned areas, identifying hypotheses of new regulation different from the already existing tender or direct assignment path. The Municipality opened the availability of six disused buildings, at high risk of abandonment and/or decay, to city communities gathering ideas and use practices to implement in those spaces, with the intent of streamlining the allocation and assignment of buildings. In fact, when it comes to intervening with a regenerative approach on real estate building, most of the time the local administrators get entrenched behind rules and technical restrictions, security issues and general impediments. Administrative structures find difficulties to operate outside the box, stressing on the aspect of technical tools and competencies to enable commoning and regenerative processes. With the “Laboratorio Spazi” the idea was to unfold the process of space assignment to less formal and structured local communities, trying to open up to informal groups of citizens and inhabitants, up to that point left out of the traditional dynamics of assignment of real estate public properties.

Registered local associations, third sector organizations, including those in partnership, committees formally constituted for the pursuit of purposes compatible with those envisaged for the property of interest and, as said, informal groups of citizens were asked to participate and to propose ideas and plans to revive the building and to establish a collaborative and open governance of the spaces. In Bologna, commons are considered as the ground on which the partnership, collaboration and responsibility between administration and civil society are based. The Laboratorio Spazi represents a new tool to deal with commons in the city regeneration process because it opens up critical



aspects so far left a little behind dealing with commons: the presence of material common (buildings with value) and the interaction and legitimation of informal groups of citizens. The experimental process compels the Municipality to face the political perspective of the commons in urban regeneration and put the public administration in front of the need to take into consideration these two new dimensions, questioning the collaborative instruments and practises used so far.

## **2.2 Turin**

Any narration regarding the urban and social transformations of Turin has no option but to start with its past as a post-Fordist city (Vassallo, 2015). In fact, in the early 20th century the city experienced rapid urban, economic, social and political development and transformation. The rapid growth of the automobile industry, represented in particular by the FIAT (3) car company, had an enormous impact on Turin's identity and structure (Bagnasco, 1990).

This sudden and symbiotic growth with the Factory substantially altered not only its social structure (turning it into the working class city par excellence in Italy), but also its urban planning, implemented through territorial infrastructurisation. It began with the construction of numerous industrial sites at the outer edges of the municipality, in areas which had so far been agricultural, and continued with the infamous and chaotic construction of entire residential neighbourhoods, sparked by the rise in demand for housing (the Mirafiori Sud neighbourhood being the most important example of this process).(Olmo,1997)

Starting in the second half of the 20th century this partnership began to flounder, not only due to the industrial crisis that affected the automobile sector in particular, but because the city and its society began to show signs of aversion towards a complete and utter adherence to the Factory system. The initial insurgence of blue-collar workers led to important progress in the acknowledgement of their rights (e.g., the Workers 'Statute, 1970), launched in previous decades. But 1980 was the year in which there was a march that was to be known as the "march of the 40,000"(4). This event was a milestone in the history of demonstrations, but above all it symbolised a new social composition, no longer the sole prerogative of workers, but also of the middle class that slowly began to reveal its strength and importance.

The event was considered as the first warming sign of a city that began to think about what lay beyond its image as a working class city. The on-going industrial crisis and the increasingly bitter relations between the Factory and local politics quickly prompted the city to tackle the post-Fordist transition (Armano, Dondola, Ferlaino, 2016). This process was in many ways very slow and painful for Turin. Inevitable dismailing (5) involving not only production activities, but also the

urban model of the neighbourhoods, left without basic services, commercial activities and links with the rest of the city. In other words, the *social protection network began to crumble* (after having been developed based on the concept of universal welfare).

To deal with this loss and bereavement the city created a new image of itself by developing a new PRGC (drafted by Gregotti and Cagnardi in 1995) and restyling the suburbs; this involved exploiting the flourishing seasons of European Complex urban regeneration Programmes (6). Apart from providing the opportunity to physically and socially upgrade many areas of the city, that season also imbued the territory with a fertile and varied associative atmosphere and triggered a close relationship between the third sector and the local administration. In fact the urban regeneration projects leveraged this urban fabric, giving it the necessary resources, involving it in the projects, and building real networks of alliances across the territory. As part of this process, the 2006 Olympic Games acted as a driving force to acquire more resources for this transformation, but it was also an opportunity to reveal a new city image to the world (Bagnasco & Olmo, 2011).

The current situation is very different. The city that was “always on the move”(7) has truly stopped, leaving its transformation in the lurch. The neighbourhoods still waiting to be transformed after the crisis in 2007 are now left “hanging”, thus revealing the inadequacy of urban planning tools to put aside the grand urban transformation project and instead imagine more sustainable processes in line with current endogenous and exogenous conditions.

It was during this “deadlock” that common assets began to become part of the public debate like a panacea to remedy that period of stagnation. In Italy the common assets concept has a juridical matrix *in primis*, but it is also very political; in fact it is part of the debate on the spatial transformations of the city thanks to the Assemblée Cavallerizza 14:45 experience (8). The latter involves occupancy of an old building in the city by a collective of citizens, students, entertainment workers and intellectuals. The Reale Cavallerizza di Torino is in fact one of the city’s monuments. In 1997 the complex became part of the UNESCO Heritage List; a few years later, the Municipality of Turin decided to purchase it from the Military Public Lands Administration with the intent to restore it and revive Benedetto Alfieri’s project to link it to the Royal Theatre, the Royal Palace and the Cathedral. However, with the advent of the crisis in 2007, the ambitious projects for the Cavallerizza became unfeasible, thus condemning it to becoming a *suspended space* in the city. At this point a new idea surfaced: to sell it to a private entity. This idea held sway until spring 2013 when the Assemblée Cavallerizza 14:45<sup>1</sup> occupied the spaces of the complex, claiming it as a

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“common asset”, and proposed an alternative cultural programme to encourage people to visit the space that had been taken away from the city. The common asset concept was an opportunity to test different models of heritage management, instead of the traditional public private partnership models, and enhance its use. The process is highly symbolic and sheds new light on the ‘right to the city’, linking it closely to the places where it occurs (Vassallo, 2016). In actual fact, what took place was the transformation of a “legacy” into a right (Bianchetti, 2014).

The public debate focusing on the Cavallerizza Reale took place during administrative elections and immediately became a political issue. Despite this visibility, seven years have passed and nothing has changed in spite of all the political promises regarding the Cavallerizza.

In the meantime common assets have forcefully become part of the city debate, representing in particular an opportunity to revive the urban regeneration processes that were suspended a long time ago. In 2016 the city adopted the “Regolamento dei Beni Comuni”(along the lines of the one promoted in Bologna). As a tool it was immediately used to participate in a European Contract Notice to obtain financing during a period of austerity. The goal of the Co-City project, presented as part of the Urban Innovative Actions Contract Notice, was to trigger a polycentric welfare policy that would generate a community (thus the idea to avoid selecting a single target area of the city, but instead spreading the projects across all the suburban neighbourhoods), thereby enhancing its development through a link with spatial revitalisation projects. The administration will make spaces, buildings and a new administrative system available, i.e., a “Patti di Collaborazione” which will replace traditional concession acts; the aim is to redefine, albeit not in an exclusively manner, a collaboration contract between the administration and active citizens involved in the promotion of projects/activities/initiatives regarding care of the territory and production of services.

The challenge is to combat urban poverty and the employment crisis by experimenting with new social enterprise models and by building new “case del quartiere”(9) that will powerfully impact the territory; this can be achieved by using disused real estate heritage and encouraging initiatives by active citizens. However, a question does spring to mind: whether in this context the project for the revitalisation of real estate has prevailed over the process of social inclusion and civic activism (Saporito, Vassallo, 2020).

At this moment in time it is important to avoid a misunderstanding regarding what represents the construction of a “common asset” based on an urban revitalisation policy as against the revitalisation of a “public real estate asset” made available for social projects.

So again, this begs the question: what role do Beni Comuni play and what is their importance within the framework of these urban revitalisation processes?

### **2.3 Grenoble**

Mainly known for its high-tech industry and its universities, Grenoble has also built a solid reputation for urban and social innovations during the *Trente Glorieuses* (10).

With the election of Hubert Dubedout as mayor, the city became in 1965 the French laboratory of the GAM (11), a citizen movement that reconfigured the political life of some French cities during the 1960s and 1970s (Sellier, 1977). Born in 1963 in Grenoble, the first GAM brought together representatives of associations, members of local neighborhood unions, trade unionists, researchers and socialist militants. This informal think-tank defended a "militancy of the living condition" (Joly & Parent, 1988 : 73) that approached urban growth as a social issue. In the early 60's, Grenoble was experiencing strong demographic growth. The city center was aging and the urbanization of the suburbs was quite anarchic. The lack of facilities and decent housing was a glaring problem in a city which, in the meantime, was preparing to host the 1968 Winter Olympics. If the construction of new neighborhoods was on the agenda, it was based on a master plan that favored an overhanging approach to local urban planning issues. The municipality in place planned demolition and reconstruction operations in the old districts and an extension of the city to the south based on a massive production of housing with only a small proportion of social housing. The GAM considered that all these transformations should not be left in the hands of the private sector, but should instead be the object of a participative reflection that starts from the field, the needs and the concrete claims of the inhabitants (Lecomte & Al., 1972). It was on these arguments that the GAM, in association with the local socialist parties, won the 1965 municipal elections and implemented an urban policy in Grenoble based on principles that were unheard of in France in the 1960s.

The new municipality first tackled the city extension project by commissioning a multidisciplinary team of architects, landscape architects and sociologists to program this new district in dialogue with the people of Grenoble. This participatory planning focused on the programming and urban integration of the many school, sports and cultural facilities that the municipality wished to finance in order to support the life of this new neighborhood of 3,000 housing units, half of which were henceforth intended for social rental housing. The Dubedout team also decided to develop the same level of educational and socio-cultural facilities in all of Grenoble's districts. Neighborhood by neighborhood, this project was carried out in consultation with local unions, associations and residents. With this in mind, the municipality has introduced the principle of "land reserves for facilities" into the urban planning documents in order to ensure that all planned facilities can be built, including in sectors affected by strong real estate speculation (Joly & Parent, 1988).

Following its re-election in 1971, the same team initiated a policy of renovation of the old districts based on an ambitious principle : to rehabilitate rather than demolish and to keep the modest inhabitants in place by controlling real estate speculation and gentrification in the sectors concerned. To implement this "soft renovation" policy, the municipality has developed a vast land acquisition plan. It pre-empted a large number of degraded condominiums in order to rehabilitate some of them and demolish and rebuild those that were in a too advanced state of insalubrity. In both cases, social housing was created and households were rehoused. At the same time, the municipality bought several religious buildings from the diocese to install socio-cultural facilities for the residents (Freschi, 1982).

Dubedout's team thus made Grenoble a landmark laboratory for participatory and social urban planning. As in Bologna, the municipality constantly involved neighborhood unions and local associations in defining its urban policy. Although this dialogue was less "formalized" than in Bologna in terms of "democratic decentralization," it nevertheless led to a "tailor-made improvement" in the living condition of each Grenoble's neighborhoods. Dubedout's team developed innovative urban planning tools to succeed in this challenge, such as the creation of a "land intervention zone" (ZIP) that gave the municipality the right to control land transactions in its territory, in order to block those that could harm the general interest of a given neighborhood.

Beaten down by the right-wing majority that conquered the mayor's office in 1983, this legacy has been timidly reinvested by the socialist coalition that managed the city from 1995 to 2014. As such, the 2014 elections marked a turning point in Grenoble. As in 1965, a movement from civil society formed to run for the city hall, clearly claiming to be Dubedout's legacy. However, the context was not the same. The new ecologist coalition that won the city hall had to deal with the decline of state subsidies. If its objective is to remobilize the people of Grenoble so that they actively participate in the sustainable transformation of their living environment, the municipal team must at the same time confront the concrete and costly management of the vast real estate patrimony acquired during the 18 years of mandate of the Dubedout team.

Faced with the need to renovate the most used facilities as a priority, the new municipality has decided to subject the least used public buildings to a different fate. This decision stemmed from a restructuring of public services as a direct response to the context of austerity. The city thus adopted in 2015 a Plan for the Economy of Local Public Services and a General Plan concerning the real estate owned by the city. The objective of these documents was to avoid increasing local taxes by "actively" optimizing public property.

In this context, in 2017, the new municipality launched a so-called Call for innovative urban projects (CIUP). This instrument has been spreading in French cities since 2014, when the city of Paris created the first CIUP *Réinventer Paris* (reinventing Paris). The objective of those calls is to

encourage private “interdisciplinary” groups to take charge of the design and transformation of public land and buildings in order to achieve generic objectives of innovation. This instrument breaks away from two types of more usual urban project mechanisms: the classic real estate sales, based on the criterion of price, and the classic operational urban planning, framed by national laws and local planning documents. The CIUP have quickly opened a debate in the urban planning field due to the strong implication of real estate developers (Guelton, 2018) in the projects. If on one hand those call seem to represent an extension of implication of economic private actors in the intermediate scale of urban production since the 50s (Orillard, 2018), on the other hand they provoke a new concern on the public control of urban programming (Meunier, Redoutey & Zetlaoui-Léger, 2018).

The CIUP Gren' de projets was therefore conceived in the context of this optimization with the objective of opening up access to and programming of six public buildings with heritage value to the greatest number of people. While in other French cities the CIUP often concerns large building lots that can attract large real estate developers, the city of Grenoble has chosen for the call only buildings that require more renovation than construction. In addition, the municipality supported local actors in designing their projects and organized a two-phase selection process with a jury that included invited professionals and city councilors from opposition parties. Thus, the ecologist municipality has strongly oriented the device to allow actors from the Grenoble associative ecosystem and the local third sector to apply. On this point, its initiative was heard and adopted by the targeted actors. Most of the winners are local associations or small entrepreneurs. During the project definition phase, the municipality also decided to retain ownership of the buildings and to enter into long-term lease agreements with the winners.

If the commons are not a central issue of this process, the concept is emerging unexpectedly from two projects driven by local associations and leading strong social programs. The first concerns the rehabilitation of a 19th century house located in one of the old districts of the city center. The collective of associations, winner of the CIUP, intends to create a boarding house for precarious people, workshops for reintegration and shared spaces open to all the inhabitants of Grenoble. If the rehabilitation of the house is carried out by a local social landlord, the collective works hand in hand with this actor and the architects to elaborate the spatial project and find specific financing in order to preserve the heritage assets of the building. The second project aims to convert a municipal swimming pool from the 1970s into a popular health center with a self-managed sauna-hammam. The collective that proposed this program did not even win the CIUP, but its project is being accompanied by the municipality and the metropolitan institution in a parallel process. In this second case, the collective of associations and the institution also worked together to sketch out the

programmatic and spatial project. This "joint work" goes further, including the construction of the economic model of the future center and also concerns its governance methods.

These two projects seem to create the proof of the relation between commons and urban regeneration among the technicians of the municipality who are currently trying to understand how to regulate those processes and how to reproduce them (taking inspiration also from Italian experiences). If the property is still not an issue, the fact that the collectives have to take in charge financially and technically the renovation of the buildings opens an interesting field of experimentation in terms of implication of the actors and distribution of the roles. Going out from a classical context of separation between contracting public authority and project managers, we are observing the creation of public/private colleges of actors which have to create rules to share the responsibility about fundraising, space design and space governance.

### **3 What to compare?**

Using three similar case studies, the intent of this preliminary reflection is to understand how space transformation reconceptualizes the concept of common good since the physical space opens up to challenges and hurdle that could jeopardize the final result and the expected outcome. From a distant and present centered point of view, what could be observed is a general expediency of urban tools in the management of the relation between urban commons and regeneration : the tools are sometimes conceived only for a large planning scale, they seem to be still based on rigid roles of public actors, they focus on commons or on regeneration exclusively. But we make the hypothesis that looking closely at those tools and inserting them in the long history of the cities can allow the emergence of small changes, hybridations, "misunderstandings", displacements and changes of culture that can enlighten the potentials of this relation and question the separation between top-down and bottom-up processes.

One of the goals of comparison in social sciences, and especially in anthropology, is to decentralize our look, escaping to ethnocentrism (Bourdin, 2015). Comparing two different countries' approaches to urban commons could give us the possibility to relativize the local current political debate, its vocabulary and its capacity of making an evaluation of the degree of "purity" of commons. What would be interesting for us would be on the contrary to focus on the way in which institutional and non-institutional actors produce pragmatically new forms of governance and how this is the product of a larger tendency in urban planning. In this sense a comparison on tools and processes would give us the possibility to open-up the black box of urban planning to show how the political process of commons is the product of constant redefinitions of roles and vocabularies. As the three case studies show, the municipalities are experimenting with tools which are not meant to

stabilize innovation, but to prefigure new actions, and that are at the same time anchored in a tradition of the city management. Their articulation with urban development needs to be observed for the next few years.

Another interest of comparison, when it comes to heterogeneous actors and contexts, is the possibility to enquire “analogies of relations » (de Verdalle, L., Vigour, C. & Le Bianic, T., 2012) more than to look for recurrence of causal links. Those analogies can question anthropological issues concerning the relation that actors create with the space. In this sense our case study gives us the possibility of understanding how the commoning process creates specific relations to the space. As the buildings transformed by the tools are well settled in the existing urban fabric, they seem to question the issue of value given to the space, not only in material terms, but mostly in terms of heritage and identity. The process of building recycling seems also to call for a form of care by the actors which is not only based on use, but also on design as a practice of space and governance planning. This approach needs for us to be realised through an ethnography of the projects that could allow a long time observation of processes, a deep interaction with actors, and an articulation of scales of planning.

Finally we would like to underline the necessity of a situated historical perspective for understanding urban commons. If an important work of research on the understanding of commons inside the long history of human thought (cf. Dardot & Laval, 2014) is in action since fifteen years, a vast field has still to be explored about how commons can be understood in local histories of cities and regions and in which way their actual existence is linked to a specific political tradition. The three cities that we are exploring seem to be a very good example of this new field. Their similar political traditions open up interesting hypotheses on the relation between material and immaterial assets in the generation of urban commons.



## **Notes**

- (1) [http://partecipa.comune.bologna.it/sites/comunita/files/allegati\\_blog/odg\\_172\\_reg.beni\\_comuni\\_urbani\\_pgn\\_45010\\_2014.pdf](http://partecipa.comune.bologna.it/sites/comunita/files/allegati_blog/odg_172_reg.beni_comuni_urbani_pgn_45010_2014.pdf)
- (2) <https://www.fondazioneinnovazioneurbana.it/45-uncategorised/1892-laboratorio-spazi-pubblicato-l-avviso-pubblico-per-l-assegnazione-di-cinque-immobili>
- (3) FIAT is the acronym of Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino. It is the most important Italian manufacturer of automobiles, etc. The brand has had an enormous influence over the industrial, political, economic and social history of the city of Turin.
- (4) 14th October 1980, 40,000 'white-collar workers' marched through the city center of Turin to protest against the 35-day occupation of FIAT by workers threatened by layoffs. This march was defined as a victory for the productive middle classes and marked a breaking point in the social history of Italy.
- (5) According to the 2016 Rota Report, starting from the 1970s in Turin, as many as "10,000,000 square meters of industrial areas are abandoned (about 18% of the municipal area) and between 1995 and 2015, 5,000,000 square meters of these areas are transformed into new spaces for residence, commerce and services, with more than 60 urban planning measures approved " ( [http://www.rapporto-rota.it/images/news/La\\_Citta\\_e\\_i\\_suoi\\_numeri\\_1\\_giu.pdf](http://www.rapporto-rota.it/images/news/La_Citta_e_i_suoi_numeri_1_giu.pdf))
- (6) Between 1997 and 2005 different projects and policies of urban regeneration were concentrated in Turin: the framework of these actions is given by the Periferie Project. For further information: <http://www.comune.torino.it/rigenerazioneurbana/documentazione/periferie9705.pdf>
- (7) It was the slogan used for the communication and promotion of the city during the 2006 Winter Olympic Games
- (8) <https://cavallerizzareale.wordpress.com>
- (9) <http://www.casadelquartiere.it>
- (10) Glorious thirties. The thirty years going from 1945 to 1975 characterised by the economic boom after the Second World War.
- (11) *Groupes d'action municipale*, municipal action groups.

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