

The Postpolitical Use of the Concept of the Commons: the Regulation of the Urban Commons in Bologna

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In the last decades, the concept of the Commons has defined a new political space in the struggle for the hegemony between society and capital. Starting from the unconscious political work of Elinor Ostrom (1990), the concept has evolved into a post-Marxist political strategy whereby the singular and the plural, the Common and the Commons, represent respectively the theory and the praxis of the hegemonic struggle.

The theory of the Common is a new political project through which all the fragmented yet existing antagonistic struggles can be articulated (Negri; Hardt, 2009; Laval; Dardot, 2014). This project has emerged from a theoretical speculation on the self-governing praxis of the Commons. This praxis is interpreted as the construction of a social relation (Caffentzis, Federici, 2013; Harvey, 2012; Mattei, 2011) between a social group and an aspect of its social and material life *crucial* to its life and livelihood (Harvey, 2012). The production and the institution of the Commons, both in the institutional and no-institutional space, become the infrastructure on which the project of the Common can be built. In this way, the Common and the Commons become both the means and the aim of the hegemonic struggle, able to politicize the social space producing dissent and rupture in the current order of things (Laclau; Mouffe, 1985; Ranciere, 1993, 1999).

Nevertheless, despite of its politicization, the praxis of the Commons, due to the elusiveness of its ontology that does not fall into scientific Cartesian knowledge (Mattei, 2011), has been pushed into an ambiguous dimension that undermines its political meaning (Caffentzis; Federici, 2013; De Angeli, 2003) where the Commons indicate a variety of collaborative praxis to be implemented within the capitalist system (Caffentzis, Federici, 2013; De Angeli, 2010). Therefore, in order to prevent further attempts of reactionary *detournement* (Mattei, 2013), this paper reflects on an ambiguous use of the concept of the Commons in a specific urban setting, the city of Bologna, where the “Regulation for the care and regeneration of the urban commons” (2014) uses the concept to propose a new form of collaborative governance. In the Regulation, the Commons become the *material and immaterial goods of the city*, such as public squares and buildings but also creativity and social inclusion, for which improvement both the citizens and the institution are called to join forces and sign a *pact of collaboration*. The aim of the pact is to activate the responsibilities of citizens for the management and care of the Commons in a crisis environment where the public administration does not have enough human and economic resources (Arena; Iaione, 2012). The paper uses an interpretative approach based on the analysis of the discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2003) that combines an inductive with a deductive method to understand the effects of the theory and the praxis of the discourse on the Commons in the Bologna’s Regulation on the city’s political dimension.

The paper starts with a review of the political evolution of the concept of the Commons. Secondly, it shows how the same politicization has given rise to ambiguous interpretations. Thirdly, it introduces the ambiguity of the concept of the Commons in the Bologna's Regulation. Fourthly, after illustrating the theory and the praxis of the Regulation, the paper assesses its effects of three aspects on the city's political dimension: the relationship between citizens and institution, the degree of participation in the urban governance and the redistribution of space, power and resources within the city. This preliminary assessment leads to hypothesizes that the concept of the Commons fosters a postpolitical configuration within the city (Swyngedouw, 2009, 2010). The following part demonstrates the hypothesis, by verifying that the characteristics of the theory and the praxis of the concept of the Commons in the Regulation match the characteristics of what Swyngedouw (2009, 2010) has defined as the theory and the praxis of a postpolitical configuration: a populist discourse and a Governance-beyond-the-State arrangement. Through this validation, the paper sustains that the concept of the Commons in the Bologna's Regulation transforms the political into a postpolitical meaning where the *cruciality* of the social relation between a social group and a social and material aspect becomes the *reason* of the social relation between citizens and institutions to achieve consensus and govern the city within the space of the possible, preventing the rise of a political moment (Swyngedouw, 2009).

The paper concludes sustaining that, on one side, it is necessary to keep unveiling the ambiguous uses of the concept of the Commons but, on the other side, it is necessary to keep strengthening the praxis of the Commons with the theory of the Common. Only through the combination of the singular and plural inflection, it is possible to avoid the concept's colonization and to maintain *political* this concept that should represent the strategy for the production of space and life out of the orthodox economic system: out of the current order of things.

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Paper presented at the RC21 International Conference on "The transgressive city: Comparative perspectives on governance and the possibilities of everyday life in the emerging global city" Mexico City, 21-23 July 2016. <http://rc21-mexico16.colmex.mx/index.php>