International Journal of the Commons

A Synthesis of Rational Choice and Critical Urban Commons Debates

REVIEW ARTICLE

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ubiquity press

ABSTRACT

The notion of urban commons has been used to describe community self-organized efforts to govern shared urban resources that are deemed essential to their well-being. Commoning often involves communities claim, use and manage resources over which they have very limited property rights. While critical commons scholars see urban commons as a response to the enclosure of capitalist urbanization, traditional commons scholars have attempted to replicate their commons research in urban settings in view of the success of commons as a governance mode for common-pool resources. In this article, we use the debates in these two schools of thought to synthesize the problematics related to commoning in urban setting. To advance urban commons research, we develop two research agendas and the propositions that explicate our major arguments and assumptions. The two research agendas explore institutional designs and property rights arrangements that enable commoning, collective action and self-organization among actors with different preferences and capacities, and the collaborative governance mechanisms that strengthen the role of urban commons in city governance. We believe that the two research agendas lay out new pathways for urban commons research whereby the two schools of thought could benefit from each other and generate new insights that would be useful for practitioners in the field.

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KEYWORDS:
Urban commons; rational choice perspective; critical commons scholarship

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Wang, X., Lam, W. F., & Lorenzo, T. (2024). A Synthesis of Rational Choice and Critical Urban Commons Debates. *International Journal of the Commons*, 18(1), pp. 475–489. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.1277

INTRODUCTION

The notion of urban commons has been used to describe community self-organized efforts to govern shared urban resources that are deemed essential to their well-being, and commoning often involves communities claim, use and manage resources over which they have very limited property rights (Bollier and Helfrich, 2015; Hardt and Negri, 2009; Linebaugh, 2008). While critical commons scholars see urban commons as a much-needed response to prevent if not combat neoliberal city governance and enclosure (Johnson, 2004; Quintana and Campbell, 2019; Ulloa, 2015), traditional commons scholars intend to extend the success of commons in managing common pool resources (CPRs) to the governance of urban resources and systems (Feinberg, Ghorbani and Herder, 2021, 2023; Foster and Iaione, 2019; Huron, 2017). Although both schools of thought have made considerable contribution to urban commons research, there is a lack of synthesis of the debates in the two schools, thus limiting the development of the field.

For example, critical commons scholars have accumulated important insights on factors such as neoliberal capitalism, urban politics and heavy regulation of property rights that inhibit urban commons and called on citizens to take back institutional control over urban resources (Quintana and Campbell, 2019). They also caution against perspectives that treat commons as neoliberal policy fix for a shrinking welfare state, addressing problems of capitalist systems through resource pooling from civil society (Lutz, 2015). However, there is a lack of discussion on how to strengthen the role of urban commons within city governance. On the other hand, scholars who conduct traditional commons research usually adopt a rational choice perspective on institutional designs for commons in urban settings. They typically focus on collective action problems that are caused by factors inherent in the commons such as resource nature (e.g., rival in consumption but lack excludability) and community attributes (e.g., trust, norms) rather than external factors such as urban politics and regulatory environment (Ostrom, 1990; Schlager and Cox, 2018). The focus has been on testing and extending Ostrom's design principles with resources and communities that are typically urban (Parker and Johansson, 2011; Kip et al., 2015).

However, what is urban? People living in rural areas—typical traditional commons research contexts—use and share resources that are also used in urban settings such as Wi-Fi, electricity, healthcare or education. These resources could be CPRs or public goods of which the use is non-rivalrous and non-excludable. The nature of a good is separate from its management regime (i.e., open access, state property, private property, common property) and from the nature of resource users (e.g., individuals, corporations, voluntary associations, public agencies). In other words, CPRs are not automatically common property, nor do CPRs have to be managed by community-based organizations (McGinnis, 2011). In the same vein, public goods are not automatically public property, nor do public goods have to be managed by public authorities. Moreover, urban life and communities are very diverse, which makes it hard for scholars to pinpoint universal community attributes that are distinct from those of rural life and communities.

An important finding of traditional commons research however is that the commons are in many instances a more effective mode of governance than the state or the market in addressing the problematics of CPRs (Ostrom, 1990). The eight design principles for CPR commons summarized by Ostrom (1990) enable resource users to see the link between their individual behaviours and the collective outcomes, to better utilize local information in problem-solving and conflict resolution, to develop reciprocity and long-term working relationships with one another, and to learn and respond to the changing environment. These institutions provide the foundation for self-governance and hence the resilience of a resource system (Baggio et al., 2016).

Over the past decades, this finding has informed the governance and management of many natural resource systems as well as intervention efforts made by international organizations and governments (Lam, 2006; Ostrom, 2011). In view of the significant impact that traditional commons research has made on natural resource management, policymakers have become more interested in using urban commons as an instrument to regenerate public assets such as parks, buildings and facilities, encourage local governance and address unmet local needs (Huron, 2017; Park, Shin and Kim, 2020). The Bologna Regulation in Italy and the Localism Act in the U.K. are good examples of attempts to encourage urban commons.

Thus, we contend that urban commons research is not to discover new commons that typify unique urban resources and community attributes but to enrich our understanding of commoning in urban settings scrutinized by critical scholars. There is no doubt that traditional commons literature has accumulated important insights, questions however arise as to whether urban commons differ from traditional commons so much that the knowledge generated by traditional commons research does not provide a good knowledge basis for understanding and managing shared resources in urban settings (Parker and Johansson, 2011). Borch and Kornberger (2015) has long lamented that the traditional understanding of the commons has been translated uncritically into urban studies.

Briefly put, research on urban commons has been limited by a lack of synthesis between traditional commons research and critical commons research. Hence, to further urban commons research, it is important to reflect on what important implications critical commons scholarship, particularly the insights on constraints that political, economic and social structures could have for the operation and viability of urban commons as a mode of governance. This article is an attempt to develop research agendas that point us to new questions that at the local level, what institutional and property rights arrangements could encourage commoning of public properties, and at higher governance levels, what collaborative governance mechanisms could strengthen the role of urban commons in city governance and urban regeneration. In doing so, this article begins with consolidating the problematics for commoning in urban settings with insights from both schools of thought.

PROBLEMATICS FOR COMMONING IN THE URBAN CONTEXTS

In light of traditional commons research, we first take a rational choice perspective on commoning in general, and use the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework to locate collective action problems in linked action situations at multiple governance levels. Collective action problems have always been the primary concern for traditional commons scholars. The IAD framework has a problem-solving orientation (Ostrom, 1990). The purpose of the IAD framework is to allow scholars to explore and explain how people use institutional arrangements to address collective action problems encountered in action situations (Schlager and Cox, 2018) and to understand the logic of institutional designs (Ostrom, 1987, 1990). We then draw on the discussions of critical common scholars to enrich our understanding of "urban" and associated complications for commoning in urban settings.

COLLECTIVE ACTION PROBLEMS IN COMMONING

Commoning takes place when a group of people come together to provide and produce public goods and services (e.g., social services) (Ostrom, Tiebout and Warren, 1961; Davis and Ostrom, 1991), or to claim, use (sometimes repurpose) and manage shared resources (e.g., land) deemed important to their well-being (Linebaugh, 2008). Commoning of public goods and services, or local public economy usually entails action situations such as construction of jurisdictional units, provision and production, financing, coordination, and dispute resolution (McGinnis, 2011). The focus of urban commons scholars is primarily on the latter type of commoning as a response to neoliberal city governance, enclosure and privatisation. To examine problematics for the latter type of commoning, we incorporate insights from traditional commons research on CPRs.

When the use of a resource is rivalrous and non-excludable, as in the case of common pool resources (CPRs), resource management challenges could concern both appropriation and provision (Ostrom, Gardner and Walker, 1994). Appropriation is concerned with the extraction and use of the resource, with a focus on the distribution of resource units among users and also the maintenance of some order in which the extraction is performed. The primary managerial challenge is to regulate who may use a resource, how much, in what ways to avoid overuse. Provision, on the other hand, is concerned with making sure the resource is made available and properly maintained; the focus of attention is on incentivizing users to contribute to the supply and maintenance of the resource, and avoiding free-riding behaviours (Schlager, Blomquist and Tang, 1994; Ostrom, Gardner and Walker, 1994).

CPRs such as public space, public facilities or energy, are particularly susceptible to problems such as overuse as often discussed in traditional commons research. However, they differ in their varying degrees of regenerative capacity. For example, although the use of public space or electromagnetic spectrum is rivalrous because at any given time and place one use of a portion of the spectrum precludes any other use of that portion, it is not destroyed by use, unlike buildings, tools or energy, thus giving rise to fewer concerns over provision. In most countries, electromagnetic spectrum is regulated centrally by the state and auctioned to private telecommunication actors. Berge and Kranakis (2011) maintain that electromagnetic spectrum should be directly managed by its users as commons rather than regulated by governmental or private institutions.

Prior studies indicate that the mobility of resource flows such as gas could lead to appropriation issues (Schlager and Cox, 2018). In their research on the variation in rules developed by resource users for the management of different types of CPRs, Schlager, Blomquist, and Tang (1994) found that highly mobile resource flows necessitate resource users to exercise control over access but not over the flows, and they tend to be governed by time or technology rules, whereas more stationary flows tend to be governed by quotas which allow resource users to allocate the flows. Therefore, for resources with strong regenerative capacity, the primary managerial challenge is to regulate appropriation and ensure fair distribution.

For other resources, appropriation activities cause wear and tear (as in the case of built infrastructures, tools), or lead to declining reserve (as in the case of electricity), thus calling for collective action to not only regulate appropriation and avoid overuse, but also to maintain, produce and replenish the resource. The latter becomes challenging when resource users free-ride provision activities. The second design principle states that, 'the benefits obtained by users from a common-pool resource, as determined by appropriation rules, are proportional to the amount of inputs required in the form of labour, material, or money, as determined by provision rules.' (McGinnis, 2011).

Resource users, however, might leave commoning endeavours, whether due to migration or because they lose a sense of identification with the community. Commons with a shrinking number of participants are likely to face challenges to reproduce itself (Kip et al., 2015; Parker and Johansson, 2011). In addition, the diversity inherent with large and complex urban agglomerations may be at odds with the ideals of traditional commons. As well put by David Harvey (2012, 67), 'the city is the site where people of all sorts and classes mingle, however reluctantly and agonistically, to produce a common if perpetually changing and transitory life.' Urban residents with different identities and preferences thus should be thought of as engaging in constant boundary negotiation and community making, and rearticulating the 'we' (Kip et al., 2015).

Urban scholars have embraced the relational nature of urban commons and taken on the view in which commons and community are mutually constitutive (Huron, 2017; Kashwan et al., 2021; Vittoria, Ragozino and De Vita, 2023). Sandstrom et al. (2017, 509–10), who discuss commoning as a 'process that is constituted in the general reproduction of the community … as not only comprising a set of property relations vis-`a-vis natural resources but also as associational practices around specific places and buildings that are managed collectively regardless of their juridical form. Seen from this perspective, commons are … also important social resources that bind people together in a place for a common purpose.' For example, the community of Lido Pola took on a management and impulse role for local development through asset valorisation and territorial animation activities on the Bagnoli waterfront in Naples which was abandoned and gradually dilapidated for 20 years (Vittoria, Ragozino and De Vita, 2023). There were entanglements between diverse groups of people involving the Lido Pola community, the students of the neighbourhoods, and the experts, in particular, through the commoning activities. Ostrom (2005) suggests that social capital, such as trust and norms, is vital to the success of commons.

In a nutshell, community making is integral to commoning in the urban contexts. As well put by Huron (2017, 1065), 'maybe this is what is urban about the urban commons: this attention to the needs of as-yet-unknown members, and a willingness to keep boundaries somewhat porous.' As such, commoning conveys an emergent and dynamic nature of urban commons, not only in terms of the claiming of state properties deemed crucial to the livelihoods of the community, but also the emergence of a self-defined community, and the devising of strategic scales, porous boundaries and institutions for collection action (Borch and Kornberger, 2015; Dellenbaugh, Kip et al., 2015; Ferguson, 2014; Hardt and Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012; Velicu and García-López, 2018).

Critical commons scholars have also highlighted challenges arising from inequalities amongst actors in commoning initiatives due to historical reasons and cultural factors (e.g., colonisation, caste, gender or race), or differences in wealth, social influence, cognitive and organisational skills, familiarity with city governance (Clement, 2010; Feinberg, Ghorbani and Herder, 2021; Kashwan, 2016; Kashwan et al., 2021; Mudliar and Koontz, 2021). For example, similar to Agrawal and Gibson (2001), Kashwan (2016) saw higher than expected levels of cooperation in communities with widespread power asymmetries and pointed out that individuals from marginalized groups within local communities accept unfair rules because they defer to the social and political authorities of local leaders who favour unfair rules. Thus, these scholars question the claims made in the CPR literature that a majority of institutions are built through consensus, arguing that such 'consensus' disguises embedded inequalities of various types. To enrich the understanding of commoning in urban settings and potential problematics, in the next section, we draw on the discussion on urban political-economic structures that might complicate the commoning processes.

NEOLIBERAL CITY GOVERNANCE, PRIVATISATION AND ENCLOSURE

Unlike many traditional local commons which are often located in remote areas where de facto, if not de jure, self-governance is acquiesced (Ostrom, 1990), commoning in urban settings may encounter significant institutional challenges when communities claim and utilize resources over which they have limited property rights (Feinberg, Ghorbani and Herder, 2021). However, it is not just institutional challenges that community commoning initiatives may face from existing regulations, these initiatives may also express interests that conflict with the public interests shaped by urban politics (Macleod, 2011).

As such, to understand the tensions facing commoning initiatives in the urban environment, it is necessary to explicate what is unique about being urban (Huron, 2017; Kip et al., 2015). Already in 1938, Louis Wirth pointed out that we cannot take the notion of the city and, hence, the urban for granted and attach it to a clearly delimited object. In earlier days, the differentiation between 'the city as a local entity' and 'the urban' calls into question the way many scholars have written about the urban commons such as community gardens located in cities. Today, the city-scale becomes a key site for national strategies of economic competitiveness and cities have also become strategic hubs in the globalization of capital and labour (Molotch, 1976; Logan and Molotch, 1987; Macleod, 2011). According to Neil Smith, scales are not pre-given or an a priori. Geographical scale is socially produced as simultaneously a platform and container of certain kinds of social activity (Jones III et al., 2017; Smith, 1992). Far from neutral and fixed, therefore, geographical scales are the product of economic, political and social activities and relationships. In other words, scale is the geographical organizer and expression of collective social action. Brenner (2004) claims that the city-scale plays a key strategic role in the current globally occurring rescaling of statehood and the production of a neoliberal global economy. This renders the management of urban resources vulnerable to urban politics defined by growth coalitions of business elites (Logan and Molotch, 1987) and commons grabbing (Dell'Angelo et al., 2017).

Numerous case studies reveal the decisive roles of growth coalitions and urban regimes (maintenance regimes, middle-class progressive regimes motivated around slow growth, growth-oriented development regimes) in reshaping politics in towns and cities and enabling the onset of urban entrepreneurism (Macleod, 2011; Stone, 1993, 2005). Urban entrepreneurism is characterized by domination of economic agenda and business elites in the planning of urban development (e.g., land use plans, zoning) (OECD, 2007). Public administrators are no longer simply administrator of public funds but funding brokers to smooth public-private partnerships (Hall, 2003; Leitner, 1990). In this sense, urban governing institutions increasingly appear to be 'streamlined' to foreclose cumbersome debate and respond nimbly to market opportunities (Purcell, 2008). The unbalanced political and economic power that drives urban sprawl through land acquisition or commons grabbing leads to the dismissal of long-standing local claims to resources deemed essential to their welling being, turning smallholders and subsistence farming into large-scale commercial agriculture or speculative investments (Dell'Angelo et al., 2017).

Thus, critical scholars theorize urban commons as a much-needed response to prevent if not combat privatisation, enclosure and city governance that practices neoliberal capitalism, and to take back institutional control over resources deemed important to their wellbeing (Johnson, 2004; Quintana and Campbell, 2019; Ulloa, 2015). Rose (1994, 110) distinguishes between public property owned and managed by a government body, and 'public property collectively "owned" by society at large with claims that are independent of and superior to government'. For Bruun (2015), the latter represents the commons. Here, the relationship between property ownership and institutional control over urban resources becomes critical in redefining who 'the public' is, as well as ascertaining who exactly might have a legitimate claim to be part of the public and, in turn, a right to the city (Macleod, 2011, 2648).

More importantly, the question that how to enable the agency of local communities to perform stewardship and take part in resource management lies at the centre of commoning (Vittoria, Ragozino and De Vita, 2023). Agency is connected to power via the ability to utilize both tangible (allocative) and intangible (authoritative) resources, as described by Giddens in 1984. This form of power is manifested in the creation of rules within public decision-making arenas, as well as in the capacity to manage the agenda (determining the topics of discussion and who gets represented). Additionally, it encompasses the less overt ability to influence perceptions and notions regarding what is deemed acceptable (Lukes, 2005). Moreover, in a study of the gendered negotiation of access to land and water in Peru, Vera Delgado and Zwarteveen (2007) suggests that the variable ability to exercise agency through institutions and to challenge boundaries is highly dependent on the possession of resources (e.g., knowledge, social networks). In some cases, public-private partnership is employed to perform stewardship of public goods such as cultural heritages and public parks. Due to the lack of the capacity to exercise agency, local claims to these resources are often less represented in the governance of resources (Cleaver and De Koning, 2015).

Foster and Laione (2019) discussed examples of institutional support (e.g., the Bologna regulation) for commoning. They contend that managing and creating urban commons most often requires changing or tweaking (or even hacking, in a sense) the regulation of public and private property to give citizens institutional control over resources and working through the administrative branches of local government to enable and protect collaborative forms of resource management. However, the criticisms towards the Bologna regulation (Bianchi, 2018), particularly

the repression of more antagonistic proposals, the exclusion of less capable citizens, the retaining of decision-making power within the public administration, beg the question of how to design institutional platforms that can truly enable collaborative governance in commoning initiatives.

Next, we elaborate our ideas in two research agendas that we hope would drive research to address internal challenges from community making and devising strategic scales and boundaries for collective action on the one hand and how actors of city governance could approach urban commons on the other.

RESEARCH AGENDAS

The challenges facing commoning in urban settings can be represented in Figure 1. Both schools of thoughts are key to finding solutions. As mentioned earlier, a key asset of the IAD framework is precisely its ability to observe linked action arenas of resource management at multiple governance levels and to analyse constraints on the design and sound implementation of adequate rules at the local level. Hence, through politicising the IAD framework (Clement, 2010), researchers could point out the directions that urban commons research can take to address the problematics concerning community and boundary making as well as limited property rights over resources at the local level. Moreover, a politicised lens of IAD also calls for ideas on collaborative governance arrangements that could facilitate commoning, foster multi-scalar collective action and enhance city governance by addressing power imbalances among commoning actors. Next, we elaborate on these two research agendas.

INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN FOR URBAN COMMONS

We argue that to address problematics concerning community and boundary making as well as limited property rights over resources, it is important to study how and which designs of rules and property rights arrangements can encourage public participation, give back institutional control over resources and harness agency. Kiser and Ostrom (1982) classify rules into seven types including boundary rules, position rules, choice rules, scope rules, aggregation rules, information rules and payoff rules. We highlight the importance of the design of rules at the local level, particularly boundary rules and position rules, to commoning in the urban settings. For example, Community Land Trust (CLT) is a legal mechanism that is often employed to support housing commons in the urban environment, particularly where there is a speculative real estate market. Land owned by a CLT is removed from the real estate market and put into a legal structure that is democratically governed by a diverse membership of public and private actors and inclusive of community residents where it is based (Aernouts and Ryckewaert, 2018; Moore and McKee, 2012).

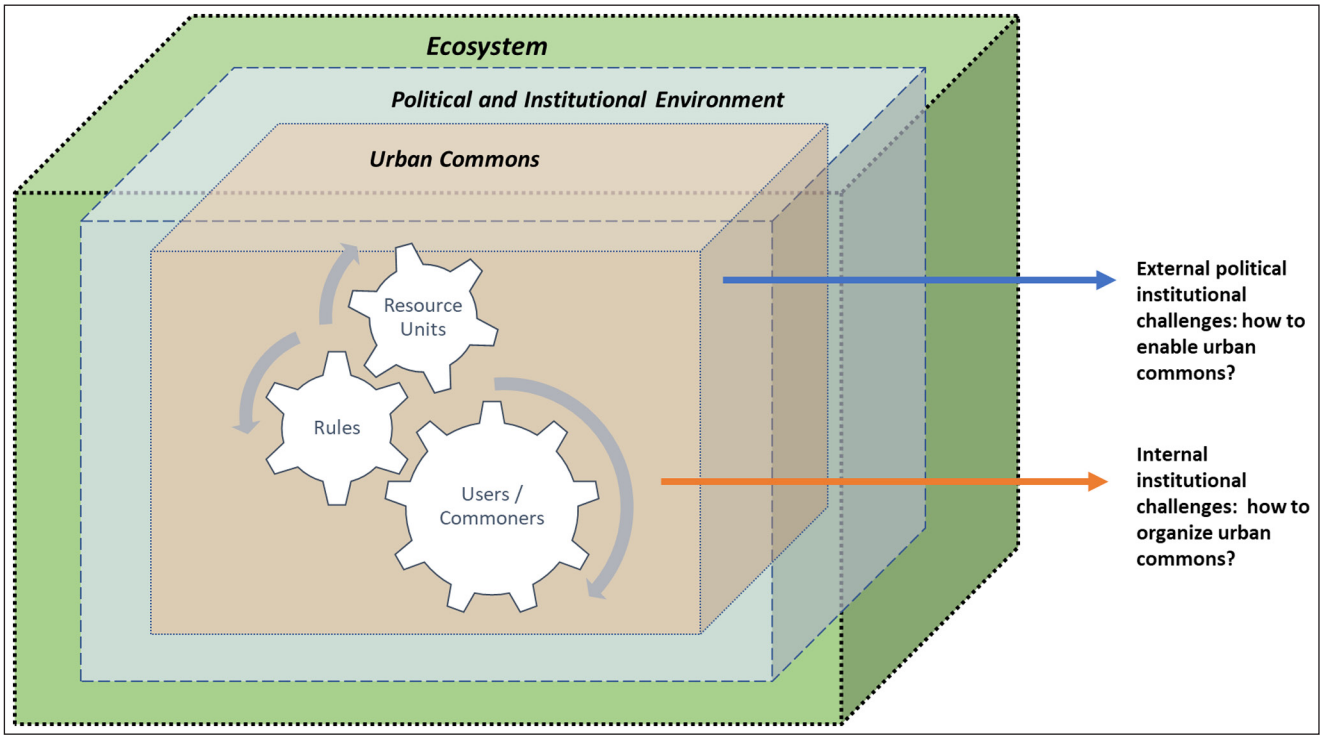

Figure 1 The Two Questions for Research Agendas on Urban Commons.

For many resources, one can define five types of positions which hold varying bundles of rights and obligations. Schlager and Ostrom (1992) defined a series of five rights that they found in empirical studies of operational resource systems in the field: access, withdrawal, management, exclusion and alienation. Access rights allow people to enter a defined area and enjoy its benefits without removing any resources, whereas withdrawal right allows people to obtain specified products from a resource system and remove that product from the area for proscribed uses. Management right allows people to participate in decisions regulating resource or making improvements in infrastructure. Exclusion right allows people to participate in the determination of who has the right of access or withdrawal or management. Alienation gives people the right to sell, lease, bequeath, or otherwise transfer any of the preceding component rights.

Schlager and Ostrom (1992) posed the possibility that one can relate the different ways that these bundles are combined to a set of positions that individuals hold in regard to operational settings. For example, an owner has all rights, and a proprietor has all rights except alienation. While a claimant has access, withdrawal and management rights, an authorized user has access and withdrawal rights. An authorized entrant only has access rights. In the commoning case of *L'Asilo*, Naples, a community of art workers occupied a three-storey 16th century building (about 4000 square meters). There are three positions: inhabitants, guests and beneficiaries (Cozzolino, 2017). 'Inhabitants' are all who are involved in the care and management of *L'Asilo*. 'Guests' are all who can request a space for a temporary use for artistic or cultural purpose. 'Beneficiaries' of *Asilo* are all who take part in the activities proposed to the public by the 'inhabitants' or the 'guests'.

The abovementioned positions can be held by different rights-holders ranging from members of the public, corporations, voluntary associations, to public agencies. In urban settings, with limited property rights, members of the public are often entrants or users who have no institutional control over state properties. To break down this barrier and allow members of the public to have institutional control over properties deemed valuable to their well-being, we need boundary rules that allow them to enter positions which not only have access and withdrawal rights but also management rights. Boundary rules specify how participants enter or leave these positions (McGinnis, 2011). Moreover, committed members of the public could be allowed to take positions with more property rights. In other words, a volunteer can move to a claimant position with management rights if he or she demonstrates a strong commitment to the well-being of the resource system. This might answer the question from urban commons scholars concerning how to encourage public participation and community making, keep boundary porous, and harness agency (Huron, 2017).

It is important to commoning that collective action can be facilitated at different scales by allowing interested members of the public (i.e., commoners) with different preferences and capacities (e.g., availability, knowledge and skills) to participate. For example, in their research of urban green commons, Colding and his colleagues (2013) discover that many individuals find it hard to partake in more formalized organized urban green commons, like allotments, which require considerable commitments and duties in participation. In contrast, public-access community gardens allow for much looser frameworks of participation. In a similar vein, despite the good will of the Localism Act in the U.K., some self-organized community initiatives experienced difficulties with developing and executing neighbourhood plans (e.g., Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan) due to a lack of time, expertise and familiarity with the regulations and processes of city governance (Moore and McKee, 2012).

Thus, to broaden participation and facilitate collective action among community members with different preferences and capacities, it is necessary to allow institutional diversity that enables them to enter and take a variety of positions with varied levels of boundaries, rights and responsibilities. Moreover, we argue that the design of rules, particularly boundary rules and position rules, and property rights arrangements empower committed members of the public with more institutional control over resources, which would enhance the self-organizing and adaptive capacity of commons by harnessing their agency and stewardship, facilitating negotiation and coordination among diverse stakeholder interests and modifying operation methods or practices in higher-level collective choice arenas such as a committee with governance functions (Schlager and Cox, 2018). As in the case of *L'Asilo*, the governance of the space is self-managed through a weekly assembly in which everyone can participate and discuss questions at stake. Along with the weekly assemblies, there are also topic-based working groups such as visual arts and workshop, performing arts, and the like (Cozzolino, 2017).

Moreover, Shepsle (1989) define an institution to be robust if it is long-lasting and the operational rules (e.g., choice rules) have been modified over time to address changes in local conditions according to a set of higher-level rules (which institutional analysts would call collective-choice rules). These higher-level rules might themselves be modified slowly over time. The contemporary definition of 'robustness' in regard to complex systems focuses on adaptability to disturbances: 'the maintenance of some desired system characteristics despite fluctuations in the behaviour of its component parts or its environment'

(Carlson and Doyle, 2002, 2538; see also Anderies, Janssen, and Ostrom, 2004; Janssen and Anderies, 2007).

The analysis of past and current action situations in the commoning process of a resource can help researchers gain insights into institutional designs that contribute to the adaptability of a commons. Alternatively, the comparisons of current action situations across the same type of urban resources may also provide certain level of insights into robust institutional designs and outcomes thereof but may commit causal fallacy. Thus, to gain insights into design principles of robust urban commons, we suggest that it is necessary to look over time at multiple cases of the same type of resources and then across different types of resources in different urban settings. The systematic comparisons would help researchers identify institutional arrangements and property rights arrangements that are critical to commoning and adaptability of urban commons. To sum up the arguments in this research agenda, we develop the following three propositions for urban commons research.

Proposition 1: The designs of rules, particularly boundary rules and position rules, and property rights arrangements are key to the commoning of a resource. They are instrumental in enabling public access to the benefits of a resource despite heavy regulation of property rights, and promoting public participation, community making as well as harnessing agency in resource management.

Proposition 2: Collective action can be facilitated at different scales by allowing institutional diversity (e.g., a variety of positions, boundaries and property rights arrangements) that enables commoners with different preferences and capacities to enter and take positions with varied levels of rights and responsibilities.

Proposition 3: Giving committed members of the public with more institutional control over resources would enhance the self-organizing and adaptive capacity of commons by harnessing their agency and stewardship, facilitating negotiation and coordination among diverse stakeholder interests in higher-level collective choice arenas and modifying operation and management methods or practices.

ENABLING URBAN COMMONS AS CO-CREATION ARENAS TOWARDS URBAN RESILIENCE

Foster and Laione (2019) maintain that any attempt to bring the commons to the city may confront the law and politics of the city. Therefore, to facilitate the operation of urban commons and increase its role in city governance, more insights need to be developed on how urban commons can be facilitated politically and institutionally. Critical scholars have theorized urban commons as a much-needed response to prevent if not combat privatisation, enclosure and city governance that practices neoliberal capitalism (Johnson, 2004; Quintana and Campbell, 2019; Ulloa, 2015). They also caution against perspectives that treat commons as neoliberal policy fix for a shrinking welfare state, addressing problems of capitalist systems through resource pooling from civil society (Lutz, 2015).

On the other hand, commons' often informal and self-organized nature also creates institutional barriers for it to play more important roles in city governance. For example, as aforementioned, despite the good will of the Localism Act in the U.K., some self-organized community initiatives experienced great difficulties with developing and executing neighbourhood plans (e.g., Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan) due to a lack of time, expertise and familiarity with actors, structures and processes of city governance (Moore and McKee, 2012). Therefore, we draw on the collaborative governance literature in search of insights on solutions that strengthen the role of urban commons in city governance.

Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2012, 2) define collaborative governance as, 'the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished'. Research finds that productive interfaces between community initiatives and bureaucracies hinge on the extent to which public managers act as competent boundary spanners who process information, facilitate two-directional communication and coordinate actions (van Meerkerk and Edelenbos, 2018a, b; Williams, 2002, 2012). However, the roles of public managers in facilitating the co-creation of public solutions might be very limited.

First, public managers are responsible for policy implementation. Their hands are often tied when community members want to repurpose public assets. As Torfing (2019, 5) says, 'the public sector is compartmentalised in bureaucratic silos that each tend to focus all their attention on the specific policy programmes and public services that they are supposed to deliver and on the budget frames and number of employees at their disposal.' For example, in a study of commoning experiments in Hong Kong, community residents proposed many usages (e.g., community living room, community library) for vacant spaces in public markets that are different from the usages allowed under the existing regulations and hence come into conflict with public managers who manage public markets according to these regulations (Wang, Leung, and Mui, 2023).

Second, public administration scholars have also recognized the risk of viewing public managers as the 'platonic guardians' of public interests, and acknowledged the importance of collaborative governance processes where community members can be included in defining of public interests rather than only in the co-production processes (Torfing and Sørensen, 2019; Torfing, Sørensen and Røiseland, 2019). The question remains as to how to strengthen the role of urban commons in city governance. The Bologna Regulation on Collaboration between Citizens and the City for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons provides a good example of solutions to the question. The regulation allows citizens and private organizations to sign collaboration pacts with the city in order to improve public space, green areas, and abandoned buildings.

From the moment of its approval, the Regulation has been extremely successful both in Bologna, where 357 interventions of care and regeneration have been agreed (Comune di Bologna, 2017), and in the rest of Italy, where by September 2015, similar regulations were adopted by fifty-four cities and were under evaluation in a further seventy-nine (Labsus, 2016). However, as aforementioned, there have been criticisms as well towards the failures of the institutional setup in considering more antagonistic proposals, including less capable citizens as well as enabling true co-creation (Bianchi, 2018). These lessons point us to the importance of the design and conduct of collaborative governance to addressing power imbalances in commoning.

Actually, one of the core missions for collaborative governance scholars is to address the challenges related to power imbalances for collective action. In their development of collaborative governance model, Ansell and Gash (2008) have already identified prior history of conflict or cooperation, the incentives for stakeholders to participate, power and resources imbalances as starting conditions for collaborative process. In view of the less-than-ideal starting conditions such as power-resource-knowledge asymmetries, collaborative governance scholars focus their research on the processes of building collaborative governance and enabling institutional designs (e.g., participatory inclusiveness, process transparency, clear ground rules) or driving factors such as leadership (e.g., facilitative leadership) and mutual interdependence (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh, 2012).

Ansell et al (2020) and Sørensen et al (2020) highlighted that the design and conduct of collaboration or boundary spanning strategies can shape opportunities or constraints for inclusion. In a study of 28 cases of local, regional or national level policymaking in nine western countries, Sørensen, Hendriks, Hertting and Edelenbos (2020) found that in comparison with managerial boundary spanning which contributes to aligning cross-sector efforts in policy implementation, political boundary spanning can mediate political conflicts through the alignment of political visions, goals and strategies, and promote fairer and more legitimate policy processes and outputs. Specifically, they identified hands-off and hands-on boundary spanning strategies that facilitate collaborative governance and align bottom-up community generated and top-down policy agendas. Hands-off boundary spanning typically entails political, legal and/or fiscal framing of collaborative governance arenas. Political framing which takes the form of general policy goals that set the overall agenda and direction for collaborative policy deliberation, legal framing consisting in reflexive regulations that set the ground rules and design of collaborative arenas, and fiscal framing which lays out the conditions for achieving and spending funding (Sørensen et al., 2020).

Providing platforms is a good example of hands-off political boundary spanning (Ansell and Gash, 2018; Sørensen and Torfing, 2019; Torfing, 2019). Platforms are defined as institutional opportunity structures containing dedicated resources, templates, and procedures that facilitate the formation, proliferation, and adaptation of arenas, which are temporary, rule-bound self-organized spaces or structures supporting deliberative interaction between interdependent actors aiming to establish a common ground for creative problem solving and joint decision-making as well as action (See Figure 1). Hands-on boundary spanning takes place through politicians' facilitative leadership to promote collaborations across stakeholders and active participation in the activities, debates and decision-making in co-creation arenas.

Sørensen et al. (2020) maintain that in situations with only hands-off political boundary spanning, there is limited opportunity for political boundary spanners to explain the political sentiments of politicians and dynamics of representative policy-making arenas to actors in collaborative governance arenas but also to feed the knowledge and insights they harvest from these arenas into the political processes in government cabinets, representative assemblies, councils and committees. Hence, it is necessary to use a combination of hands-off and hands-on forms of political boundary spanning to bring about collaborative innovation. However, political boundary spanning can be difficult to achieve in illiberal democratic systems (Wang, Leung and Mui, 2023). To sum up our arguments, we develop the following proposition on political and institutional mechanisms that can strengthen urban commons.

Proposition 4: The role of urban commons in city governance could be reinforced if there are platforms that provide not only dedicated competences and resources but also political and administrative support for collaborative arenas.

In view of the success of commons in managing CPRs, there has been an increased interest in the benefits of urban commons to urban resilience. Meerow et al (2016, 39) defined urban resilience as 'the ability of an urban system—and all its constituent socio-ecological and socio-technical networks across temporal and spatial scales—to maintain or rapidly return to desired functions in the face of a disturbance, to adapt to change, and to quickly transform systems that limit current or future adaptive capacity.' Previous research suggest that urban commons potentially support this type of adaptability via informal networks of actors interacting in a bottom-up manner, their experimental and sometimes disruptive character and their openness to newcomers (Borch and Kornberger, 2015; Bruun, 2015; Colding et al., 2013; Foster and Iaione, 2019). And the formation of local knowledge and community stewardship also contribute to the adaptive co-management of urban resources (Feinberg, Ghorbani and Herder, 2023; Krasny et. al., 2014; Plummer and Armitage, 2007; Plummer, Armitage, and de Loë, 2013). More importantly, we argue that urban resilience increases when members of the public can participate in managing urban resources and systems and co-creating solutions with public actors and other private actors.

The case of Lido Pola living lab in Naples illustrates how commoning results in life-engendering entanglements of local and planetary symbiotic mutualism and the regeneration of Bagnoli area (Vittoria, Ragozino and De Vita, 2023). The community of Lido Pola, recognized as an urban commons by the city of Naples with Resolution 446/2016, took on a management and impulse role for local development through asset valorisation and territorial animation activities. In years of activism, since 2016, the Lido Pola community has developed consolidated experience in activities and processes related to citizen science and the active engagement of citizens in urban transformation processes and environmental issues monitoring. Multiple public science outreach initiatives have been promoted, triggering the debate between researchers and local society on the topics of environmental science, both marine and geological, landscape protection, urban planning, social leadership, waste management, the use of chemicals in agriculture, and many others. The activists of the commons (the commoners), by activating various forms of collaboration with students and professionals from different disciplinary fields, developed several proposals regarding refurbishment and reuse of areas and infrastructures surrounding the main building. The community also promoted citizen-led environmental monitoring activities, with the aim of implementing a process of collective self-protection involving the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. In line with the activities carried out, the community actively participates in the Popular Observatory for the Reclamation of Bagnoli, a consultative body recognized by the redevelopment public agency Invitalia and engaged in technical analysis and public awareness throughout the process of land reclamation and environmental cleanup in the area.

Hence, urban commons offers a new lens for collaborative governance scholars, public managers and politicians to rethink ways that urban resources and systems can be governed with a view to enhancing public problem-solving and co-creating public-value outcomes (Ansell and Torfing, 2021a, b; Torfing and Sørensen, 2019). Sørensen, Bryson, and Crosby (2021, 277) maintain that public value 'is defined through an often messy integration and alignment of what citizens expect will make things better for themselves and their loved ones'. For example, Muller (2015) analyses the role that urban commons could play in participatory urban planning processes, using the Park Am Gleisdreieck as a case study. She posits that a community of people, for instance, working together to create a park – might be better partners in a city's urban planning process than 'the public' more broadly, because the commoners have already come together with clearly articulated visions and needs, unlike the more amorphous 'public'.

Furthermore, co-creation stimulates collaborative innovation, as it brings together public and private actors with different experiences, perspectives and forms of knowledge in a problem- or task-focused process (Ansell and Torfing, 2021a, b). The actors will most likely challenge and test each other's ideas about the problem and the possible solutions, thus giving rise to mutual, expansive and transformative learning. Co-creation also ensures a coordinated effort to implement the new and promising solutions that are generated through mutual learning, creative problem-solving and the testing of prototypes. While co-creation improves the quality and feasibility of public solutions and promotes their implementation in an otherwise risk-averse and change-resistant public sector, it also helps to build joint ownership to the co-created solutions even if private actors only have had marginal influence (Torfing et al., 2021). In so doing, co-creation offers an alternative way of addressing the growing distrust in elected government. The combination of enhanced participation and effective problem-solving enhances input and output legitimacy, thereby augmenting trust in politics

and government. To sum up our arguments and call for future research, we develop the following proposition on the role of urban commons in building urban resilience.

> *Proposition 5: Urban commons is a unique collaborative arena for the governance of urban resources. It contributes to urban resilience through building social capital, pooling resources, social learning, collaborative innovation and joint ownership over solutions, and strengthening the legitimacy of governance.*

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we further the research on urban commons through synthesizing two major schools of thought on commons in urban settings. In the past decades, studies of urban commons grounded upon various intellectual traditions and disciplines have coalesced into a burgeoning body of literature. Commons research has traditionally focused on the sustainability of CPRs (Ostrom, 1990, 2009), but recently been extended to shared resources in the urban setting (Foster and Laione, 2019). The notion of urban commons has been used to describe and examine self-organized endeavours of members of the public to co-manage shared resources that are deemed essential to their collective well-being. While the rapid growth of the urban commons literature is a healthy development, its potential has been limited by the Tower of Babel in which studies grounded on different intellectual traditions focus on different theoretical and substantive issues; take on different assumptions; and draw upon different methods and types of data.

In this paper, we draw on both traditional and critical commons scholarships to identify problematics that communities might encounter in commoning urban resources. While the two traditions are different in many ways, they offer important insights which could help strengthen and enrich each other in understanding urban commons. For example, researchers can benefit from critical commons scholarship which sheds light on the relational nature of commoning in urban settings, inequalities among actors in commoning, as well as constraints from higher governance levels (e.g., neoliberal city governance) on the design and implementation of adequate rules at the local level. Two research agendas are proposed to further urban commons research.

In the first research agenda, we adopt a politicised lens of the IAD framework to analyse the design of rules, particularly position rules and boundary rules, and property rights arrangements that can facilitate public access to state properties despite heavy regulation of property rights, encourage collective action among members of the public with different preferences and capacities, and empower those who are committed with more institutional control over resources deemed important to their wellbeing, all of which are critical to commoning in settings with urban complications underlined by critical scholars.

To address the gap in critical commons scholarship, the second research agenda explores ways to strengthen the role of urban commons in city governance without treating commons as neoliberal policy fix for a shrinking welfare state. In light of collaborative governance literature, we discussed how boundary spanning and providing platforms could facilitate and support commons politically and institutionally within city governance. Moreover, given its unique civic, emergent and experimental characteristics, we argue that urban commons has an advantageous position to enhance cross-sector co-creation and envision new pathways towards urban resilience.

The discussion however is more applicable to liberal democratic systems. In illiberal democratic or autocratic systems, commoning would lead to stronger conflict with city governance dominated by private interests without checks and balances and the role of commons might simply be restricted as policy fix. More research is needed to develop insights on commoning in a non-democratic system and its relation with city governance. Despite the limitations, we believe that the research directions discussed in these two research agendas would allow urban common scholars to benefit from both schools of thought and the insights generated from their studies would also be helpful to practitioners in field to structure and operate urban commons and strengthen its role in city governance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank reviewers for their valuable comments which significantly contributed to the improvement of the paper.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Wang, X., Lam, W. F., & Lorenzo, T. (2024). A Synthesis of Rational Choice and Critical Urban Commons Debates. *International Journal of the Commons*, 18(1), pp. 475–489. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.1277

Submitted: 04 April 2023 **Accepted:** 19 May 2024 **Published:** 29 July 2024