



Social Life in Public Space as a Commons.

The Case of Public Art



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**Social Life in Public Space as a Commons.
The Case of Public Art**

**Het sociale Leven in de Publieke Ruimte als Commons:
de Casus van Publieke Kunst**

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**Social Life in Public Space as a Commons.
The Case of Public Art**

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Non sarò mai abbastanza cinico da smettere di credere che il mondo possa essere migliore di com'è. Ma non sarò neanche tanto stupido da credere che il mondo possa crescere se non parto da me. (Brunori Sas, Il costume da torero)

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Foreword

The first book that I bought with the doctoral grant was the Italian edition of Elinor Ostrom's *Governing the Commons*. The first book that I read, instead, was Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life of Great American Cities*. The first journal article of which I took notes in my copybook was David Harvey's *From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism*. I wrote *I bought* Ostrom's book, because in fact I have not read it until some years later. Instead, I received an inevitable and bright inspiration from Jane Jacobs' interest for the lived urban fabric, the importance of everyday people's trajectories through errands, strolls, street life. Then is when I confirmed my scale of inquiry to the local, human dimension of everyday life.

For a considerable part of my postgraduate years, I continued my study of public art, begun during my Master's. But soon enough I realised that what is important with public art are all the things that go on around it. Public outcry, controversy, regeneration, gentrification, implications on the touristic trails: public art has a life that exceeds the intrinsic value and the commissioners' goals.

Living in Rome and then moving to Venice, two cities whose centres are considered works of art as a whole, intensified my attention for what surrounds people in their commuting and daily promenades, while walking the dog, or during their visits to new cities. But I was neither interested in the material qualities of the local scale of cities, nor in the study of the intrinsic features of art in public spaces. On top of that, with the entrepreneurial turn in urban governance, as Harvey suggested, cities were underpinning ventures with specific rationales, taking actions strategically and competing with other cities.

What really caught my attention was the idea that people benefit from being outside, walking on a street, making unplanned encounters, living random, ephemeral, yet recurring experiences. Moreover, it seemed that people benefit from other people's presence too. There is more than strategy out there that makes a public art piece loved or loathed. It took me some time to realise that the missing piece of this puzzle were, simply, people.

So, while conducting a study about public art, I understood that it was necessary to look at the bigger picture. Public art is part of something broader. It is part of the urban built environment, it sits in public spaces, in a square, on the sidewalk, in an intersection, on a waterfront. But it is also part of the variety of uses that people do of such a built environment. It is part of the social life of public space, that seem

to be very important to people.

At that stage of my research I attended a summer school about public space, from a human geography perspective. The professor emphasised that public space is a struggle. It is crucial to people because it is where we exercise the right to the city and the right to a decent living. There is where the homeless find a shelter, where rights are claimed, where the Lefebvrian “ongoing struggle” is carried on every day (Mitchell 2017, 513). The professor also stressed the fact that public space is in danger, and not just because of the rise of digital space-less public spaces such as social media or technological arrangement as envisioned in Cyberbia (Sorkin 1992). Public space faces a challenge also on a political layer, and Harvey came in handy again to me, when gentrification evicts low-income residents and commodification prevents assembling or expels the needy. The end of public space, as presented by my professor, deals with “how public spaces are deployed socially, strategically, ideologically, as well as how they are used by myriad publics—the ends to which they are put” (Mitchell 2017, 503).

The struggle of public space is often, and especially in the geography circles, attributed to the neoliberal¹ turn that institutions and their representatives took. Moreover, at that time I had already spent some months getting acquainted with the ideas of the value based approach (Klamer 2016) and I could see a connection between the two disciplines.

However one looks at the problems of public space, nowadays international institutions recognise public space as an important pillar of a sustainable development of cities and ultimately the well-being of their inhabitants. United Nations has included attention to public spaces of cities among the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, aimed to *Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*: “By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities” (United Nations, 2019).

In this context, the research questions acquired their definitive form. What makes social life in public space so important? How is it produced, challenged, and sustained? What can public art say about its functioning? The present doctoral thesis is an endeavour in making sense of social life in public space. In hindsight, the earliest purchase was prophetic. I found in the theory of commons a robust framework to interpret social life in public space in a way that not only does justice to the features of the object of my analysis, but one that also offers cues on how to treat it with possibly no loss of meanings and values² along the way.

¹Following Foucault, neoliberalism “refers to the practice of governors (including civil servants) who embrace the market approach as their policy. Neo-liberalism incorporates the logic of markets in the logic of governance. In the neo-liberal perspective, politicians and especially civil servants talk about the world as if it was one big market” (Klamer 2017, XII)

²Here a clear influence from the value based approach can be found. The idea of the neoliberalism’s *Weltanschauung* as a big market in which individuals are consumers and in which the multiplicity of values is only captured by the monetary value is, if not wrong, harbinger of considerable loss of other value, lost and yet relevant. In this respect, theory of commons is a logical continuation insofar it explains the, not always non-problematic, functioning of certain resources outside the logic of the market.

Introduction

The thesis presents, already in its title, the effort of conceptualising social life in public space as a common resource. The nature of this theoretical exploration is genuinely interdisciplinary and its contributions are multiple. It entails economics, cultural economics, geography, sociology, history of art, and urban planning, with respect to their attention for public space and its importance. One of the main challenges of this work has been to understand the different approaches of the disciplines that bear different interpretations of the same object of analysis, that has already several layers of interpretation: the people, the politics, the control, the governance, the finance.

Keeping the focus on the object of analysis and using adequately the fields of knowledge involved, the main objective is to contribute to the theory of commons and to offer a new perspective that is consistent with the contemporary debate. The conceptualisation of social life in public space as a commons has natural implications on public policy and urban governance. If we are serious in interpreting social life in public space as a common resource, we should also start thinking how to manage it as such.

A second objective concerns with public art, that is in this thesis used as an opportunity to focus closely on certain aspects of social life in public space. This led me to identify a new role of public art as an element of the resource system that social life in public space constitutes, with consequent implications in terms of its management.

The overarching endeavour of the present work is to contribute to an economics debate that is getting increasing attention, of which the current popularity of commons attests. This thesis participates in the conversation about the importance of culture for the economy, a conversation whose aim is to overcome the ubiquitous idea of *homo oeconomicus*, its pervasive instrumental reasoning, and the subsequent reductive loss of meanings. This thesis takes very seriously, literally indeed, that what happens from A to B matters.

The thesis consists of four sections, that respectively answer four sub-questions that work as building blocks to answer the encompassing research question: What makes social life in public space so important and how is it produced, challenged, and sustained? Such a question opens to a theoretical examination that aims at finding a satisfactory conceptualisation of social life in public space, once we have acknowledged that it is important to people.

The first section intends to answer the question: What is the most adequate framework to analyse social life in public space from a cultural economics perspective? The endeavour in setting an orientation starts acknowledging that economic theory has for long time overlooked goods that are important to people and their economic behaviours, relegating them either as anomalies, such as public goods, or excluding them from the category of goods at all. At the same time, the section sets the ground for the overarching objective of challenging the standard economics' indifference to crucial cultural aspects of life.

With regard to social life in public space, the section continues questioning the adequacy of the economic notion of public goods, traditionally seen as non-rival and non-excludable, because very little can be exerted about the demand for these goods, notwithstanding demanded indeed, whereas the focus is mainly upon their doom to provision failure. The notions of social goods and shared infrastructure (Frischmann 2012) are an endeavour in overcoming the arid category of public goods and highlight what motivates the demand for goods that are more than just public, and of which social life in public space is a part. Looking at the benefits exerted by these goods, and looking at the way these benefits are produced and enjoyed, enables us to frame them as common resources.

The section lingers on the possibility of drawing from the theory of commons. Theory of commons has significantly developed³ since the publication of Hardin's tragedy (1968) and even more after the publication of Ostrom's masterpiece (1990). Theory of commons enlarged in volume and in scopes, and over time many branches of theory emerged. From the traditional idea of a common resource as a non-excludable and rival resource, cultural commons overcome the issue of rivalry, whereas the doctrine of urban commons involved in the political and social struggles paradoxically raising problems in terms of excludability. The section concludes that the reviewed scholarship on the commons increasingly recognise the importance of the practice of making commons but a clear relational approach to it still lurks.

The second section scrutinises the alleged resource of social life in public space. Drawing from contributions in urban sociology, urban planning, and geography, it clarifies what is social life and what is public space and argues that the specificity of the two elements is actually their interconnectedness, therefore they should be treated as a 'system', as it is the case of traditional commons too (cfr. Ostrom, 1990). The endeavour in conceptualising such a system as a common resource is supported by the distinctive traits of the functioning of social life in public space. Social life in public space is then hermeneutically compared to Ostrom's examination of the common pool resources. People enjoy the presence and the actions of others, as well as their absence. They *make* the public space. This means that social life has traits of collective production and appropriation and that they tend to occur simultaneously. Moreover, it is not always clear who is playing which role. Sometimes people benefit

³A research on Scopus shows a constant growth in published works containing "commons" in their title, abstract, or keywords, with a peak in 2018 when 184.605 documents of this such were recorded (Scopus, n.d. last access: October 2019). <https://www.scopus.com/term/analyzer.uri?sid=d31c7b51d298fdf98b8311292ff53b26&origin=resultslist&src=s&s=TITLE-ABS-KEY%28commons%29&sort=plf-f&sdt=b&sot=b&sl=22&count=2770888&analyzeResults=Analyze+results&txGid=9748623d14769551ab106732d56e3791>

from a designed entertainer, sometimes they genuinely converge where others are (Whyte 1980). These aspects shed light on the crucial feature of interdependency. Consequently, both subtractability and excludability are problematic features of the resource, because the behaviour of people and at the same time the design of the space challenges the possibility for anyone to use the space independently from the other users. Problems of supply and appropriation, mostly in terms of decisions on an institutionalised level and on the level of external arrangements challenge the just functioning of the system, proving that institutions and public actions are essential actors of the system (Ostrom 1990; Cassegård 2014; Borch and Kornberger 2016).

What emerges from the provisional application of the theory of common pool resources to social life in public space is that it functions as a commons. However, its resourcefulness cannot be explained following Ostrom blandly. Some differences with the traditional framework and the new commons emerge. To address that and to ultimately offer an interpretation of social life in public space that is enriching both for theory and for practice, a new concept is formulated: relational commons. This proves indispensable insofar the distinctive trait of the resource at hand is precisely the bundle of relations and practices that constitute social life in public space. In order to study in detail the resource, a concrete element of the system is introduced, public art.

The third section presents public art as a case of social life in public space. It poses the question: what is the role of public art with regard to social life in public space? Two main reasons allow us to address public art in order to study social life in public space: It is genuinely part of the urban fabric and it is, predominantly, open access. Moreover, aspects of legal ownership or ways of financing can be left out of this specific analysis. Public art is used as a ‘contrast agent’ that highlights a part of the social life in public space around it.

A preliminary problem when studying public art is its definition. In order to come to a pragmatic definition of public art, art historians, cultural economists, and public art professionals take different positions. Other problems of public art deal with its changing role over time and the issue of controversy. The understanding of public art this work adopts is art in public space. This is possible because, on the one hand, commentary on public art expands and stresses elements of its publicness that, in one way or another, are embedded in the idea that this art sits in a public space. On the other hand, since the main interest of this work is social life in public space, seeing it as an urban node (Sennett 2018) really enables us to study what happens around it.

The section concludes comparing the acknowledged definition of art in public space to the notion of infrastructure as introduced in the first section. The most interesting aspect of art in public space, if not of art in general, is that it has an effect on who enjoys it – an economist would say: *consumes it*. But the scope of impact of public art is less excludable, at least in principle, than art in museums. Those who *consume it* are not audience, visitors, ticket payers. They are passers-by, citizens, tourists, tax payers, if anything. Hence the effects of public art resembles those of the infrastructural resources, that produce positive externalities that are dynamic, since they evolve and invest also non-users.

The fourth and last section furthers the analysis of public art bringing four original experiences of art in public space. Based on the analysis carried out in the previous sections, and adopting an understanding of public art as art in urban public spaces, this section intends to answer the question: How does public art function and what can it tell about social life in public space? The answer comes with an empirical approach. Four recent experiences of art in public space in different European cities are at the core of the analysis. The exploration is based on three methods, chosen insofar adaptive to the features of the object of analysis: *in situ* observation, grounded on Gehl Institute's public life study toolkits; purposive sampling and snowball interviews (Bryman 2012); and a comparison with media press and press releases available on line and offline. The four experiences of public art are: *I am Queen Mary* (2018), by Jannette Elhers and LaVaughn Belle in Copenhagen; *Carmela* (2016), by Jaume Plensa in Barcelona; *Triumphs and Laments* (2016) by William Kentridge in Rome; and *Santa Claus* (2005/2008), by Paul McCarthy in Rotterdam. The section scrutinises the four public art pieces with the aim of understanding the manner social life functions around them. Each location shows distinctive traits in the ways the space is used and in the way the work of art has been installed and the relative arrangements. The results can be analysed through four variables: type of initiative, use of space, intrinsic features, and image. Each experience teaches 'a lesson' about the role played by the artwork in the space and among the people. The reader will find tales of clever adoption, public history, creation of place, and of a space that works regardless other arrangements.

The last section sheds light on what it is that makes a space and makes it desirable to people: the variety of relations that can take place here. Tourists, residents, city users, and even pets find in public space something important to them, and most of the time this happens by chance, a thing that is possible because of the non-excludability of the resource system *social life in public space*. With this regard, the concept of relational commons becomes concrete finally.

The dissertation concludes setting the ground for a new interpretation of social life in public space, looking at what really makes it an important part of people's lives. Overcoming the category of public goods, and undertaking a demand and value based analysis, the new concept of relational commons enables us to grasp the real essence of the resourcefulness of social life in public space. Explaining it through the notion of commons, and conceiving the relational commons can help redistributing responsibilities to its actors and to redefine the rationales of urban governance and its policies. But this concerns the future.

What the thesis offers today, in its conclusion, is a conceptualisation of social life in public space that adds to the theory of commons. Scholarship on commons currently engages in a recognition of the relational aspects of the commons as fundamental, yet a serious conceptualisation is still missing. In addition, a lesson can be learnt that concerns the functioning of public art, and the essential role played by its recipients.

The present thesis is a theoretical work. However, it pursues its conceptual objectives using an empirical approach to the case of public art. With this regard, some limitations have been encountered during the process and some have remained

in the final outcome. The first limitation deals with the constraints of temporal and financial resources that entail every doctoral project. As far as the methodology, the consequence of adopting a theoretical approach and enriching it with an empirical section may be a perceived inadequacy of the latter, however contrasted by the rationale of the choice. The empirical section is in fact tailored on the exigencies of its purpose, that is to support an exploration, that aims to find out whether the notion of relational commons is applicable and in what way.

Other limitations concern the definition of public art as art in public space, and the array of practices in there. Both had to be confined. Public art is intended in this work as a rather narrow cluster, compared to its many possibilities. The cluster might look even narrower if we take into account also the potential of urban design and architecture as art works in the city (Romano 2007). In fact, for the sake of internal consistency, the thesis does not explore art in the digital realm and its declination, as well as art in non-urban public spaces such as land art or earth art. It also had to leave out artistic expressions in public space with an anti-establishment connotation such as street art, graffiti, or other non-visual artistic expressions such as performing art in public space (Bengtson 2013).

As far as the practices in public space, the attention is drawn predominantly on everyday activities. However, it is to be acknowledged that the uses of public space can assume diverse connotations that could go under the umbrella definition of those activities that challenge the resourcefulness of public space, that yet are part of what this thesis calls a relation commons. Thus, the reader will not find a specific focus on homelessness, demonstrations, and occupations, although these topics are explicitly considered a part of the life in between buildings.

When concluding an intellectual journey such as this, it is easy to see all the missing tiles that could have enriched the analysis, so that much more could have been done. Sometimes, limitations seem to exceed the accomplishments. However, it is also clear that without this imperfect journey, limitations would have not been visible at all. This work aspires to take part to a conversation that rethinks public space for people, and rethinks economics accordingly. Perhaps the journey was worth it.

Conclusion

Lessons learnt

In the first pages of this thesis, the reader was encouraged to picture a public space in her mind. I suggested a square, a space between buildings such as the church, the city hall, houses, shops, and cafes. The necessary element to make everything work, however, are the people. Everyday strolls, memories, moments, movements, encounters. The effervescence of a city is given by the way it is lived.

In May 2018, I escaped for a couple of days to Venice, a far home of mine I need to go back to every once in a while. In Campo Santi Giovanni e Paolo, I witnessed the perfect scene of social life in public space, that has become my personal epitome of a public space. In the middle of the usual pedestrian bustle of residents and tourists (not so many in this square), a group of children was playing football, using the medieval façade of the cathedral and the Renaissance front of the Scuola Grande of San Marco to bounce the ball and even score. A stray cat got involved in the match, before finding shelter inside the church. Soon enough someone tossed the ball in the canal. The entire team had to make good use of the gondola stop – providentially the gondolier was busy chatting with a lady – in order to protrude enough to recuperate the ball. In a minute, the spontaneous *mise-en-scene* started over.

This is the subtle yet rich lattice of relations upon which this thesis has focused. And what motivates the endeavour is not just the fact that public life exists, but the idea that people count on it. When I witnessed that scene in Venice I felt enriched and that picturesque experience a fine memory. The present work is an endeavour to understand how social life in public space is produced, sustained, and challenged. Conducting this research project taught me, and hopefully others as well, few lessons.

As a cultural economist, I was interested in understanding where does the value of public art come from and how to maximise the extraction of such a value in a sustainable and inclusive manner. That got me to reflect on the life in public space: what makes social life in public space desirable and valuable? How does it take place? What is it similar to and different from?

While searching for the most adequate theoretical framework to analyse social life in public space, the first lesson I learnt is that social life in public space is one of those things in which value does not come from the object, but it comes to existence thanks to the subject's effort. While I value an apple because it can be eaten, quite independently from my disposition, other goods such as ideas, academic papers,

public art, and more broadly the life in the streets and squares, are valuable because my activity, and that of the other users, makes it valuable.

Hence, the most adequate framework for the object of analysis of this work could not be the economic categories of private and public goods. People seem to have a more central role than that of sovereign consumers, insofar they are an active part of the value chain. That insight got me to embrace the notions of the commons as it does justice to the ongoing and shared practices that constitute a public space.

My study of life in public space brought out relational practices. People relate to each other and to the object, like a square or a statue. Accordingly, I welcomed the increasing interest among researchers in the relational aspect of commoning as a practice. However, I missed a clear conceptualisation of the relational elements. Land commons originate with the aim of solving the problem of depletion, that is inherent to a natural resource, such as a water basin or a fishery. By the same token, urban commons have the ambition to secure the provision of a good or service without the intervention of the State nor the market. In both cases, a well-defined group of people, the commoners, try to protect the resource constructing excludability on a non-excludable good. But how, then do relationships matter?

Theorisation of cultural commons, instead, solves the issue of rivalry, including non-rival collective resources among the extant categories of commons. In any case, the scholarship emphasises the actions of people as constitutive of the common resources. Contribution acquires centrality. And with that we perceive a relational element. Contribution is, like reciprocity, the constitutive action of relationships.

Although social life in public space works like a commons, some differences have emerged. It appeared not fully feasible to call it an urban or a cultural commons, because the essence of the resource would have been lost. The specific feature of social life in public space is that what is an input for some, can be a benefit for others. And moreover, these inputs and outputs merge. The matter of the commons is the relations among people, that can be purposive as well as casual, ephemeral yet recurrent, unexpected but sought. I called this a *relational commons*.

Relational commons are resource systems in which relations constitute inputs and outputs. As in the case of shared infrastructures, people may presume their existence, yet they keep on contributing to them. In the case of social life of public space, the blended consumptive and productive behaviour are strictly connected to the physical element of the resource system, that is public space, and with regard to that specific issues of provision arise. External arrangements with local authorities and other providers of the physical space and its control are essential to the functioning of the commons but they are not directly involved in the production and appropriation of the resource.

In order to understand in more depth how social life in public space works, I focused on an element of it, public art. This allowed to analyse the object of the thesis in a privileged way, that of approximation. I pragmatically defined public art as art in public spaces of cities. Drawing from the previous research, I looked at public art as a combination of environmental and intellectual infrastructure.

Public art is to be shared, yet it allows for a consumptive behaviour that makes

it potentially rival. At the same time, its functioning seems to work in a regime of confusion of roles, where resources are not distinguished from processes, nor are outputs from practices. Public art generates a flow of activities of social and economic nature. It is interconnected with its communities, from the local to the global scale, and it shapes and is shaped by people and over time.

To expand the theoretical endeavour, I scrutinised four experiences of contemporary public art that allowed to define with a fair degree of confidence that social life in public space is a relational commons. The empirical section shows that public art works in specific synergy of conditions that depend and evolve around the initiative, the use of the space, the image, and the intrinsic features of the work of art.

Each of the four experiences offers a particular information about how social life in public space functions and that it does so as a commons. The relations that occur around the artworks are specific for the time and the space of the installation and this has implications for the governance of public art.

Each experience offers a message to take home: *Santa Claus* teaches a story of clever adoption, *I am Queen Mary* gives a lesson of public history, from *Carmela* we learn that actions of people are relevant to its functioning, and, finally, *Triumphs and Laments* sheds light on the importance of external agreements, confirming the indissoluble condition of social life and public space.

We learnt that social life in public space is important because of what happens, can happen, and will happen in there: a lattice of relations. In such a context, public art plays the role of urban node, thanks to its infrastructural features. The relations make the space, and the people make the relations, of which some are shared practices. In the case of the relational commons, the value is created by the users (the ‘commoners’) in connection with the physical space and its external providers.

Objectives achieved

This dissertation aspired to achieve a number of objectives. First, offering a contribution to the analysis of the new commons that is consistent with the spirit of the ongoing debate. With the focus on social life in public space, the notion of relational commons has been developed. Second, with specific regard to the case of public art, a new understanding of its role is proposed. The domain of commons reveals details of the functioning of public art and explains why relations occurring in public space are so important. The overarching objective of this dissertation was based on the idea that the economic science should get back to its root of understanding the values of things and re-value the importance of culture.

The achievements of this dissertation leave several possibilities open for future research. If the conceptualisation of the relational commons stands, then more questions arise that concern what existing practices may fall into that category.

New objectives

With specific regard to social life in public space, it is important to start an inquiry into feasible possibilities of treating the relational commons as such. Immediate future research will concern a mapping of extant practices of appropriation of public

space, that could be possibly described with the umbrella term of urban creativity, with the purpose of test the notion of relational commons further and to expand its potential applicability.

Moreover, extant institutionalised endeavours to manage social life in public space as a commons should be researched and mapped, in order to test the viability of the concept of relational commons in operational terms and eventually to define what is the role of external authorities that play an indirect yet crucial role in the commons. In fact, acknowledging that social life in public space is produced, challenged, and sustained as a commons, may dramatically change the way urban governance is thought and implemented. The role of external institutions may become subtler, in favour of the role played by the well-defined yet highly heterogeneous group of commoners. New governing systems might be designed, based on cooperation, contribution, inclusion, and *genius loci*.

As far as it concerns public art, the notion of relational commons proves to be the best model to fully understand the way its value is produced and enjoyed, bringing the relations among people in the spatial dimension of public art's setting at the centre of the investigation. As seen, for example, in the experience of Barcelona, where the artist proved to be able to turn a space into a place, applying the ideas of relational commons to programmes of public art may be beneficial if we are serious in maximising the extraction of its values for the different stakeholders.

New insights unveiled in this work with specific regard to art in public space might be of influence to conventional spaces where art is displayed and enjoyed. Museums, that are increasingly interested in outreach actions (Krause Knight and Senie 2018, Bollati and Morea 2020), may benefit from the acknowledgment that a strong point of public art is its relational feature. Leveraging on the dialogic characteristic of art may positively influence a re-thinking of the collections setup inside the museum and in its relation to its surrounding urban environment.

Last considerations

This thesis aimed at explaining social life in public space in a way that is useful to people, and that in practice can give not just the right to contribute to the city, but also the accountability in doing so. This thesis participates in an intellectual discourse that rethinks the economics as embedded into culture, in a way that we do not see ourselves as wolves to others. When we reduce people to rational consumers, we start seeing the world as a matter of market-like transactions. Instead, this thesis claims that what happens from A to B matters; and actually presents the most enjoyable part.

Recently, I found myself involved in quite a few discussions with my friends about the hot topic of dating apps. While I am no more than a laggard, my flatmate adapted easily to the innovation. After a serious break-up, I suggested him to call a friend and go to a pub. I might be biased in my judgment after three years spent studying social life in public space, but I think that the right thing to do when looking for new acquaintances is going out, literally. Instead, he started using Tinder. He prefers to stay at home and to go out once he finds a match. I saw the end of public space a tiny bit closer. Tinder is one of those new tools to move fast

forward. But it also cuts off the unplanned, occasional, meaningful possibilities that we can only find on our way from A to B, through public spaces.

After some reflection on the topic, I realised that the elements at hand should not become mutually exclusive, after all. New public digital spaces should not overshadow the importance of impromptu, unexpected experiences of analogue public space, precisely because what happens from A to B is irreplaceable and belongs to the urban public space. However, this is only possible if we acknowledge the importance of public space and, indispensably, that people are the vital actors of this process. They contribute to the production of a resource they appropriate every day. The enjoyable passage from A to B depends on how the other users of the resource behave both in space and in time. To achieve that, a necessary start is that local authorities recognise the resource and act as enablers of the relational commons, designing policies that rethink the right to contribute, and give awareness and responsibility to the people.

Glossary

The following section analyses the most problematic words used in the thesis from a semantic point of view. Throughout the development of the research, certain concepts have raised doubts and discussions. It is not this glossary's purpose to halt the debate. The reader will certainly want to intervene, raise objections, and suggest references. The aim is to acknowledge the complexity of certain terms, that the interdisciplinary context of this research has increased, and to show the rationale behind some necessary choices. The scrutiny of the terms, listed alphabetically, starts with their entries in the English Oxford Dictionary.

Art

NOUN

1. *mass noun* The expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.
 - a Works produced by human creative skill and imagination.
 - b Creative activity resulting in the production of paintings, drawings, or sculpture.
2. *the arts* The various branches of creative activity, such as painting, music, literature, and dance.
3. *arts* Subjects of study primarily concerned with human creativity and social life, such as languages, literature, and history (as contrasted with scientific or technical subjects)
4. A skill at doing a specified thing, typically one acquired through practice.

The Parthenon was built by a society whose language did not have a word for *art*. In ancient Greek, *τεχνη* (*téchne*) was the word that referred to what today would be know-how, a concept good for art, craftsmanship, engineering, rhetoric, politics, medicine, and so on. In addressing the question what is art, philosopher Berleant (1964) suggests that “the search for a completely demarcated concept, unequivocal in its denotation, is an *ignis fatuus*, as impossible to attain as it is undesirable to possess” (ibidem, 239). Thus, in his belief, defining what is art is rather dependent on the experience of it, therefore “relative to the *experienter*” (ibidem, 240) in the

sense that the aesthetic experience of art precedes the definition of the *concept* of art.

One of the most disturbing definition of art is probably given by Brian Eno, who contentiously defines art as “everything that you don’t have to do” (Eno 2015, 4). He underlines the ‘additional’ feature of art, as a creative *plus* to everyday practices. For instance, he beliefs eating is necessary, whereas baking a great apple pie is art. What is art and what is not is a typical ongoing issue among disciplines, such as the discussion whether architecture and design should be considered art, and within art critique, as Marcel Duchamp famously made clear submitting his *Fountain* to the Society of Independent Artists. A notable comment is given by semiologist Umberto Eco: “We don’t really know it is so, but it has always been art which has first modified our mode of thinking, of seeing, of feeling, still long before, sometimes 100 years before, one could understand why” (Eco, 1962).

How does economics deal with such a protean subject? Scholars are interested in the peculiar way in which utility and externality occur in artistic production and consumption that allow them to consider cultural goods to be *special*. They use the tools given by standard economics, in order to explain why and how culture deserves a special treatment (Throsby 1994, 2001; Towse 2010; Dekker 2015). A plausible explanation can be that the arts are a *specific* realm and as such artistic products. However, once we acknowledge the intricacy of the answer to ‘what is art’, the main interest of a cultural economics’ contributor will be the analysis of the economic, social and symbolic implications of the arts. The problem of defining what is art is not the cultural economist’s problem. Her problem is to understand how the multifaceted value connected to art is extracted and further to investigate and devise ways in which such value extraction could be maximised.

Culture

NOUN

mass noun

1. The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively.
 - a A refined understanding or appreciation of culture.
2. The ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.
 - a *with modifier* The attitudes and behaviour characteristic of a particular social group.
3. Biology - The cultivation of bacteria, tissue cells, etc. in an artificial medium containing nutrients.
 - a count noun A preparation of cells obtained by culture.
4. The cultivation of plants.

VERB WITH OBJECT

Biology - Maintain (tissue cells, bacteria, etc.) in conditions suitable for growth.

In the context of the value-based approach, culture is the overarching domain within which the logics of home, society, market, and government operate. Culture shapes people's values, meaning things they find important in their lives and that they strive for. Culture allows *shared practices*. Practice means that there is always some kind of relation. A relation cannot exist alone, it occurs among a plurality of actors and, within this relation, meanings are produced, negotiated, and shared. A conversation is, for example, what lets the arts come into existence. The arts activate dialogues on several levels (Klamer 2017).

Indeed, the origin of the word 'culture' implies an idea of practice. It derives from the future participle of the Latin verb *colo, -is, -ui, cultum, colere*, and indicates 'the things that will be taken care of'. As in the case of cell and plants cultures, what we refer to when using the word culture is an evolving growing substance, that needs contribution and care to keep on existing. In its broadest anthropological sense, 'culture' means the base of a society, its values and shared norms and beliefs. It can also indicate an elitist sense of civilisation, as in the German *Kultur*. A subsection of the broadest culture are the arts.

Cultural economics is increasingly interested in including cultural elements in its analyses. Cultural goods and services are heterogeneously defined in theory and in practice, with implications for economists who seek to study the cultural sector (Snowball 2008; Throsby 2013). Cultural goods have been defined based on the gradual involvement of creativity in the productions, of intellectual property, and of symbolic meanings (Throsby 2001, 2008). The present thesis acknowledges the problems of defining and consistently operating with the notion of culture, and understands culture in its broad, evolutionary meaning as an overarching context that shapes what people believe in and strive for, a context of which the economy is a phenomenon.

Urban fabric

1. Structural parts of a building, as opposed to furniture or movable fittings.
2. Building, including windows, doors, and finishes. Urban fabric means the streets, buildings, open spaces, etc., making up a town or part of a town.
3. Factory

The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture provides a standpoint on urban fabric as a second meaning of the less specific fabric. Its understanding of (urban) fabric is connected to the physical elements that constitute the urban environment, or a rather local scale: windows and finishes also constitute the urban fabric. By the same token, Sennett (2018) talks about the fabric of a city in relation to other elements such as the grain, the nodes, the weave. These elements, altogether, make the city. Jane Jacobs (1961), who is considered among the precursor of an urban analysis based on the urban fabric, was instead particularly interested in the people that

inhabit the city and whose life eventually makes the urban fabric (Sassen 2016). The presentation of the research theme on design of urban fabric at TUDelft describes the urban fabric as “the physical urban environment (elements, materials, form, scales, density and networks), and (...) its psychological, socio-cultural, ecological, managerial and economic structures”(TUDelft, 2019) . It is this multi-dimensional understanding of urban fabric the one to which this study refers.

Public

ADJECTIVE

1. Of or concerning the people as a whole.
 - a Open to or shared by all the people of an area or country.
 - b Of or involved in the affairs of the community, especially in government or entertainment.
2. Done, perceived, or existing in open view.
3. Of or provided by the state rather than an independent, commercial company.
4. British Of, for, or acting for a university.

NOUN

1. the public treated as singular or plural Ordinary people in general; the community.

with adjective or noun modifier A section of the community having a particular interest or connection.

one's public informal The people who watch or are interested in an artist, writer, or performer.
2. British short for public bar or public house

Public space, public realm, public funding, public bodies, public art, the public, a public company. “Public” is a word used to address a variety of subjects and situation. Nuances of sense can imply differences in legal, social, or perceptual terms, which are often intertwined. Public can mean ‘open access’ as well as State managed and/or provided. A hipster cafe can be a public place (social), although privately owned (legal), and at the same time it may be felt as non-welcoming by non-hipster people (perceptual) .

The public can be the audience or the consumers of a certain activity of business. A public company is a firm whose shares can be bought and sold in the stock exchange market, while a public body is generally the State, that can own or manage a certain good because of a public interest. What all these differences have in common is a sense of stake holding, that always play a role in the management of that public something. The challenge is that whenever such a condition occurs, all the different – not necessarily public – parties involved in the process have to work together in order to preserve the public interest, comply with public requirements, or satisfy the public.

Public space

Public spaces – including streets – are, and must be seen as, multi-functional areas for social interaction, economic exchange and cultural expression among a wide diversity of people. It is for urban planning to establish and organize these public spaces, and for urban design to facilitate and encourage their use, in the process enhancing a sense of identity and belonging. (UN-Habitat 2015, 4)

Although neither English Oxford nor the Oxford Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture provide a definition for public space, the idea of public space is increasingly present in the public discourse and most prominently in the endeavours towards sustainable development as promoted by the United Nations. One of the *Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*, addresses, among the others, public space: “By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities” (United Nations, n.a.)

Public space is seen as expression of public realm and traditionally they are constitutive elements of the physical city. However, public space can be wherever public discourse is, and consequently lose their tie to the tangible feature. Online platforms, although immaterial, can be used to raise public concern and therefore function as a public space (Zhang 2019). Moreover, it is often and conveniently defined based on what it is not: private space (Mitchell 2017).

Main axes of definition of public spaces are “ownership, control, access and use” (Mehta 2014, 54). Some spaces can be privately owned but publicly accessible, as many of the plazas built in New York thanks to the “plaza bonus” (Whyte 1980). Other spaces could be publicly owned but not publicly accessible, such as public parks in Paris, whose gates commonly close at 18:00, or, in an extensive understanding of the term, public buildings such as courthouses, city halls, or public hospitals. Although affected by both legal ownership and practical accessibility, the specificity of public space is its use. Public space is the space of relations, where specific types of rules of behaviour apply, such as: making one’s way through crowds, choosing where to sit in a bus or a bar, avoiding undesired attention, queuing, achieving social invisibility, assisting a stranger in trouble, avoiding what looks dangerous, paying civil inattention, exercising sociability (Lofland 1989).

United Nations Habitat defines public spaces as “places which are accessible and enjoyable by all without a profit motive and take on various spatial forms, including parks, streets, sidewalks, markets and playgrounds” (UNHabitat, n.a.) Acknowledging the many possible definitions of public space and that their understanding strongly depends on the discipline of analysis, this thesis considers public space the open spaces of cities, regardless their ownership and control, and adopts Gehl’s standpoint of “life between buildings” to exclude, on the one hand, some places that could figure as public spaces such as the aforementioned courthouses, city hall, schools, and hospitals, and, on the other hand, to stress that also the uses of public space are a “dimension of architecture, urban design and city planning to be carefully

treated” (Gehl 1971, 7). The *sine qua non* of the adopted understanding of open public spaces of cities is, in conclusion, the ever changing, both in space and in time, variety of activities, uses, and possibilities, meaning the relations among people.

Resource

NOUN

1. usually resources A stock or supply of money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by a person or organization in order to function effectively.
 - a *Resources* A country’s collective means of supporting itself or becoming wealthier, as represented by its reserves of minerals, land, and other natural assets.
 - b A source of help or information.
 - c *Resources* North American Available assets.
2. An action or strategy which may be adopted in adverse circumstances.
 - a *Resources* Personal attributes and capabilities regarded as able to help or sustain one in adverse circumstances.
 - b *dated mass noun* The ability to find clever ways to overcome difficulties; resourcefulness.
 - c *archaic mass noun* The possibility of aid or assistance.
 - d *dated* A leisure occupation.

VERB [WITH OBJECT]

1. Provide with resources.

Economic analysis is to a great extent focused on the management and the efficient allocation of resources. A resource is typically a general term used to specify a means, an input, a stock of wealth that enables economic choices of production and consumption. With this regard, resources can be capital goods, that are used to produce other goods but differ from means of production insofar they are not incorporated in the output. Resources can be physical (a screw) or natural (coal, water basins - in this case they are input, not capital goods). The underlying economic idea is that they are scarce: “it is one of the characteristics of the world as we find it that our ends are various and that most of the scarce means at our disposal are capable of alternative application. This applies not only to scarce products. It applies still more to the ultimate factors of production. The various kinds of natural resources and labour can be used for an almost infinite variety of purposes” (Robbins 1932, 35).

Literature identifies several types of resources besides the physical and natural ones. A socioeconomic perspective concerns the ideas of social, human, and cultural capital. Human development needs investment, such as education (Becker 1993); moral resources and shared practices need investment, such as voting in the elections

or making an effort to build a relationship (Hirschman 1985; Klamer 2017). These notions identify means, that are not necessarily monetary yet often ascribable with a monetary measure, acquired and used by individuals and societies to achieve mobility and distinction (Bourdieu 1979, 1984; Putnam 1993).

Social life

NOUN

1. Public spaces – including streets – are, and must be seen as, multi-functional areas for social interaction, economic exchange and cultural expression among a wide diversity of people. It is for urban planning to establish and organize these public spaces, and for urban design to facilitate and encourage their use, in the process enhancing a sense of identity and belonging. (UN-Habitat 2015, 4)

Gehl (1971; 2013) as well as Whyte (Whyte 1980) see social life in relation to urban planning and design, with a specific interest on what uses people make of the environment with the aim of finding better ways of building public space. Jacobs was concerned with the liveliness that dwellers brought in the space and that make it a place. She was concerned with the human dimension, the urban fabric, the eye of the street, and diversity (Jacobs 1961; Sassen 2016). This is what in general concerns social life. Gehl (1971) distinguishes three types of activities that occur in public space: necessary, optional, and social, or resultant. Necessary activities concern using public space because of something we have to do, such as going to school. Optional activities concern additional use of space, when external conditions are favourable (good weather or good reasons to stay). As a result from that, social activities occur spontaneously, such as meeting and gathering, and they depend on the type of space.

In a metropolis, the attitude of a passer-by has been described as *blasé* (Simmel 1903), whereas parochial spaces (Hunter 1985) induce a more profound involvement of uses. Simmel conceptualised the notion of sociability, as the (dis)satisfaction that accompanies individuals when they associate with others, when they experience a sense of playful, even superficial, togetherness (Simmel and Hughes 1949). De Certeau (1988) identified in the act of walking a form of communication and appropriation of the space as an action that generates the city itself. Lofland (1989) reviewed sociological endeavours in explaining what is social life, and what types of relations occur there. They are spontaneous yet seem to follow some patterns. Public realm is the arena of civil inattention, fleeting, segmental, and bounded/unpersonal relationships (*ibidem*). Informed by these concepts, social life is referred to in the thesis as the bundle of diverse possibilities, a lattice of relations, that concern the inhabitant of a city.

Summary

This thesis looks at social life in public space of cities and endeavours in the conceptualisation of it as a common resource, with a focus on the case of public art. Social life is the life that takes place in urban public spaces, the life between buildings (Gehl 1971). What constitutes social life in public space are encounters, moments, sociability, and even atmosphere (Simmel and Hughes 1949; Lefebvre 1996; Miles 1997; Borch and Kornberger 2016).

Nonetheless, public space is a controversial realm. It is genuine stage of the ongoing struggle for the right to the city (Mitchell 2017), a recurring phenomenon that is increasingly undermined by so-called processes of commodification and extreme securitisation under the name of the ‘smart city’, as well as by the emergence of space-less public spaces such as the digital realm. However, public space is increasingly recognised as a fundamental pillar of sustainable urban development (United Nations, 2019) that indicates its importance for society.

These considerations allow to interpret public space, and more specifically social life that takes place in it, as a resource for people. Accordingly, this thesis researches how social life in public space is produced, challenged, and sustained. It provides for a theoretical exploration, one that is genuinely interdisciplinary, as it entails economics, cultural economics, geography, sociology, history of art, and urban planning.

For a considerable time during my postgraduate years I focused on the study of public art, and precisely of (contemporary) art in public space. But soon enough, as a trained researcher in cultural economics with a special attention for urban dynamics, I noticed that the uniqueness of public art is inherently related to the relations among people taking place around it. These interactions concern not only proximity, but also public discourse and controversy around the work of art. All these things considered, the research expands on the case of public art. What can public art say about social life in public space?

The exploration is developed following four main sub-questions. The first addresses what the most adequate framework to analyse social life in public space from a cultural economic perspective is. It appears, certain goods, which are important to people and also relevant to the economy, have traditionally been relegated as anomalies by economic theory. According to this view, it seems inappropriate to position social life in public space under the anomalous category of public goods. What seems instead pertinent is to frame social life in public space as a commons. It must be noted, both the notion of traditional commons and the more sophisticated

cultural and urban commons do not seem to comprehensively applicable social life in public space. The reviewed scholarship recognises the relational aspects of commons as crucial, yet a clear relational approach to its study lurks. To begin with, it appears relevant to analyse what in fact social life in public space is and how it functions.

Accordingly, the second sub-question of this work asks what is social life and what is public space. Contributions on urban sociology, urban planning, and geography clarify that what the most relevant feature of social life in public space is the interconnectedness of the two elements that constitute the resource, meaning social life and public space. This is a trait that encourages a provisional application of common pool resources (Ostrom 1990). What emerges from such an association is that people play a special role in the context. They enjoy the presence or absence of others, their interactions constitute public space. Social life in public space shows traits of collective production and appropriation and interdependency of roles. Moreover, the role of institutions and public action proves essential with respect to the functioning of the system and its provision and appropriation problems. Simply put, social life in public space works as a commons. However, a bland application of traditional commons cannot fit without some adjustments insofar some differences emerge. For this reason, a new concept is formulated: relational commons, in line with theoretical framework and the peculiarities of social life in public space. This novel type of commons addresses the distinctive trait of the resource at hand, that is the lattice of relations and practices that makes social life in public space.

At this stage, the case of public art becomes relevant in understanding what is a relational commons. The third sub-questions asks what the role of public art is with regard to social life in public space. Public art, pragmatically defined in this thesis as art in public space, is part of the urban fabric, works as an urban node (Sennett 2018) and is genuinely open access. It shapes and is shaped by what people do in public space. Hence, looking at the relations around public art works as a 'contrast agent', highlights a part of the social life in public space. The most interesting aspect of public art is probably its transformative power on passers-by, citizens, tourists, tax payers, who enjoy, or consume it, not always purposively. With this regard, public art is comparable to infrastructural resources, exerting externalities that involve both users and non-users.

Four experiences of art in public spaces are considered in order to understand how public art functions and what it can tell about social life in public space. The exploration entails: *I am Queen Mary* (2018) by Jeannette Ehlers and LaVaughn Belle in Copenhagen, *Carmela* (2016) by Jaume Plensa in Barcelona, *Triumphs and Laments* (2016) by William Kentridge in Rome, and *Santa Claus* (2005/2008) by Paul McCarthy in Rotterdam. The four artworks are explored through different qualitative methods: in situ observation based on Gehl Institute's public art studies, purposive sampling and snowball interviews (Bryman 2012), and a comparison with media press and press releases. The experiences show that what constitutes public space around a public art piece is crucially the variety of relations that can take place in there. Tourists, residents, city users, and even pets, find in public space something important to them, the realisation of which happens often by chance. This makes finally possible to understand what a relational commons is concretely.

Therefore, this thesis offers a novel interpretation of social life in public space and, at the same time, it contributes to the latest developments of the theory of commons, concerning the relational aspects of these types of resources, stress the action of making the commons as a social practice (Euler 2018), and yet lurk a specific conceptualisation of that. Overcoming the economic notion of public goods, and adopting a value based analysis, the concept of relational commons is developed in order to grasp the real resourcefulness of social life in public space. Social life in public space is important for the lattice of relations that can occur, that do occur, or will occur in there. This and the way these relations are produced and appropriated by people, and the importance of external agreements, constitute the relational commons. In this context, the common resource is the relations, and the ‘commoners’ are the users of public space: passers-by, residents, city users, tax-payers. The value is created by the users of public space in connection with the physical space and its external providers.

By focusing on public art, this thesis also offers a contribution to the field of public art studies. The notion of relational commons suites well the peculiar status of art in public space, and it proves helpful in fully understand how public art’s value is created and enjoyed. Such conclusions seem promising also for more conventional artistic settings such as museums, as they are increasingly interested in outreach actions (Krause Knight and Senie 2018, Bollati and Morea 2020).

The increased attention to new collective ways of governing resources attests for a general plea, both in the academic field and in practice, to rethink the economics as embedded in culture and finally overcome the ubiquitous idea of homo oeconomicus. The overarching objective of this thesis is to contribute to this discourse. As a result, it seeks to offer an interpretation of social life in public space that is useful to people, and that in practice can give not just the right to contribute to the city, but also the accountability to do so. Instrumental reasoning brings loss of values when it reduces the world to market transactions. Instead, as seen in social life in public space, what happens from A to B, matters, even if not captured by standard economics, and it is often the most enjoyable part.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte van steden en streeft ernaar het te visualiseren als een gemeenschappelijke hulpbron, met een focus op openbare kunst. Het sociale leven is het leven dat zich afspeelt in stedelijke openbare ruimtes, het leven tussen gebouwen (Gehl 1971). Wat het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte vormt, zijn ontmoetingen, momenten, gezelligheid en zelfs sfeer (Simmel en Hughes 1949; Lefebvre 1996; Miles 1997; Borch en Kornberger 2016).

De openbare ruimte is echter een controversieel ruimte. Het is een podium van de voortdurende strijd voor het recht op de stad (Mitchell 2017), een terugkerend fenomeen dat in toenemende mate wordt ondermijnd door processen van commodificatie en extreme securitisatie onder de naam van de 'slimme stad', evenals door de opkomst van ruimtevrije openbare ruimtes zoals het digitale Niettemin wordt openbare ruimte steeds meer erkend als een fundamentele pijler van duurzame stedelijke ontwikkeling (Verenigde Naties, 2019) die het belang ervan voor de samenleving aangeeft. Deze overwegingen laten toe de openbare ruimte, en meer specifiek het sociale leven dat zich daarin afspeelt, te interpreteren als een hulpmiddel voor mensen. Op basis daarvan onderzoekt dit proefschrift hoe het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte wordt geproduceerd, uitgedaagd en in stand gehouden. Ik geef hierin een theoretische verkenning. Een verkenning die oprecht interdisciplinair is, omdat het economie, culturele economie, geografie, sociologie, kunstgeschiedenis en stadsplanning omvat.

In de jaren na mijn afstuderen heb ik mij een lange tijd geconcentreerd op de studie van openbare kunst, specifiek (hedendaagse) kunst in de openbare ruimte. Maar al snel merkte ik - als opgeleid onderzoeker in culturele economie met speciale aandacht voor stedelijke dynamiek - dat het unieke van openbare kunst inherent verbonden is aan de relaties tussen mensen die eromheen plaatsvinden. Deze interacties betreffen niet alleen nabijheid, maar ook publiek discours en controversie met betrekking tot het kunstwerk. Hieruit volgend, gaat het onderzoek in openbare kunst. Wat kan openbare kunst ons vertellen over het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte?

De verkenning is ontwikkeld aan de hand van vier deelvragen. De eerste gaat in op wat het meest adequate kader is om het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte vanuit een cultureel economisch perspectief te analyseren. Het blijkt dat bepaalde goederen, die belangrijk zijn voor mensen en ook relevant zijn voor de economie, traditioneel zijn gedegradeerd tot anomalieën door economische theorie. Vanuit deze opvatting lijkt het ongepast om het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte te positioneren onder de afwijkende categorie van publieke goederen. Wat in plaats

daarvan relevant lijkt, is het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte als een commons te benaderen. Hierbij moet worden opgemerkt dat zowel de notie van traditionele commons als de meer verfijnde culturele en stedelijke commons het sociaal leven in de openbare ruimte niet volledig toepasbaar lijken. De literatuur in dit veld erkent de relationele aspecten van commons als cruciaal, maar een duidelijke relationele benadering van de studie mist. Om te beginnen lijkt het relevant om te analyseren wat het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte eigenlijk is en hoe het functioneert.

Daarom vraagt de tweede deelvraag van dit werk wat het sociale leven is en wat openbare ruimte is. Bijdragen van stedelijke sociologie, stadsplanning en geografie maken duidelijk dat het meest relevante kenmerk van het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte de onderlinge verbondenheid is van de twee elementen die de hulpbron vormen, namelijk het sociale leven en de openbare ruimte. Dit is een eigenschap die een voorlopige toepassing van gemeenschappelijke bronnen aanmoedigt (Ostrom 1990). Wat uit zo'n vereniging naar voren komt, is dat mensen een speciale rol spelen in de context. Ze genieten van de aanwezigheid of afwezigheid van anderen, hun interacties vormen openbare ruimte. Het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte vertoont kenmerken van collectieve productie en toe-eigening en onderlinge afhankelijkheid van rollen. Bovendien is de rol van instellingen en openbare actie van essentieel belang met betrekking tot de werking van het systeem de problemen met voorzieningen en kredieten. Simpel gezegd, het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte werkt als een commons. Een argeloze toepassing van traditionele commons kan echter niet passen zonder enige aanpassingen voor zover er verschillen ontstaan. Om deze reden is een nieuw concept geformuleerd: relationele commons. Dit nieuwe type commons richt zich op de kenmerkende eigenschap van de beschikbare bron, dat in de structuur van relaties en praktijken die het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte maakt.

In dit stadium wordt openbare kunst relevant om te begrijpen wat relationele commons zijn. De derde deelvraag behelst wat de rol van openbare kunst is met betrekking tot het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte. Openbare kunst, in dit proefschrift pragmatisch gedefinieerd als kunst in de openbare ruimte, maakt deel uit van het stedelijke weefsel, werkt als een stedelijk knooppunt (Sennett 2018) en is oprecht publiek toegankelijk. Het vormt en wordt gevormd door wat mensen doen in de openbare ruimte. Vandaar dat als we de relaties rond openbare kunstwerken als een 'contrastmiddel' beschouwen, een deel van het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte wordt benadrukt. Het meest interessante aspect van openbare kunst is de transformerende kracht ervan voor voorbijgangers, burgers, toeristen, belastingbetalers, die - niet altijd doelbewust - ervan genieten, of het consumeren. In dit opzicht is openbare kunst vergelijkbaar met infrastructurele middelen, met externe effecten waarbij zowel gebruikers als niet-gebruikers zijn betrokken.

Vier ervaringen van kunst in de openbare ruimte worden onderzocht om te begrijpen hoe openbare kunst functioneert en wat het kan vertellen over het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte. De verkenning omvat: *I am Queen Mary* (2018) door Jeannette Ehlers en LaVaughn Belle in Kopenhagen, *Carmela* (2016) door Jaume Plensa in Barcelona, *Triumphs and Laments* (2016) door William Kentridge in Rome en *Santa Claus* (2005/2008) door Paul McCarthy in Rotterdam. De vier kunstwerken worden onderzocht via verschillende kwalitatieve methoden: in situ observatie op

basis van openbare kunststudies van het Gehl Institute, doelgerichte sampling en sneeuwbal sampling in interviews (Bryman 2012), en een vergelijking met media-pers en persberichten. De ervaringen laten zien dat de verscheidenheid aan relaties die kunnen plaatsvinden cruciaal is in de openbare ruimte die rondom een openbaar kunstwerk vormt. Toeristen, bewoners, stadsgebruikers en zelfs huisdieren vinden in de openbare ruimte iets belangrijks voor hen, waarvan de realisatie vaak toevallig gebeurt. Dit maakt het mogelijk om te begrijpen wat een relationele commons precies is.

Daarom biedt dit proefschrift een nieuwe interpretatie van het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte en draagt het tegelijkertijd bij aan de nieuwste ontwikkelingen van de theorie van de commons. Dit heeft betrekking op de relationele aspecten van dit soort bronnen, en benadrukt de actie van het maken van de commons als een sociale praktijk (Euler 2018). Op dit moment mist een specifieke conceptualisering daarvan. Door middel van het voorbijstreven economische notie van publieke goederen, en het adopteren van een waarde gebaseerde analyse, wordt een concept van rationele commons ontwikkeld met het doel om de ware vindingsrijkheid van het sociale leven in de publieke ruimte te begrijpen. Het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte is belangrijk voor de structuur van relaties die zich daarin kunnen voordoen, doen of zullen voordoen. Dit en de manier waarop deze relaties door mensen worden geproduceerd en toegeëigend, en het belang van externe overeenkomsten, vormen de relationele commons. In dit verband is de gemeenschappelijke bron de relaties en zijn de ‘gewone mensen’ de gebruikers van de openbare ruimte: voorbijgangers, bewoners, stadsgebruikers, belastingbetalers. De waarde wordt gecreëerd door de gebruikers van de openbare ruimte in samenhang met de fysieke ruimte en haar externe providers.

Door zich te concentreren op openbare kunst levert dit proefschrift ook een bijdrage aan het veld van openbare kunststudies. Het idee van relationele commons past goed bij de bijzondere status van kunst in de openbare ruimte, en het blijkt nuttig te zijn om volledig te begrijpen hoe de waarde van openbare kunst wordt gecreëerd en genoten. Dergelijke conclusies lijken ook veelbelovend voor meer conventionele artistieke instellingen zoals musea, omdat ze in toenemende mate geïnteresseerd zijn in outreach-activiteiten (Krause Knight en Senie 2018, Bollati en Morea 2020).

De toegenomen aandacht voor nieuwe collectieve manieren om middelen te besturen, getuigt van een algemeen pleidooi, zowel op academisch gebied als in de praktijk, om de economie als ingebed in cultuur te heroverwegen en uiteindelijk het alomtegenwoordige idee van *homo oeconomicus* te overwinnen. Het overkoepelende doel van dit proefschrift is om bij te dragen aan dit discours. Het doel is om een interpretatie van het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte te bieden die nuttig is voor mensen, en die in de praktijk niet alleen het recht kan geven om bij te dragen aan de stad, maar ook de verantwoordelijkheid om dit te doen. Instrumenteel redeneren leidt tot waardeverlies wanneer het de wereld reduceert tot markttransacties. In plaats daarvan, wat te zien is in het sociale leven in de openbare ruimte, is wat er gebeurt van A tot B van belang, zelfs als het niet wordt vastgelegd door de standardeconomie, en het is vaak het leukste gedeelte.

Sintesi

Il presente lavoro è incentrato sulla vita sociale nello spazio pubblico e ne offre una concettualizzazione come risorsa collettiva, utilizzando in particolare il caso dell'arte pubblica. Per 'vita sociale' si intende quella che si sviluppa negli spazi pubblici delle città e il suo costruito (Gehl 1971). Incontri, momenti, sociabilità e persino l'atmosfera sono ciò che costituisce la vita sociale nello spazio pubblico (Simmel e Hughes 1949; Lefebvre 1996; Miles 1997; Borch e Kornberger 2016).

Eppure, lo spazio pubblico è un ambito da significati e interpretazioni controversi. È naturalmente teatro della continua lotta per il diritto alla città (Mitchell 2017), un fenomeno ricorrente e infiammato da processi come la commodificazione dello spazio pubblico e l'estrema messa in sicurezza di quest'ultimo nel nome della smart city, così come l'emergere di spazi pubblici immateriali come quello digitale. Anche per queste ragioni, lo spazio pubblico resta importante per la società, come confermano recenti riconoscimenti di questo tra i fondamentali pilastri per uno sviluppo urbano sostenibile (Nazioni Unite, 2019).

Queste considerazioni permettono di interpretare lo spazio pubblico, ovvero in maniera più specifica la vita sociale che avviene nello spazio pubblico, come una risorsa per le persone. Di conseguenza, la domanda di ricerca si interroga su come la vita sociale nello spazio pubblico sia prodotta, contestata e sostenuta, attraverso un lavoro esplorativo e teorico e genuinamente interdisciplinare, che attraversa le discipline dell'economia, dell'economia della cultura, della geografia, della sociologia, della storia dell'arte e dell'urbanistica.

Per una considerevole parte dei miei studi *post lauream*, mi sono concentrata sull'arte pubblica, e più precisamente sull'arte (contemporanea) nello spazio pubblico. Ben presto, tuttavia, e coerentemente con il mio ambito disciplinare di appartenenza di economia della cultura e una predilezione per lo studio delle dinamiche urbane, dallo studio dell'arte pubblica è scaturita l'idea che l'unicità di questo tipo di interventi sia profondamente connessa a ciò che accade, ovvero le relazioni tra gli individui, attorno all'opera. Alla luce di ciò, il caso dell'arte pubblica supporta e arricchisce la domanda di ricerca: cosa può dire l'arte pubblica della vita sociale nello spazio pubblico?

L'esplorazione si sviluppa attraverso quattro sotto-domande di ricerca le cui risposte, insieme, contribuiscono alla risposta per la domanda principale. La prima di queste è finalizzata all'elaborazione di un quadro teorico di riferimento che permetta di analizzare la vita sociale nello spazio pubblico dalla prospettiva disciplinare

dell'economia della cultura. Una prima ricognizione evidenzia come la teoria economica abbia relegato a una residuale categoria di anomalie l'analisi di alcuni beni, che invece sono importanti per gli individui e rilevanti per l'economia stessa. Secondo questa prospettiva, risulta inappropriato posizionare la vita sociale nello spazio pubblico nella anomala categoria dei beni pubblici. Quel che invece sembra pertinente, è inquadrala nell'ambito dei commons. Tuttavia, sia la nozione di commons tradizionali sia la più specifica classificazione dei commons culturali e urbani non sembrano essere applicabili *in toto* alla vita sociale nello spazio pubblico. Sebbene la dottrina riconosca diffusamente la crucialità dell'aspetto relazionale dei commons, un approccio chiaro che valorizzi questo aspetto essenziale sembra ancora assente. A partire da questo, appare fondamentale intraprendere un'analisi che individui innanzitutto cosa sia la vita sociale nello spazio pubblico e come funzioni, per comprendere di che tipo di risorsa collettiva si tratti.

Di conseguenza, la seconda sotto-domanda della tesi approfondisce il concetto di vita sociale nello spazio pubblico. Contributi da una varietà di discipline, quali la sociologia urbana, l'urbanistica e la geografia, evidenziano in maniera chiara che la più importante caratteristica della vita sociale nello spazio pubblico è l'interconnessione dei due elementi che costituiscono la risorsa stessa, ovvero la vita sociale e lo spazio pubblico. Tale tratto corrobora l'applicazione, per lo meno in via provvisoria, della teoria dei commons (Ostrom 1990). Ciò che emerge da tale associazione è che gli individui giocano un ruolo peculiare in questo contesto. Essi beneficiano della presenza, così come dell'assenza, di altri e le interazioni tra individui sono di fatto la ricchezza dello spazio pubblico. La vita sociale nello spazio pubblico mostra, perciò, tratti di produzione e appropriazione collettive e, inoltre, di interdipendenza di ruoli. Ancora, il ruolo delle istituzioni e dell'azione pubblica si dimostra essenziale per il funzionamento del sistema 'vita sociale nello spazio pubblico' e i connessi problemi di appropriazione e fornitura. Semplicemente, la vita sociale nello spazio pubblico funziona come un commons. Tuttavia, un'applicazione supina della teoria dei commons tradizionali non risulta adeguata senza aggiustamenti, in quanto alcune differenze emergono, come già emerso dalla preliminare ricognizione della letteratura. Per questa ragione, la tesi propone la formulazione un nuovo concetto in linea con il quadro teorico e le peculiarità della vita sociale nello spazio pubblico: il commons relazionale. Questo inedito tipo di commons si riferisce alla particolarità della risorsa in oggetto, ovvero il reticolo di relazioni e pratiche che di fatto costituisce la vita sociale nello spazio pubblico.

A questo punto, il caso dell'arte pubblica acquista rilevanza ai fini della comprensione del concetto di commons relazionale. La terza sotto-domanda, infatti, si concentra su qual è il ruolo dell'arte pubblica rispetto alla vita sociale nello spazio pubblico e alla sua lettura in senso di risorsa collettiva. L'arte pubblica, che in questa tesi è definita pragmaticamente come arte nello spazio pubblico urbano, è parte del tessuto urbano, funziona come nodo (Sennett 2018) e genuinamente non presenta barriere all'accesso. Essa condiziona ed è condizionata dai comportamenti degli individui che vi si imbattono. Per questo, l'arte pubblica può servire lo scopo dell'analisi come un 'agente di contrasto' in grado di evidenziare una parte della vita sociale nello spazio pubblico, ovvero quelle relative alle interazioni con l'opera. Il più interessante aspetto dell'arte pubblica è, probabilmente, il suo potere trasformativo

su passanti, cittadini, turisti, contribuenti, i quali ne beneficiano, o la consumano, e non necessariamente di proposito. In questo senso, l'arte pubblica può essere paragonata alle risorse infrastrutturali (Frischmann 2012), da cui scaturiscono esternalità che coinvolgono sia gli utenti sia i non utenti.

Per comprendere in che modo l'arte pubblica possa illuminare la comprensione del funzionamento della vita sociale nello spazio pubblico, sono state prese in considerazione quattro esperienze di arte nello spazio pubblico. Esse sono: *I am Queen Mary* (2018) di Jeannette Ehlers e LaVaughn Belle a Copenhagen, *Carmela* (2016) di Jaume Plensa a Barcelona, *Triumphs and Laments* (2016) di William Kentridge a Roma e infine *Santa Claus* (2005/2008) di Paul McCarthy a Rotterdam. Le quattro opere d'arte sono analizzate attraverso diversi metodi qualitativi: osservazioni *in situ* sulla base dei format di studio sulla vita pubblica del Gehl Institute, interviste di tipo *purposive sampling* e *snowball* (Bryman 2012) e un paragone con informazioni tratte dai media e comunicati stampa sia online sia offline. Le esperienze mostrano che ciò che davvero costituisce lo spazio pubblico, in questi casi quello attorno a un'opera d'arte, è la varietà di relazioni che qui possono dipanarsi. Turisti, residenti, utenti urbani e persino animali trovano nello spazio pubblico qualcosa di importante, che si realizza spesso in maniera casuale. Questo permette finalmente di comprendere in maniera concreta il senso della nozione di commons relazionale.

Pertanto, la presente tesi offre un'interpretazione innovativa della vita sociale nello spazio pubblico e, al contempo, contribuisce allo stato dell'arte della teoria dei commons, che sottolinea sempre di più gli aspetti relazionali di queste particolari risorse e stressa l'azione del fare il commons come una pratica sociale (Euler 2018), ma che pure manca di una specifica concettualizzazione di tale tendenza. Superando la nozione economica di bene pubblico e adottando un'analisi basata sulla molteplicità dei valori, il concetto di commons relazionale è sviluppato col fine di afferrare e valorizzare la capacità della vita sociale nello spazio pubblico di essere una risorsa per le persone. Essa è infatti importante grazie al reticolo di relazioni che qui possono svilupparsi, si sviluppano e si svilupperanno. Questo, assieme al modo in cui le relazioni sono prodotte e consumate dagli individui e all'importanza di intese con attori esterni quali le istituzioni, è ciò che costituisce il commons relazionale. In tale contesto, la risorsa collettiva è costituita dalle relazioni e coloro che compongono il commons sono gli utenti dello spazio pubblico: passanti, residenti, utenti urbani, contribuenti. Il valore è creato da chi usa lo spazio pubblico in connessione con il modo in cui esso è costruito e il modo in cui ne è gestita la fornitura.

Attraverso il caso dell'arte pubblica, questo lavoro offre un contributo anche al campo d'indagine ad essa relativo. La nozione di commons relazionale si adegua in maniera calzante al peculiare status dell'arte nello spazio pubblico e si dimostra utile nel comprendere appieno come avvengono l'estrazione e la fruizione del valore dall'arte pubblica. Queste conclusioni appaiono promettenti anche nell'ottica di una possibile applicazione di questi a contesti artistici più convenzionali, quali i musei, in linea con la tendenza a intraprendere strategie che li portano a 'uscire' dal loro contenitore tradizionale (Krause Knight e Senie 2018, Bollati e Morea 2020).

Il crescente interesse per nuovi modi collettivi di governare alcune risorse combacia con una generale tendenza, sia in campo accademico sia in pratica, a ripensare la

scienza economica come naturalmente parte della cultura e, in finale, a superare l'ubiquità del concetto di *homo oeconomicus*. Ciò detto, l'obiettivo d'insieme di questo lavoro è contribuire a questa conversazione. Di conseguenza, esso cerca di offrire una teorizzazione della vita sociale nello spazio pubblico che sia utile per le persone e che, nella pratica, possa sostanziarsi nell'attribuzione non soltanto del diritto di contribuire al commons ma anche della responsabilità di tale contribuzione. La ragione strumentale porta con sé una perdita di valori quando riduce il mondo a una questione di transazioni di mercato. Piuttosto, come è possibile denotare per la vita sociale nello spazio pubblico, quello che accade a un punto a un altro, da A a B, anche se non catturato dall'economia tradizionale, conta e, molto spesso, è la parte più bella.

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