

Special Session Proposal

Commons as enablers of territorial transition: evidences, assessment and theoretical perspectives

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Abstract

The concept of common goods is not new and is at the heart of abundant research in many fields of social sciences and law. Emerging explicitly in territorial development and in particular in European urban areas (urban commons), common goods raise several questions. Many initiatives, projects, symposiums, conferences that are structured today around this notion can be outlined, including sessions held by EU organisations. Crystallizing various current issues, mobilizing local communities, they have to do with energy transition, sustainable urban planning, management of natural resources, public spaces, the establishment of circular economy or urban ecosystems, etc. Moreover, there is a multitude of common goods in contemporary society. More or less inclusive / excluding, phenomena such as community gardens, social solidarity economy, collaborative or sharing economy, some short food supply chains, shared consumption, creative commons movements, etc. now participate in the « making » of territories and in their development.

What we find particularly important is that commons question the way in which the development of territories is conceived today. Also, it raises the question on how those initiatives contribute (or not) to the transition issue at stake at territorial level. The economic and competitiveness dimensions (creation of knowledge, productive resources, etc.) now also combine societal and non-economic aspects (improvement of well-being and quality of life, resilience, etc.) and tend to consider ecological contents. It tends to become increasingly explicit in development strategies. These phenomena are also signing of an evolution of our society towards more collective and participative modes of exploitation and management of territorial resources in which stakeholders and in particular users are involved.

Commons seem today to reflect an aspiration towards a more localized, inclusive, sustainable and equitable development model; without ignoring the tensions and conflicting dimensions of development.

In this context, several questions emerge:

- What are new "territorial" commons, how do they develop across Europe, and how do they contribute to (social) innovation, transition and territorial development?
- How do these common goods mobilize the territory, its resources, its actors and its proximities?
- What implications do they have in terms of actors and governance? In particular, regarding equity (risks of exclusion phenomena and free riders), long-term management of the good (management of negative externalities, rivalries) and associated potential conflicts?
- What are the research approaches and specific methodology challenges targeting the commons and commoning that need further mastering?
- How do these phenomena question territorial development? How do they contribute to the renewal of models, methods and approaches?
- How to assess the contribution of commons to territorial dynamics and evolution through sustainable development models?

This special session is open to papers from all disciplines of regional science, whether they present theoretical reflection and/or empirical results.

Keywords: common goods, urban commons, territorial commons, transition, territories, territorial development