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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

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Abstract

In the rich and complex framework that today define the debate about urban commons, our contribution focuses on the relations between commoning processes and urban regeneration. In the last 5 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 paper focuses 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 needs a methodology that can highlight the way in which those apparently sporadic cases challenge the existing knowledge on urban commons. Our objective is to question not only the impacts of commons on city governance, but also on how spaces are reshaped and redesigned by commoning practices.

Keywords: Tools, Urban regeneration, Comparison methodology, Italian and French case studies, Austerity urbanism, Commoning processes, Urban commons

Urban commons, austerity urbanism and urban regeneration

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 (Foster and Iaione 2015; Buchs et al. 2019). The scientific debate, even though it is not yet able to settle around a univocal definition of the commons, identifies some predominant characteristics, which help to define its main features. A common is composed of a shared resource (public or private), around which a community takes action and responsibility, and a governance model oriented to public interest and open access (Ostrom 1990; Dellenbaugh et al. 2015; Festa 2016). Resources (commons) can span from natural material goods to intangible digital knowledge. Their institutional organization and founding principles (common) are based on non-excludability and non-rivalry (Ostrom 1990) with an additional social value or utility (Foster and Iaone 2016). Among others, a characteristic that defines a common is the "commoning practices" that act for protecting a resource from the market and the neoliberal forces that try to capture it (Harvey 2012; Festa 2017). Moreover, independently by property issues, "commoning thus involves establishing rules or protocols for access and use, taking care of and accepting responsibility for a resource, and distributing

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the benefits in ways that take into account the well-being of others" (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016: 195).

Given these assumptions, our research approach focuses on commoning processes developing around existing real estate public properties. Urban commons, and the processes they trigger, are becoming a new field of urban public policies (Ostrom 1990; Piscitelli 2018; Dellenbaugh et al. 2020). Within this context, we observed the emergence in the last five years of specific experimental public policies that mix commoning practices with urban regeneration. Those policies enable citizens not only to make use of disused buildings and produce public interest activities (housing and services), but also to take charge of their architectural planning and renovation design. This article wishes to underline how these particular situations generate processes of commoning within the urban space that are more and more employed by local institutions struggling for survival in the context of austerity devolution constraints (Ségas 2017). As affirmed by Festa (2017: 285) "the renewal of the debate on commons since the 2000s is deeply linked to the development of capital in its neoliberal phase". If urban commons have in fact emerged from citizens' mobilizations in urbanized contexts affected by the 2008 and 2011 financial crisis, urban commoning policies and tools seem to be linked to the emergence of an austerity urbanism (Peck 2012). Facing the reduction of State allocations, this form of urbanism operates through management and optimization of public properties and services (Adisson and Artioli 2020). In this context urban commoning policies and tools allow municipalities to share the management and the maintenance of public properties. While a large part of the literature defines urban commons as a product of a conflictual relation between citizens and public authorities (Dellenbaugh et al. 2015), we would like to emphasise the interest of focusing on the way in which urban commons are transforming local policies and tools.

Transforming and regenerate a physical/material resource might challenge the traditional approaches in which the topic of commons has been treated so far, posing new issue to be analysed and hurdle to be addressed. One of the central challenges is due to the fact that the buildings object of commoning policies and tools are not immediately exploitable resources, but they have to go through a renewing and transforming process in order to become one. Moreover, the redefinition of governance model potentially impacts the direction in which the city develops and, in this scenario, commons can create tensions and contradictions inside the urban regeneration processes. Those tensions concern different issues: from the definition of urban needs, to the financing issues, to the distribution of roles and competences, to the design and transformation actions. How do public policies select spaces and support commoning practices? Which are their financial constraints? How do public instruments let emerge 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 forms of social critique of neoliberal ideology are produced? Which forms of social inclusion or exclusion are generated?

Cities and tools

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 five years used commons as a driver to implement regenerative processes in the urban areas. 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 et al. 2010; Rodotà 2018) 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 and activist debate (Dardot and Laval 2014) and it is starting attracting the interest of public administrations only recently since the pandemic crisis (Jaspart and Perrin 2021).

The cities chosen, Bologna, Torino and Grenoble, are not comparable in terms of 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 seems 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 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 commoning approaches. 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.

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. 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 and 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 '80 s, 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 and 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 and 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 centralised 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 and Mingione 2017). The development and diffusion of the commons' concept in urban regeneration has been strongly intertwined with another hot topic in urban studies: social innovation (Moulaert et al. 2013; 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

[1] http://partecipa.comune.bologna.it/sites/comunita/files/allegati_blog/odg_172_reg.beni_comuni_urbani_pgn_45010_2014.pdf.

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 mobilisation 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-organised 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 organisations, 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.

Turin

Any narration regarding the urban and social transformations of Turin has no option but to start with its past as a Fordist city (Vassallo 2015). In fact, in the early twentieth 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).

[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.

Starting in the second half of the twentieth 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 et al. 2016). This process was in many ways very slow and painful for Turin. Inevitable dismantling[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]. In particular between 1997 and 2005 different projects and policies of urban regeneration were concentrated in some suburbs of the city: the framework of these actions is given by the "Periferie Project". 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 and Olmo 2011).

Today, the situation has completely changed: 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 left "hanging", thus revealing the inadequacy of urban planning tools and methods. The city show its inability to put aside the grand urban transformation projects (referred to large urban areas and large public and private funding) and instead imagine more sustainable processes in line with current territorial endogenous and exogenous conditions. It was during this "deadlock" period that commons began to become part of the public debate like a panacea to remedy that situation. It's important to take in consideration that in Italy the urban common concept has a juridical matrix in primis, but has also a political value; so, it start to take part of the debate on the urban spatial transformations in a very conflictual and controversial way (in particular through different forms of spatial claim). In fact in Turin the debate on urban commons arises precisely in conjunction with a process of occupation and claiming of an urban monument called Cavallerizza Reale.[8] The latter involves occupancy of an old building in the city by a collective of citizens, students, theater workers and intellectuals. The Cavallerizza Reale is one of the most important city's monuments, locaded just in the city center. In 1997 the complex became part of the UNESCO Heritage List but 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 realize the 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 the Administration has changed its strategy and it has decided to sell it to a private entity. In 2013 this clearance sale process was stopped when the Assemblea Cavallerizza occupied the spaces of the complex, claiming it as a "common", and proposed an alternative cultural programme to encourage people to visit the

[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" (https://www.rapporto-rota.it).

[6] 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.

space that had been taken away from the city. The common 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 2021). 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 (2016) and immediately became a political and media issue. Despite this visibility and political promises, seven years has passed, the municipal administration has changed again and the transformation process of the Cavallerizza Reale is being defined according to the more traditional tools of spatial transformation, through the support of banking foundations and designing a functional mixitè project that attempts to guarantee its partially public use. In the meantime, despite the missed opportunity offered by this process, urban commons have forcefully become part of the city debate, in particular as a useful concept to define new institution management models of urban regeneration processes. In 2016 the City of Turin adopted the "Regolamento dei Beni Comuni" (along the lines of the one promoted in Bologna). This tool was immediately used as an opportunity to participate in a European project (Urban Innovative Action). The goal of the Co-City project (2017–2020), was to trigger a local welfare policy by designing spaces managed in a shared way by different local subjects (NGO, active citizens, informal group, small enterprises) able to offer diversified services and adhering to the demands coming from the different neighborhoods. The administration has made a list of public dimissed buildings available, that has became the subject of sustainable urban regeneration and reuse processes through innovative territorial alliances (defined by Patti di collaborazione).; the aim has been to redefine, albeit not in an exclusively manner, a collaboration contract between the administration and active citizens involved in the promotion of activities regarding care of the territory and production of services.

The challenge has been to combat urban poverty and the employment crisis by experimenting with new social enterprise models and by building new "case del quartiere"[9] that powerfully impact the territory. Today we can affirm that in this project the revitalisation process of real estate has prevailed over the process of social inclusion and civic activism (Saporito and Vassallo 2020) which is crucial to define an urban common. At the same time it's important to underline that the overlap of two very different ways of defining common good within urban transformation processes (one, more radical carried out by the Assemblea Cavallerizza, and the other governed by the city through the Co-city project) can lead to a misunderstanding regarding the great possibility of this concept of being used to build strategic and equal alliances between public and private subjects for the construction of sustainable urban transformation processes in a context of austerity.

[9] http://www.casadelquartiere.it.

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 neighbourhood unions, trade unionists, researchers and socialist militants. This informal think-tank defended a "militancy of the living condition" (Joly and 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 ageing 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 neighbourhoods was on the agenda, it was based on a master plan that favoured 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 et 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.

[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.

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 neighbourhood of 3000 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. Neighbourhood by neighbourhood, 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 and 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 neighbourhood 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 neighbourhoods. 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 neighbourhood.

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 50 s (Orillard 2018), on the other hand they provoke a new concern on the public control of urban programming (Meunier et al. 2018). The CIUP *Gren' de projets* was therefore conceived in the context of the austerity management 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 new construction. In addition, the municipality supported local actors in designing their projects and organised a two-phase selection process with a jury that included

invited professionals and city councillors from opposition parties. Thus, the ecologist municipality has strongly oriented the call 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 nineteenth 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; cf. Jaspart and Parrin 2021). 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 the classical separation between contracting public authority and project managers, we are observing the creation of public/private coalitions of actors which have to create rules to share the responsibility about fundraising, space design and space governance.

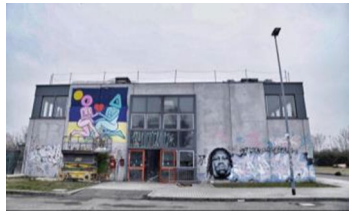
Case thinking for questioning urban commons.

Using three similar case studies, the intent of this preliminary reflection is to understand how space transformation reconceptualizes the concept of commons. From a distant and present-centred point of view, what could be observed is general expediency of urban tools in the management of the relation between urban commons and regeneration: the tools seem to be still based on rigid roles of public actors, they focus on commons or on regeneration exclusively, they could be part of a neoliberal logic of public service delegation or commodification. But we make the hypothesis that looking closely at those tools and inserting them into the long history of the cities can allow us to observe the emergence of small changes, hybridization, "misunderstandings", displacements and changes of culture that can enlighten the potentials of this situations and question the separation between top-down and bottom-up forces in commoning practices (Table 1).

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 political debates and look to those cases not as exceptions, but as part of a potential new tendency in urban planning. At the same time those tools and situations seem still sporadic and isolated. For these reasons they need to be enquired through a case thinking method challenging "the exclusive domination exercised by the hypothetico-deductive model and the universalist paradigms on all the operations of inference and of proof in the scientific argument" (Passeron and Revel 2005: 285). From case thinking point of view, a case is something that addresses problems and questions to the chain of generalisation and the "already codified norms of explanatory or prescriptive discourse." (ibid: 285). Case thinking is based on two main methodological requirements: an in-depth and context-sensitive description allowing to explain why the case is not only a simple exemplification of a generality and to highlight its singularity; a "temporal follow-up of the history of which it [the case] is the product (and a moment), going back as far as necessary and as far as possible into the past of the case" (ibid.: 32).

The case thinking methodology and its requirements seem the most appropriate to analyse the peculiar features of each case, allowing to trace the succession of representative elements of commons within urban policies. First of all, this approach will need to develop long term ethnographies in the next few years. A comparison of tools and processes through an immersive enquiry would give us the possibility to open up the black box of urban production by focusing on the way

Table 1 Synthesis of the three case studies

	Bologna	**Turin**	**Grenoble**
Tools	*Laboratorio spazi* Experimental participative process aimed to redesign policies and tools for the allocation and management of real estate owned by the municipality by promoting temporary use of buildings and abandoned areas	*Co city* Urban Innovative Actions project (2017–2020) for commons-based urban welfare Call for project offering a list of "void spaces" and promoting the collaboration of different local actors	*Gren' de projet* Call for innovative projects for private "interdisciplinary" groups able to take charge of public buildings transformation and management. Issued by a plan of local public services saving
Buildings	Six disused buildings, at high risk of abandonment and/or decay	- Dismissed buildings - Underused public services - Green areas, public areas - Residual areas, at risk of abandonment or degradation	Six underused buildings with architectural patrimonial value (XVII to XXI century) and at risk of decay
			
			
	Source: www.zic.it, www.zero.eu	Source: https://cooperativecity.org (Photos @ Andrea Giuliano)	Source: https://www.grenoble.fr
Actors	- Registered local associations - Third sector organisations, including those in partnership - Committees formally constituted for the pursuit of purposes compatible with those envisaged for the property of interest - Informal groups of citizens	- Informal groups of citizens - Registered local associations - Active citizens - Schools	- Small entrepreneurs - Associations at national scale - Associations at local scale - Consortiums of local associations - Informal collectives of citizens

in which institutional and non-institutional actors produce pragmatically new forms of governance. Previous successful and failure experiences, transfer of model's dynamics, and existing network of actors will emerge and break down, with the purpose of analyse long and articulated processes, able to create possibilities for communities to question and change their participation to urban policies.

Secondly the case thinking approach allows us to underline the necessity of a situated historical perspective for understanding urban commons. As the three case studies show, the municipalities are experimenting with tools that put together the optimization of public real estate properties with the renewal of a historical horizontal governance model. If an important work of research on the understanding of commons inside the long history of human thought is in action for fifteen years (cf. Dardot and Laval 2014), 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.

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Author contributions
This text presents preliminary reflections with respect to the topic of communing processes and tools by which they are implemented in urban contexts. The topics in question are examined in different contexts starting from individual researches, several personal considerations and reflect an ongoing issue tackled jointly by the authors. The paragraphs Urban commons, austerity urbanism and urban regeneration, Cities and tools, Case thinking for questioning urban commons are edited by all authors. In particular the section "Bologna" is by TC, section "Turin" by IV and section "Grenoble" is by FG and CL. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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