



URBAN COMMONS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES: GOVERNANCE AND CO-PRODUCTION PROCESSES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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Article info

Date of receipt: 30/07/2024

Acceptance date: 14/06/2025

Keywords: cities, culture, self-governance, urban commons, urban regeneration

doi: 10.14596/pisb.4701

Abstract

Purpose. The purpose of this paper is to reflect on cultural activity in cities, and on the contribution that urban commons can make to changing the urban cultural landscape.

Design/methodology/approach. The analysis is set within the theoretical framework of the commons, and more precisely the urban commons: therefore, we will first carry out a review of the literature covering the key aspects of the framework. Then, we will introduce a descriptive case study aimed at providing an example of the contribution that urban commons can make to the definition of cultural activities in cities.

Findings. We will find that communities managing urban commons, their values and objectives have great importance in defining the direction of cultural activities that can be carried out in such spaces; with this in mind, urban commons can make a valuable contribution to the cultural landscape of cities and neighborhood, and be part of a grass-roots movement that shapes culture on the basis of social and collective needs.

Practical and Social implications. Urban commons are often highly valued by local communities, as they become social and cultural hubs in their neighborhoods. At the same time, they often face opposition from local administration, mainly based on legal issues pertaining to the ownership of the spaces. Adopting a co-production approach to public value may allow such initiatives to flourish, with support from the public sector.

Originality of the study. This paper links the fields of urban studies, with a specific focus on commons, with that of cultural activities, and takes into account a new, shared way of "making" culture in the city.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the increased interest in the realm of commons has been linked to the growing dissatisfaction with neoliberal policies leading to environmental decline, widening social gaps between the rich and the poor and excessive individualism (Seppilli, 2012).

It is also interesting to analyze the relationship between commons and the Aristotelian concept of common good, which benefits society as a whole and emerges from the active participation of citizens and their collective action in the public realm. The idea that a common good exists goes against the representation of society constituted by atomized individuals living in isolation: in fact, its existence implies that social relationships are a key aspect of citizens' lives. Thus, the defense and collective management of commons can be considered as strategic resources that activate the common good and foster participation to its achievement. Moreover, the common good is recognized as "the source of legitimacy of decisions" (Rochet, 2010), opening interesting paths in the realm of public management regarding the philosophical and political ground to be adopted when discussing the government's role and objectives.

In fact, commons can be a productive field for the application of co-production, with the idea of involving citizens in public service delivery (Verschuere et al., 2012) in order to improve the use of assets and resources by the public sector and citizens, with the aim of achieving better outcomes or greater efficiency, as well as building an interactive network where citizens are engaged in self-organizing communities and cooperate with governments to develop democracy (Campanale et al., 2021). Co-production can also be seen as a tool for improving multi-sectoral governance (Sicilia et al., 2019), which is a key element of commons. In fact, the importance of co-operation between the public sector and civil society in promoting collective interests and well-being can be linked to the approach of polycentric governance systems designed by Ostrom for the management of commons (Dallera, 2012), with each actor bringing their own features and experience in the system.

Moreover, while co-production, co-implementation and co-evaluation of public policies are established concepts in the public management literature, the integration of a collaborative perspective between different sectors in the management of commons has emerged only very recently (Mangialardo and Micelli, 2021; Sardi and Sorano, 2019; Tosun et al., 2017; Soma and Vatn, 2014). What emerges is a form of "commons-led co-production" (Bianchi et al., 2024), where commons gain political advantage from co-production processes: this perspective aims at mediating between the two opposite approaches according to which commons can either be enhanced or co-opted following co-production.

Finally, the adoption of this perspective also resonates with the juridical interpretation by Arena (Cortese, 2017), according to whom commons are functional in activating a different administrative model from the traditional one; they compel citizens to take care of a general interest arising from “an alliance of all the parties that are involved at different times and are motivated to protect and promote it”. Arena’s elaboration starts from the idea that a collaborative administration of commons enhances each person’s development and then links this consideration with the principle of subsidiarity, which was introduced in the Italian Constitution in 2001 and states that public administrations have to promote citizens’ initiatives that aim at achieving general interest goals. Thus, the shared management of commons becomes a tool to ensure that subsidiarity is implemented.

Experiences with commons, and especially with urban commons, indicate that culture is a central aspect in their existence, and cultural initiatives that are carried out are often designed according to the needs and preferences of the local community. These activities range from artistic performances and exhibitions to educational workshops and community festivals, all tailored to reflect and enhance the local cultural identity. This responsive approach ensures that the initiatives not only serve a social purpose but also actively involve community members in their planning and execution, fostering a deeper connection and sense of ownership among participants. This integration of cultural activities with community governance and public administration highlights how urban commons can enrich the cultural life of cities. By facilitating spaces where culture can flourish, urban commons help to maintain the social fabric, encourage civic engagement, and promote a shared sense of community identity, all of which are essential for the evolution of urban areas.

The purpose of this paper is to carry out a preliminary investigation on the contribution that urban commons can make to cultural life in cities, and on the extent to which this contribution is acknowledged and enhanced by the public administration. Experiences with urban commons are peculiar because they combine grassroots initiatives, urban planning and regeneration objectives and inclusive, collaborative strategies aimed at repurposing dismissed areas. These experiences often lead to innovative management and governance models, which in some cases represent an advancement with respect to the notions found in the literature (for example, Ostrom and Hess, 2007). The fluidity of the community of members that can benefit from urban commons, for example, is an innovative element that emerges from such initiatives and that influences governance processes. Instead of being “closed” communities, urban commons are usually open to the larger social fabric surrounding them, also in terms of who can access decision-making processes. The support of local communities and the emergence of community-based networks are indeed central aspects in the life

and existence of urban commons, allowing them to thrive (and, in many cases, to resist opposition coming from public administrators). Very often, urban commons include cultural initiatives in their range of activities, as culture itself is often referred to as a common. Another reason is that urban commons aim at becoming cultural hubs within their local communities, in order to provide a cultural offering that is grassroots-driven and more aligned to social needs and aspirations. Thus, urban commons represent an innovative field that can contribute to reshaping cultural processes and initiatives, as well as the way such initiatives are embedded in the existing social fabric and managed by a fluid, inclusive community of activists.

To achieve our research purpose, we adopt a methodological approach that involves purposeful sampling, specifically selecting a case that exemplifies the dynamics and impact of urban commons within the Italian context. This case study is one of the most relevant urban commons experiences in Italy, namely Lucha y Siesta Women's House in Rome. Lucha y Siesta was chosen due to its historical significance, innovative approaches, and substantial influence on local cultural practices. Through this detailed case analysis, we aim to demonstrate that culture and cultural activities have always been a central focus for Lucha y Siesta. The center's grassroots approach to shaping the cultural landscape of its neighbourhood and beyond serves as a powerful example of how urban commons can contribute to the cultural offerings of a city. By organizing a variety of cultural events and activities, ranging from artistic performances and exhibitions to educational workshops, debates and community festivals, Lucha y Siesta not only addresses the immediate cultural needs of the local community but also actively involves community members in the planning and execution of these initiatives. This participatory model fosters a deeper connection and sense of ownership among community members. Furthermore, this paper will explore the interaction between Lucha y Siesta and public administration, examining how public policies and administrative actions can either support or hinder the development and sustainability of urban commons. Our investigation will highlight the extent to which public administrations recognize and enhance the contributions of urban commons and will provide insights into how collaborative frameworks can be developed to support these initiatives effectively.

2. Literature review

2.1 The commons

The concept of "the commons" is rather complex to understand and define, as it is composed of many contributions ranging from the academ-

ia to social and political movements; often, the idea is employed for its positive emotional value (Wagner, 2012). The first aspect to consider is the multiplicity of disciplines shaping the field of the commons, which can be studied by economists, historians, philosophers, sociologists and jurists. Commons have been studied for what concerns how groups organize to manage collectively owned resources, and modes of productions and the effects of capitalism. According to the second approach, commons are collective political experiences and tools of resistance against lifestyles dictated by the market and the State (Huron, 2017; Linebaugh, 2008).

Depending on the approach, definitions of the commons vary, and certain authors even decide not to define them at all. As a consequence, there is no shared definition of what commons are, and terminological inconsistency is one of the main issues in the field. The concept is employed with different meanings depending on who uses it (Wagner, 2012), often vaguely and regarding very different subjects (Ciervo, 2012; Vitale, 2013). This is also caused by the formation of a social imaginary around the commons, with the consequence that many individuals and organizations tend to speak of the commons in order to leverage on the positive emotional response that the idea generates (Wagner, 2012). At the same time, the growth of scientific literature has contributed to the expansion of the field toward less conventional subjects (Ruiz-Ballesteros and Gual, 2012): the concept of the commons is, in fact, continuously expanding.

In economic terms, goods are defined based on rivalry and excludability. The four main categories of goods (Samuelson, 1954; Buchanan, 1965; Ostrom and Ostrom, 1977) are private goods (rival and excludable), public goods (non-rival and non-excludable), club goods (non-rival and excludable) and common-pool resources (rival and non-excludable).

Common-pool resources (CPRs) were introduced by Ostrom and Ostrom in 1977, and mainly indicate natural resources such as lakes, forests and fields. CPRs are commons shared at local level, and access is regulated by norms and rules (Distaso and Ciervo, 2011). According to Ostrom (1990), CPRs are managed by the community that “owns” them (quotes are necessary since often there is no formal property right over natural resources): the issue of management is crucial and requires that effective systems and rules are in place to avoid excessive appropriation of the resource by individuals, which would damage the community (Patnaik et al., 2017; Dietz et al., 2003). Several authors studied institutional solutions for managing CPRs, alternative to the public and private sectors (Agarwal, 2001; Gibson et al., 2000; Berkes, 2006): usually, these frameworks require collective action by the community that owns the resource. In Ostrom et al. (1994), we find the Institutional Analysis and Development framework, a multilevel tool that analyses stakeholders and institutions in order to link theoretical and practical aspects of governance systems. Later, Hess and Ostrom

(2007) indicated key principles for self-managing shared resources, such as the importance of having rules and limitations in place, which should be based on the needs of the local community, the engagement of said community in defining rules and ensuring they are respected, and monitoring and sanctions in case of misbehavior.

Until the mid '90s, economic research on the commons mostly focused on natural resources; then, the concept of "new commons" was introduced (Hess and Ostrom, 2007; Levine, 2001) and defined as "various types of shared resources that have recently been recognized as commons" (Hess, 2008). Their emergence implies a significant expansion of the field and is linked to concerns regarding increasing privatizations and commodification, as well as globalization. In fact, the definition of new commons appears to take into account a larger number of interests and issues than just rivalry and excludability in consumption, going beyond merely economic definitions. On the other hand, this term has been used to refer to virtually any form of collective interest (Wagner, 2012). This theoretical development has had an impact on management systems: today, multilevel governance defined as "institutional arrangements that facilitate the coproduction, mediation, translation and negotiation of information and knowledge within and across levels" has become a key concept in managing the commons (Ruiz-Ballesteros and Gual, 2012; Brondizio et al., 2009). Grassroots participation to governance processes concerning a specific good is what makes it a "commons" rather than a public good (Seppilli, 2012).

2.2 Urban commons: why are they different?

At first glance, we could say that urban commons indicate resources that are located in cities, as Dellenbaugh et al. (2015) find in their review of the literature. Urban commons, however, do not exist as such, they are created (Blomley, 2008): urban spaces become commons when citizens reappropriate them by occupying, managing and sharing them with others on the basis of a feeling of collective responsibility (Morrow and Martin, 2019). Thus, urban commons can also be described by the process that brings to their creation.

Over the last years, cities have seen numerous processes of appropriation or re-appropriation of places and spaces, following the progressive expropriation of citizens' creative and planning capability (Cellamare, 2019).

Urban commons are studied in relation to the effects of capitalism on collective life: in this sense, the word "urban" refers to social aspects congealed in cities (Marcuse, 2009). "Urban" does not only indicate the city as opposed to rural areas (although most studies consider the spatial dimen-

sion of urban commons, focusing on the place more than on the process): we should distinguish the city as a place and the urban, i.e. processes linking places and spaces and defined by the possibility of creating connections (Huron, 2017). The urban space is an area for mediation between daily life and the demands by the capitalist system (Huron, 2017), and urban commons represent resistance practices to neoliberal processes (Grazioli and Caciagli, 2018), in line with Castells' perspective that the urban space is an arena for struggle for public goods (e.g. housing, public infrastructure, transportation, education, healthcare, culture) and their consumption by the community. Based on this perspective, the urban commons are spaces where profit-oriented neoliberal logics are questioned through collective re-appropriation processes (Huron, 2015) in order to experiment with alternative forms of organization and production. The practice of re-appropriation leads to the regeneration of abandoned urban spaces through co-operative experiments (Grazioli and Caciagli, 2018).

Ferguson (2014) defines the urban commons as shared resources to which individuals and groups have a claim, and as spaces for political struggle against neoliberal exploitation. Bradley (2015) identifies urban commons based on the use that citizens make of the resource; according to the author, they imply voluntary contributions (not associated with financial returns) and can also be used by those who do not contribute. Mainly, urban commons are linked to social objectives, not to profit-making. They are peculiar for what concerns rivalry and excludability because, in urban areas, consumption of a resource does not decrease its value, it increases it (Huron, 2017). According to Howard (1965), land does not have intrinsic value in cities: much of it depends on the density of activities that happen there and on the amount of people that use it. The more urban commons are "consumed", the higher their value.

Urban commons can be used by those who manage them, and also by the broader community of potential users who may benefit from them at a later stage (Huron, 2017); it is interesting to note that property rights are usually not associated with using the resource on a daily basis. The community of users is not always well-defined (in contrast with CPRs) and often includes citizens and activists (Huron, 2017); its boundaries are not fixed.

Finally, cross-sector collaboration emerges as a central aspect in managing urban commons (Parker and Johansson, 2012): decisions should be made by agreement of all parties involved, and the public administration should act as a facilitator of cooperative practices.

3. Methodology

In addressing the research question regarding the impact of urban commons on cultural life in cities, this study employs the method of purposeful sampling to select a particularly illustrative example from the Italian context of urban commons. Purposeful sampling is chosen for its efficacy in providing in-depth insights into complex issues by selecting cases that are information-rich and exemplify broader trends or underlying phenomena (Patton, 1990). *Lucha y Siesta* was selected based on its historical significance, the uniqueness of its operational model, and its profound impact on local cultural practices, making it an ideal subject for examining the intersection of urban commons and culture.

To gather data for this study, a multi-modal approach was adopted, integrating various types of data sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject. First, secondary data were collected extensively from available online documents, including articles, reports, and publications related to urban commons and *Lucha y Siesta* specifically. These documents provided a historical overview of the initiative, insights into its operational strategies, and reflections on its cultural impact over the years.

In addition to document analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted during collective discussions between activists, researchers and students. These discussions offered invaluable firsthand accounts of the experiences, challenges, and successes of the initiative, providing depth to the data collected and helping to understand the personal and community-level impacts of the urban commons in question. The richness of these conversations helped to fill gaps not covered by published materials.

Furthermore, visits to *Lucha y Siesta* by the authors over several years have played a critical role in the data collection process. These visits allowed for direct observation of the space in use, the activities conducted, and the interactions among community members. Moreover, these moments created the opportunity to have informal conversations with activists and other stakeholders. Observational data were particularly useful for understanding the physical layout of the commons, the actual use of the space, and the non-verbal dynamics of community engagement that are often lost in written reports. Such visits also provided opportunities for impromptu, informal discussions with participants and observers, which enriched the authors' understanding of the case. Semi-structured interviews, along with informal meetings, allowed researchers to verify and triangulate information retrieved from the documental analysis: the information obtained through these methods was used to integrate and confirm data and findings from the first stage of investigation. This process indicated a high-level of reliability of the information retrieved from different sources (secondary data and first-hand data), and it influenced the structure of Sec-

tion 4, which presents findings as a consistent narrative in order to enhance this aspect.

While the use of informal methods was extremely useful in providing additional insight to the study, this also represents a limitation: although the authors did not engage in participant observation, their status of researchers and external observers was known to members of Lucha y Siesta and may have influenced their behavior and their self-presentation. Moreover, informal interactions can be more accessible when personal relationships are present, making it more complicated for other researchers to obtain the same findings as the present study does.

4. Findings

Lucha y Siesta, established in 2008, represents a significant case study on the role urban commons can play in facilitating social change, specifically targeting gender-based violence and fostering cultural activities. This initiative originated in an abandoned building in a working-class neighborhood of Rome. Founding activists were motivated by the intersecting concepts of 'lucha' (struggle) and 'siesta' (rest), which effectively encapsulated their vision to craft a space where women could simultaneously find relief from gender-based violence and actively combat such injustices. By reclaiming this space, the activists aimed to counteract the systemic issues of gender-based violence, social exclusion, and cultural disenfranchisement. The physical reclamation of the building was a powerful act of defiance against the status quo, signaling a broader struggle against the societal norms that perpetuate violence and inequality. The founders of Lucha y Siesta were deeply inspired by the dual notions embedded in the name they chose. 'Lucha,' representing struggle, reflects the ongoing battle against gender-based violence and the systemic inequalities that underpin it. It signifies a relentless fight for justice, equality, and the rights of women and marginalized groups. On the other hand, 'siesta,' representing rest, underscores the importance of providing a safe environment where women can heal, recuperate, and find solace from the traumas inflicted by societal violence.

Since its early days, Lucha y Siesta has been governed in an informal, democratic way, with the members' assembly being its central decision-making body. The assembly is open to activists engaged in the project, and it ensures that all perspectives are equally represented and accounted for, and that decisions are based on consensus. This process was formalized in the "Dichiarazione di Autogoverno" (Self-governance declaration) that was adopted in 2022 and that will be discussed later in this section.

As the project developed, Lucha y Siesta transcended its initial function as merely a shelter; it morphed into a dynamic center of activism and

cultural exchange. The activities orchestrated within its walls are diverse, ranging from legal workshops to seminars probing the underpinnings of gender-based violence, and public cultural events such as book readings and film screenings. These are designed not only to educate and inform but also to provoke discussion and debate on broader social and gender issues, thereby influencing the cultural narrative at a societal level. The significance of these cultural events extends beyond simple participation; they serve as critical platforms for community engagement and education, reaching audiences that span the local and broader community. Such initiatives have been pivotal in not only raising awareness but also in forging a communal identity that aligns with the principles of resistance and empowerment that Lucha y Siesta champions.

These cultural activities create an inclusive environment where individuals feel safe to express their thoughts, share personal experiences, and connect with others who share similar values and struggles. Moreover, the legal workshops offered at Lucha y Siesta provide essential knowledge and tools for women to understand their rights and navigate the legal system effectively. These workshops cover a range of topics, including domestic violence laws, immigration rights, and labor rights, equipping participants with the information they need to protect themselves and advocate for their interests. By demystifying the legal process and offering practical guidance, these sessions empower women to take control of their lives and assert their rights in various domains. Seminars that delve into the root causes of gender-based violence are another cornerstone of Lucha y Siesta's programming. These seminars bring together experts, activists, and community members to explore the social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to violence against women. By examining these issues in depth, the seminars foster a deeper understanding of the systemic nature of gender-based violence and inspire collective action to address these challenges. Participants are encouraged to critically analyze existing social structures and consider how they can contribute to creating a more just and equitable society.

Public cultural events such as book readings and film screenings further enhance Lucha y Siesta's role as a hub for cultural exchange. These events feature works that highlight themes of gender equality, social justice, and human rights, sparking meaningful conversations among attendees. Authors, filmmakers, and other cultural figures often participate in these events, providing firsthand insights into their work and engaging directly with the audience. This direct interaction helps to break down barriers between creators and consumers of culture, fostering a sense of shared purpose and community.

In addition to scheduled events, Lucha y Siesta offers ongoing programs and activities that contribute to the cultural vibrancy of the center. These

include art exhibitions, music performances, and theatre productions, all of which provide platforms for creative expression and cultural dialogue. The center also hosts regular community meetings where participants can discuss pressing issues, plan future activities, and build solidarity among members. These meetings are crucial for maintaining the participatory nature of Lucha y Siesta, ensuring that all voices are heard and that the community remains actively engaged in the center's mission.

Moreover, the center has committed substantial efforts towards providing tangible support services to women, which has become a cornerstone of its multifaceted mission. This includes comprehensive counseling services that address a wide range of issues such as trauma recovery, mental health support, and emotional well-being.

The cultivation of support networks is another vital aspect of the services provided at Lucha y Siesta. Recognizing that individual empowerment is often bolstered by strong community ties, the center actively fosters connections among women through various group activities and peer support initiatives. These networks provide emotional support, practical advice, and a sense of solidarity, helping to break the isolation that many women experience.

The empowerment process facilitated by Lucha y Siesta is multifaceted, addressing immediate needs while also providing long-term strategies for personal development and independence. For instance, the center offers vocational training and educational programs that help women acquire new skills and improve their employment prospects. These programs range from language classes and computer literacy to more specialized training tailored to the local job market. By enhancing their skills and qualifications, women are better positioned to achieve financial independence and stability.

Furthermore, Lucha y Siesta's approach to empowerment goes beyond providing direct services; it also involves advocacy and activism aimed at systemic change. The center engages in public awareness campaigns, policy advocacy, and community organizing to address the root causes of gender-based violence and inequality. By amplifying the voices of women and advocating for their rights at various levels of government and society, Lucha y Siesta seeks to create a more equitable environment where women can thrive. These advocacy efforts are complemented by partnerships with other organizations, both locally and internationally, to broaden the impact of their work and to support a wider movement for gender equality. The holistic support provided by Lucha y Siesta also includes addressing the physical needs of its participants. The center offers safe and secure housing for women escaping violent situations, ensuring that they have a stable environment from which to rebuild their lives. This housing support is often accompanied by access to essential services such as healthcare, childcare, and financial assistance.

By addressing these basic needs, Lucha y Siesta ensures that women can focus on their recovery and empowerment without the immediate pressures of survival. The impact of these services is evident in the personal stories of the women who have benefited from them. Many participants report significant improvements in their mental health, legal standing, and overall quality of life. They describe how the support from Lucha y Siesta has enabled them to escape abusive relationships, secure custody of their children, find stable employment, and regain control over their lives. These individual successes collectively contribute to the strength and resilience of the community as a whole, creating a ripple effect of empowerment and positive change.

The narrative of Lucha y Siesta is also deeply intertwined with the legal challenges it faces, particularly the ongoing threat of eviction due to the initially unauthorized occupation of the building. This legal insecurity highlights the complex interplay between urban commons and local governance structures, where such initiatives often find themselves in precarious positions. Despite these adversities, there have been intervals when the value of Lucha y Siesta was formally acknowledged by local authorities, evidenced by interventions such as the regional government's allocation of funds to secure the building. This support, however, proved to be transient with the advent of new political leadership, which reversed previous decisions, thereby underscoring the instability that can characterize the political landscape surrounding urban commons.

The precarious legal situation of Lucha y Siesta reflects broader systemic issues faced by urban commons worldwide. These initiatives often operate in a legal gray area, navigating the complexities of property rights, municipal regulations, and public policy. The unauthorized occupation of the building placed Lucha y Siesta at constant risk of eviction, a threat that loomed over its existence and created a climate of uncertainty. Despite this, the center has continued to thrive, largely due to the resilience and determination of its community and supporters.

Local government interactions with Lucha y Siesta have been marked by a fluctuating recognition of its value, mainly depending on political orientation. At times, authorities have acknowledged the significant social and cultural contributions of the center, leading to temporary measures aimed at securing its future. For instance, the regional government once allocated funds specifically to purchase the building, a move that temporarily alleviated the threat of eviction and signaled official support for the center's mission. However, such support has often been short-lived, subject to the changing tides of political leadership and priorities. The reversal of supportive decisions following shifts in political power illustrates the fragile nature of such endorsements and the broader instability that urban commons must navigate.

The community's response to these legal and political challenges has been robust, demonstrating resilience and solidarity that have significantly contributed to the center's sustainability. This communal support is not just reactive but proactive; activists and volunteers have organized a multitude of campaigns and demonstrations to advocate for the center's continuity, emphasizing its role not just as a refuge but as an indispensable cultural and social institution within the city. The level of engagement from the community and wider networks of supporters is evidence of the impact of Lucha y Siesta on the lives of those it touches and the broader cultural fabric of the area. Activists have employed various strategies to garner support and bring attention to their cause. These include public protests, social media and crowdfunding campaigns, and petitions, all aimed at rallying community members and drawing broader public attention to the plight of the center. These efforts have not only helped to build a strong base of local support but have also attracted national and international attention, highlighting the broader issues at stake and garnering solidarity from similar movements around the world. The proactive stance taken by the community underscores the collective commitment to preserving Lucha y Siesta as a vital community resource.

In addition to grassroots activism, Lucha y Siesta's supporters have sought to engage with policymakers and political leaders to advocate for more stable and supportive legal frameworks for urban commons. This advocacy has included lobbying efforts, participation in public forums, and collaboration with other organizations to push for legislative changes that recognize and protect the unique value of urban commons. By fostering dialogue with authorities, supporters of Lucha y Siesta aim to create a more favorable policy environment that supports the sustainability and growth of similar initiatives.

The resilience of Lucha y Siesta is also reflected in its adaptability and strategic planning. The center has continually evolved its programs and services to meet the changing needs of its community, while also navigating the external challenges posed by legal and political uncertainties. This adaptability has been crucial in maintaining the center's relevance and effectiveness, ensuring that it remains a vital resource for the women it serves and the broader community. Moreover, the support networks and alliances built by Lucha y Siesta have been instrumental in its ability to withstand external pressures. Partnerships with other organizations, both within Italy and internationally, have provided additional resources, expertise, and solidarity, helping to bolster the center's efforts. These alliances have been particularly important in times of crisis, providing a broader base of support and advocacy that extends beyond the local community.

In recent developments, the designation of Lucha y Siesta as a feminist and trans-feminist commons has marked a crucial evolution in its identity,

signaling a deepening commitment to inclusivity and self-governance. By explicitly embracing feminist and trans-feminist principles, Lucha y Siesta affirms its dedication to addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women across different spectra of identity, including gender non-conforming and transgender individuals. This transition was accompanied by the implementation of a “Self-governance declaration” (*Dichiarazione di Autogoverno*), which laid the groundwork for a more structured and participatory form of management. The declaration outlines the roles and responsibilities of community members, decision-making processes, and the core values guiding the center’s operations. This framework ensures that all voices within the community are heard and that decisions are made collectively, reflecting the inclusive ethos of the center. It also helps to formalize the operational aspects of Lucha y Siesta, providing clarity and consistency in its governance. The governance process rests on two levels: the general assembly and the assemblies of specific groups within the project. The latter are used to discuss matters that pertain to specific activities or spaces and are later referred about at the general assembly. Both these governing bodies work according to several key principles: openness, inclusiveness, and horizontality, which ensure that everyone has the right to participate and discuss their ideas, and decisions are made in a democratic way.

In addition to the self-governance declaration, Lucha y Siesta undertook a thorough social impact assessment to systematically evaluate its contributions to the community. This assessment involved collecting and analyzing data on various dimensions of the center’s impact, including its social, economic, and cultural effects. The process of conducting the impact assessment was participatory, involving input from staff, volunteers, participants, and external stakeholders. This inclusive approach ensured that the assessment captured a wide range of perspectives and experiences, providing a comprehensive picture of the center’s influence.

The social impact assessment highlighted several key areas where Lucha y Siesta has made significant contributions. Firstly, it documented the center’s role in providing critical support to women, including counseling, legal assistance, and shelter. These services have been instrumental in helping women escape abusive situations, rebuild their lives, and achieve greater stability and independence. The assessment also noted the positive effects of these services on mental health and well-being, underscoring the importance of the center’s holistic approach to empowerment. Secondly, the assessment examined the cultural and educational initiatives organized by Lucha y Siesta. It highlighted how the center’s diverse programming has enriched the cultural landscape of the neighborhood. Activities such as workshops, seminars, and public events have not only provided valuable learning opportunities but have also facilitated cultural exchange and community building. The assessment found that these initiatives have

played a crucial role in promoting gender equality and social justice, aligning with the center's core mission.

Furthermore, the social impact assessment shed light on the economic contributions of *Lucha y Siesta*. By offering vocational training and educational programs, the center has helped participants improve their skills and employment prospects. This, in turn, has contributed to greater economic stability and self-sufficiency among women, enhancing their ability to support themselves and their families. The assessment also noted the ripple effects of these economic gains, including increased community resilience and reduced dependence on social services.

The insights derived from this impact assessment have been instrumental in documenting the contributions made by *Lucha y Siesta* to the community and the wider cultural landscape of Rome. They provide a detailed account of the center's role in shaping the social and cultural dynamics of its neighborhood, highlighting its multifaceted impact. This documentation is not only valuable for internal reflection and planning but also serves as a powerful tool for advocacy and fundraising. By clearly articulating its achievements and demonstrating its value, *Lucha y Siesta* can more effectively engage with potential supporters, partners, and policymakers. The adoption of feminist and trans-feminist principles, coupled with the establishment of self-governance structures and rigorous impact assessment, has positioned *Lucha y Siesta* as a model of inclusive and accountable community organization. These developments reflect a broader trend within the urban commons movement towards greater inclusivity, transparency, and community participation. They underscore the potential for urban commons to serve as laboratories for social innovation, where new models of governance and community engagement can be tested and refined.

5. Discussion

The findings from *Lucha y Siesta*'s case highlight its significant role in shaping the cultural and social dynamics of its neighborhood and Rome at large. This case study illustrates the complex interplay between urban commons and local governance, highlighting the precariousness often inherent in such initiatives, which typically navigate the grey areas of urban policy contexts. The political and legal challenges that *Lucha y Siesta* has faced are reflective of broader systemic issues that influence urban commons initiatives globally, underlining the vulnerability of these vital spaces to shifts in political winds and policy decisions.

The robust support from the community, especially evident during periods of legal and political uncertainty, highlights the critical role of community engagement in sustaining urban commons. This engagement has been

instrumental in navigating challenges, showcasing the powerful impact of community solidarity in strengthening such initiatives. The solidarity demonstrated by Lucha y Siesta's supporters has not only helped the center withstand adversities but has also propelled it forward, allowing it to continue its mission despite numerous obstacles. This consistent community backing is a testament to the deeply rooted connections that Lucha y Siesta has fostered, which are integral to its ongoing resilience and success.

Furthermore, the evolution of Lucha y Siesta into a self-governing, inclusive feminist and trans-feminist commons marks a pivotal development in its history. This transition reflects a profound commitment to inclusivity and self-governance, setting a compelling model for other urban commons that aspire to enhance their governance structures and community impact. The adoption of initiatives such as a self-governance declaration and a comprehensive social impact assessment underscores the center's dedication to transparency and accountability. These measures provide a framework for similar organizations to demonstrate their value and secure support from a broad array of stakeholders.

The self-governance declaration established by Lucha y Siesta outlines a clear set of principles and operational guidelines, ensuring that decision-making processes are democratic and inclusive. This framework not only empowers the participants but also ensures that the center's operations remain aligned with its core values of equality, inclusivity, and community-driven development. The social impact assessment, on the other hand, systematically measures the center's contributions across various dimensions, including social, economic, and cultural impacts. By documenting these contributions, the assessment provides tangible evidence of the center's effectiveness and its transformative impact on the community.

Additionally, the experience of Lucha y Siesta provides interesting insight on the integration of support services with cultural and educational activities to forge resilient and transformative urban spaces. This integration is crucial, as it not only addresses immediate community needs but also fosters long-term societal change. Such a holistic approach is increasingly relevant for policymakers, community leaders, and activists who are deeply engaged in urban development and social justice. By examining the strategies employed by Lucha y Siesta, these stakeholders can gain insights into effectively leveraging urban spaces as engines of social change, thus amplifying the impact of their initiatives.

The narrative of Lucha y Siesta also provides a deep dive into the potential of urban commons to act as catalysts for cultural innovation and social integration. By hosting a variety of cultural events and workshops, the center has facilitated a vibrant exchange of ideas and fostered a sense of community among diverse groups. These activities not only enhance the cultural fabric of the neighborhood, in line with Howard's (1965) sug-

gestion that the value of urban land depends on the type and amount of activities that are carried out on it but also play a critical role in challenging societal norms and promoting greater understanding and empathy among residents. The success of these initiatives highlights the capacity of urban commons to transcend their immediate environments and influence broader cultural and social policies thanks to their adaptive and transformative capacity (Petrescu et al., 2016).

Moreover, *Lucha y Siesta*'s journey illustrates the challenges and complexities of maintaining such a space in the face of legal uncertainties and administrative hurdles. The center's experiences with eviction threats and the complexities of negotiating with local authorities reveal the delicate balance required to manage and sustain urban commons in a regulatory framework that may not always recognize their value. These challenges are emblematic of the struggles faced by similar initiatives worldwide, offering critical perspectives on navigating the intersection of grassroots activism and formal governance structures. The need for legal recognition and protection of urban commons is apparent, as these spaces respond to social needs and foster community resilience in ways that traditional urban planning often overlooks. Collaboration with local public administrations, or lack thereof, is central in co-production processes: in fact, receiving support by the city council or regional administration is often a key factor in ensuring the survival of urban commons (Parker and Johansson, 2012). In this sense, the experience of *Lucha y Siesta* indicates an unstable relationship with public administrations, where the municipal level has often been indifferent or hostile, and the regional level has either been openly supportive or openly hostile. In this case, rather than observing commons-led co-production (Bianchi et al., 2024), we find a situation where the commons risks being co-opted if it enters a co-production process, given the vast spectrum of interests at stake, many of which change depending on the political orientation of the local administration.

It is also possible to compare our case with other relevant experiences in the field of cultural activities. In Rome, for example, the most famous example is the *Teatro Valle Occupato*, a theatre that was occupied by culture workers following a series of worrying political developments regarding its future. The occupation lasted from 2011 to 2014 and contributed to keeping the theatre alive, with an engaging daily program; it ended under request of the public administration, which stated that restoration work needed to be performed urgently (and were not). When it partially reopened under public ownership, the foundation created by activists was not included in any way. Other experiences, on the other hand, benefited from the support of local administrations and are still active, such as the *L'Asilo* (Ex *Asilo Filangieri*) in Naples: in this case, the municipal administration was very supportive, being the first in Italy to create a Depart-

ment for Commons and to include the juridical concept of “commons” in its regulations. This allowed L’Asilo to flourish and to elaborate a “Civic use declaration” (*Dichiarazione di uso civico*) to reclaim the space and promote its self-governance; the declaration was later acknowledged by the municipal administration, which legitimized it. Teatro Valle Occupato and L’Asilo present several similarities: first, their approach to governance processes, which are always informal, democratic and consensus-based; secondly, their core focus, rooted in the cultural and creative sector. Moreover, both these commons have had positive results in terms of the outcome of their activities, which have been greatly appreciated and supported by the local community and workers in the cultural sector. Despite their fruitful impact on cultural processes, the key difference between them is found in their long-term survival (only L’Asilo still exists), which was strongly influenced by policy interactions. In the case of Teatro Valle Occupato, the strategy of the local administration was not aligned with the one pursued by the activists, and this difference led to the overall end of the project. L’Asilo, on the other hand, was in a more favorable situation, where the local administration was willing to accept and legitimize the creation of urban commons.

These two experiences indicate that co-production is possible when there is an open, positive approach by the public administration; in other cases, urban commons can survive even without public support, but they will tend to be perceived as more precarious, and there will be no chance of cross-sector collaboration. The case of *Lucha y Siesta* indicates that the main barriers to co-production and collaborative relationships can be found in (i) the behavior of the public administration and (ii) difficulties in finding a common “language” to communicate. For what concerns the first point, if the public administration already recognizes the value of commons and their importance as collective processes, it will be easier to collaborate; moreover, the public administration should also be flexible enough to take into account such forms of collective activity that work so differently from itself. For what concerns the second point, much often urban commons are informal experiences, led in a non-hierarchical way, and they employ categories and theories that are politically positioned, embrace different values and are usually more advanced than those of the public administration. This creates a divide between activists and administrators, and it would be important to build a “communication bridge” in order to foster cooperation. Finally, another aspect to take into account when examining the relationship between urban commons and local administrations is the risk of de-politicization of the former (Bianchi, 2018), which would need to lose their more advanced, disruptive features in order to be “accepted” as legitimate partners in co-production processes.

The proactive approach taken by *Lucha y Siesta* in conducting social im-

pact assessments and engaging in self-governance practices also highlights the importance of self-reflection and adaptation in managing urban commons. By continuously assessing their strategies and impact, urban commons can remain responsive to the needs of their communities and agile in the face of changing socio-political landscapes. This adaptability is essential for sustaining their relevance and effectiveness over time, ensuring that they remain vital resources for their communities. The ability to adapt and evolve is a hallmark of successful urban commons, demonstrating that they can meet the dynamic needs of their populations while navigating external pressures.

In light of these considerations, the case of Lucha y Siesta not only celebrates the achievements and resilience of these particular urban commons but also critically assesses the ongoing challenges it faces. This nuanced understanding is essential for anyone involved in the development and management of urban commons, providing them with a comprehensive blueprint for leveraging these spaces to foster cultural and social development. The insights gained from the Lucha y Siesta case study emphasize the transformative potential of urban commons when they are effectively integrated with community engagement and governance practices, thereby reshaping urban landscapes in culturally and socially enriching ways. The lessons learned from Lucha y Siesta highlight the importance of community solidarity, inclusive governance, and the integration of cultural activities in sustaining resilient urban commons.

6. Conclusions

Urban commons represent a compelling form of re-appropriation of unused or abandoned spaces, contributing significantly to urban regeneration and to the evolution of the concept of the “right to the city” (Grazioli and Caciagli, 2018). While regeneration may not always be the primary objective, it inevitably emerges as a consequence of the re-purposing process. The idea of “process” itself is, actually, quite important: urban commons are often defined as a social process (Linebaugh, 2008). Activists focus on reclaiming these spaces for the local community (Huron, 2017), ensuring that urban commons are not held as ‘private’ assets by those who initially occupy and take risks, such as those associated with illegal occupation. Instead, they are opened up to the community and to anyone wishing to access them or participate in the activities hosted within.

Urban commons play a crucial role in defining local cultural initiatives, doing so in a grassroots manner by considering social needs and collective values. These spaces become hubs for cultural exchange and social activism, often driving the cultural dialogue by integrating a wide array

of community-centric activities and programs. This grassroots approach is particularly effective in its capacity to reflect and respond to the direct needs of the local population, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging among community members. Future research will focus on extending the database of urban commons specifically engaged in cultural aspects, in order to expand the analysis of their contributions to these issues.

The case of *Lucha y Siesta* in Rome exemplifies how urban commons can play a crucial role in defining local cultural initiatives in a grassroots manner, tailoring efforts to meet social needs and collective values. This center has evolved from a refuge to a vibrant hub for activism and cultural exchange, deeply influencing the cultural and social dynamics of its neighborhood and beyond. By hosting a diverse array of activities, from workshops and seminars to cultural events, *Lucha y Siesta* has fostered a dynamic environment for community engagement and social empowerment.

However, the journey of *Lucha y Siesta* also highlights the challenges urban commons face, particularly in their interactions with public administrations (Bianchi, 2018). While local communities often embrace such initiatives, public authorities can be more cautious, primarily due to legal concerns about the occupation of spaces that still have recognized owners, including the public administration itself. This legal contention underscores the broader systemic issues that can impact urban commons globally, reflecting the precarious nature of such initiatives which often exist in a gray area of urban policy contexts. However, urban commons can be seen as a tool in the remunicipalization process (Becker et al., 2017) that goes beyond traditional dichotomies such as public or private ownership of urban space.

Despite these challenges, the response from the community and broader network of supporters to political and legal hurdles has been formidable. Such engagement underscores the potential of community solidarity in bolstering urban commons, a crucial factor in the sustainability of *Lucha y Siesta*. The community's proactive support through demonstrations and advocacy has been pivotal, highlighting the center's role not just as a refuge but as an essential cultural and social institution.

Several Italian cities have responded to the challenges and potential of urban commons by adopting regulations for the collaborative management of these spaces. Some regions have even passed laws to protect and promote the sustainability of urban commons, recognizing their value in urban planning and community development. However, there remains a lack of a unified, strategic approach to urban commons across different administrative frameworks, reflecting a broader inconsistency in public policy towards these community resources. Moreover, even when public administrations seem to embrace the concept of commons, the risk of depoliticization is present (Bianchi, 2018).

The need to promote lawful behavior and respect for property rights must be balanced with an appreciation for the social value created by urban commons. These spaces often address pressing social needs in ways that conventional urban planning does not, offering innovative solutions to issues of social inclusion, cultural expression, and community development. Public policy thus faces the challenge of adopting a more cooperative and integrated approach to urban commons, recognizing their potential as tools for urban regeneration and social empowerment.

In crafting policies that support urban commons, it is essential for public administrators to engage with these initiatives not as adversaries but as partners in urban development. This cooperative approach could involve legal reforms that provide a framework for the establishment and operation of urban commons, financial and logistical support to ensure their sustainability, and recognition of their role in enhancing urban life. Such policies would not only help legitimize these initiatives but also harness their potential to contribute to the cultural and social fabric of cities.

Ultimately, the discourse surrounding urban commons highlights a fundamental shift in how urban spaces are viewed and utilized in the contemporary cityscape. By fostering environments that are inclusive, participatory, and responsive to local dynamics, urban commons challenge traditional notions of urban development and management. They represent a dynamic intersection of law, culture, and community engagement, offering valuable lessons for urban planners and policymakers aiming to revitalize cities in ways that truly reflect and accommodate the needs of their populations.

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