Public Art Today. How Public Art Sheds Light on the Future of the Theory of Commons

Valeria Morea

Abstract

Public art and common goods, although belonging to apparently distant realms of inquiry, share a long history and, inevitably, an evolving meaning. This chapter investigates the evolution of the practice of public art with the objective to obtain a viable understanding of how the value of public art is produced today. With a focus on the future of public art, this chapter investigates three public art cases. The results of the qualitative analysis of these public art experiences are interpreted from an institutional economics perspective. The combination of public art and the theory of commons sheds light on what seems to be the most important attributes of common goods in the current debate, that is the social practices that constitute the act of making the commons.

1 Introduction: What is Public Art Today?

The 'commons' is an ancient term that dates back to about eight centuries ago with Magna Carta and the Charter of Forests and indicates something 'out there', where the common men could find a way to make a living, in contrast with the rampant practice of enclosures perpetrated by royal and aristocratic families over time (Standing 2019). The commons is a resourceful space, with no enclosure yet exposed to the behaviours of differently interested users.

In such a potentially free and open space, also art can be found. Many 'out there' can be found in today's multilayered society: the urban setting has placed out the rural areas and the forests, and the digital space challenges the physical one. With

V. Morea (✉)
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: morea@eshcc.eur.nl

this respect, the commons is a concept that is older than both private and public goods. Hence, it seems worthwhile to explore it further in order to understand how commons will look like in the future. Standing (2019) discusses public art as a commons, mainly referring to spontaneous, non-institutional and to some extent subversive artistic practices in public places such as street art and graffiti art. It is, in fact, after being released in the commons that some art becomes commodified and turned into a private good, being Banksy the epitome of such a phenomenon. However, a look on the way public art works today shows some differences with the type of public art we have get used to throughout the centuries.

This chapter argues that today's public art is more similar to the ancestral artistic endeavours than ever and that this makes it feasible to adopt an institutional economics perspective that takes into consideration the commons as something 'out there' that lets individuals play a central role in the realisation of their values. In an attempt to understand the way public art works, this chapter endeavours to apply the theory of commons to public art and, in doing so, it aims to go beyond the mere categorisation of art practices in terms of static characteristics. Instead, dynamic effects are possible to take into consideration when looking at the process that constitutes the life of public art.

2   A Glimpse of Public Art in History

In the beginning, there was public art. In 1940, at Lascaux in France, what is considered the very first artwork in history was discovered (Gombrich 1950). What is even more interesting is that those mural paintings that date back to the Palaeolithic Age, are in facts the earliest example of an art that is public (Standing 2019). In some respects, one could say that public art is even older than non-public art. Or, contentiously, that there is no such thing as public art at all.

With no urge to solve such a dispute, a note certainly worth reading is that over a time as long as humanity, public art has covered different roles in history. Hein maintains that "strictly speaking, no art is 'private'" (Hein 1996, p. 1), mainly because the dichotomy private versus public has changed meanings over time, and with it, the idea that the artist is autonomous. This was hardly the case before the Renaissance, for example, when the artists were not asked to express their artistic or aesthetic vision: "The celebrated treasures of Greece and Rome, as well as the Christian works of the Middle Ages and the age of the fresco that succeeded them, do not exalt the private vision of individual artists so much as they bespeak the shared values and convictions of cultural communities, and are accordingly to be found in those edifices and open places where people regularly gather to commemorate those same values and convictions" (ibidem, p. 2).

The values of the private and the public have evolved over time and so autonomy of (artistic) expression. The public realm was much more central in ancient Greeks and Romans' lives, as well as during the Middle Ages than today. During those times, when art was generally financed by patrons and the boundaries

between public and private were not understood as we would today, fora, statuaries, altars or equestrian statues were genuinely public. They were "a visual form, an anthem, or a text" that expressed "its deepest values or unify a coherent social group", something that today "has become a relic of romantic history" (ivi).

Beyond a distinction between private and public inspired by Habermas and Arendt's philosophy (Deutsche 1992; Zebracki 2013; Krause Knight and Senie 2016), art, over time, has been used as a tool of affirmation, of control and authority. Secular and religious powers have exerted consensus and authority using art. Facades, sidewalks and arcades were built and decorated by private affluent families seeking affirmation (Romano 2007). Obelisks collected from 'uncivilised' or conquered cultures were arranged in wide-open public spaces to be symbols of Western colonial power (Hein 1996).

Civic and national powers have, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, expressed themselves using monuments, in a style that has been defined 'propaganda' public art (Appleton 2006). Art was used as a means to convey political messages from democracies to totalitarian states. The nature of such art is inherently public. Examples of art as propaganda are statues, monuments, architecture at large and even landscape. In Monteverde (Rome), one can find a social housing complex whose buildings shape a fascist lettering. Similarly, Monte Pietralata near the city of Urbino has been shaped to portrait Mussolini's profile. An Italian law states that the 2% of public investments in buildings should be allotted to the public art project. As a result, during Fascism, some artists have felt the pressure of pleasing the regimen with their art when financed within this law (Margozzi 2001).

Both democracies and totalitarian states have used art to express secular powers, and by the same token, revolutions have underpinned the destruction of such art to express a counterfactual or opposite message, as it is the case of, on the one hand, Mexican muralism, and on the other hand, the popular manifestation of revolutionary forces symbolised by the fall of totalitarian symbols of power such as Saddam Hussein in Iraq (Arnoldi 2016). Moreover, religious powers have fostered the arts throughout all history. Since, or even before, the donation of Sutri, the Papacy has played the role of a secular state, one whose public expenditure in the arts would probably make modern countries blush.

The idea that public art is something else than just art is a relatively recent one. Spatiality has been challenged by some, who have questioned whether art needs in fact a public space to be public. So, while the search for the ultimate definition of public art still has to end, Cartiere and Willis have identified some key attributes of public art. Art is public when, alternatively: (1) sits in a publicly accessible space; (2) is of public interest with respect to the contents; (3) is used or maintained by a community, making the case for the creation of a public place; or (4) is publicly funded (Cartiere and Willis 2008).

Hence, it is possible to identify that what is peculiar in this context is that some types of artistic expressions exert a special interest that has social resonance. Concepts of place, communities, public interest, public funds deal necessarily with the public realm. This type of art is public art. New genre public art (Lacy 1995) is

considered to be a milestone in the history of public art. Such a new trend has put shared values at the core of the artistic practice and, in doing so, the idea of public art has been pushed further. This highly community-oriented way of making public art may bear the downside of creating a new enclosure that is comparable to the concept of 'third place' as theorised by Oldenburg and Brisset (1982). New genre public art entails project based on activism, participation and social engagement, where co-creation and directedness become a key element of a modern approach to public art (Lacy 1995). In addition to that, the banner of public art has been also fed by non-institutionalised forms of art in public space, such as graffiti and street art (Bengtsen 2013). These relatively new expressions have acquired importance and have evolved in a way that has challenged its subversive essence.

3   Three Cases of Today's (and Tomorrow's) Public Art

Today's institutional public art, at least in western societies, has come to a turning point. People do not receive one unilateral message, as it could have been the case with monuments. They negotiate and produce meanings that directly contribute to the value of the artwork. Moreover, the artworks are relevant insofar as they take part in the urban fabric.

Three cases have been investigated to highlight the key elements of today's public art functioning. With the objective of understanding the role that public art plays in the contemporary local context, the experiences selected are relatively recent, being installed between 2008 and 2018, and little to no previous research has been carried about them. The artworks belong to European capital or second cities, so that a certain degree of homogeneity of context could be achieved. Each of the cases, selected because exemplary (Farquhar 2012), teaches a specific lesson that highlights how public art becomes part of the urban fabric in today's social life of cities. The investigation is based on snowball, unstructured interviews and non-participant observations (Bryman 2012) carried out between spring and autumn 2019. The eight interviewees are persons who hold a stake in the project of installation of the artworks or in the location of installation; they are two museum employees, a civil servant, two activists, two artists and a real estate developer. The information acquired has then been triangulated to secondary data available on websites and newspapers.

(i)   **Controversy in Rotterdam: Santa Claus**

Among the symbols of the industrial Rotterdam is a 5 metres tall bronze sculpture that portrays a gnome holding something similar to a Christmas tree. The statue, commissioned to American artist Paul McCarthy by the municipality of Rotterdam in the early 2000s, under the advice of Sculpture International, has brought controversy since the first maquette was unveiled. The statue is, in fact, the depiction of a gnome that looks like a Santa Claus holding a giant sex toy. The composition

symbolises the contemporary consumerist system, idiosyncratic of the spirit of Christmas' rush to shopping, that tricks and captures society inescapably.

The issue with the sculpture arose when its very explicit shape was unveiled. It seemed that nobody wanted Santa Claus to be placed anywhere in town. Finally, it was decided that the museum Boijmans Van Beuningen would host it in its courtyard. This decision was somehow a failure: the artwork was commissioned to be exposed in a public space of the city. The courtyard of the museum is accessible only to ticket payers. However, the tall gnome was fated to stay there for a short period. In fact, at that time some ferment was occurring in Nieuwe Binnenweg, a neighbourhood not far from the museum, where a newly established organisation of local shopkeepers was trying to revitalise the area. The spokespersons of the organisation saw in Santa Claus an opportunity. Their goal was to make their neighbourhood thrive, both socially and economically. They lobbied with several formal and informal actions to get the statue placed in their area. Their argument was twofold: on the one hand, they saw the opportunity of a new sculpture as a tool of urban regeneration, that would bring spillover to the surrounding economy, and hence help make the community stronger. On the other hand, the message brought by Santa Claus was one against multinational corporation and globalisation of tastes, consumption and production. Instead, Nieuwe Binnenweg's local economy was, and still is, composed of small and family business: somehow they could embrace the same ideals of Santa Claus and certainly they felt not threatened by them.

For three years, the shopkeepers association carried out several actions aimed at co-opting Santa Claus in their desired location. They organised campaigns in the shop windows, street festivals and other guerrilla actions. They used actively public space as a resource to spread their cause and convince other people to support it. In 2008, after three years of negotiations, the shopkeepers managed to bring the statue in Eendrachtsplein.

Santa Claus is now a 'must-see' of the city of Rotterdam. Locally, since the beginning of the bottom-up endeavour of revitalisation, Nieuwe Binnenweg has developed significantly and it is counted as the hippest area of the city today, with real estate pricing rising and a clearly visible hipster-mania going on. On a wider scale, the statue has not just symbolised the development and consequent gentrification of the neighbourhood, Santa Claus has become idiosyncratic of the spirit of the whole city: sardonic, pragmatic, future-oriented.

(ii) **Urban Design in Barcelona: Carmela**

In San Pere, right next to the Palau de la Musica Catalana, lies the iron sculpture of a face. It is Carmela, a common name for an ideal Mediterranean beauty. It first has appeared in 2016, as a part of a four-pieces exhibition of the Catalan artist Jaume Plensa, hosted by Palau de la Musica. The exhibition was meant to stay no more than four months but when the deadline was approaching, some started a campaign to keep the statue there for a longer time. A petition was launched online by a

resident of the area. The main argument was a very simple yet sufficient one: the statue had been able to change the space into an agreeable, pleasant, worthy to stop in place.

The local authorities underpinned the initiative and soon an agreement was achieved between the municipality of Barcelona and the artist. The statue is now on long term loan; the owner of the statue, the artist, does not get a compensation but the municipality must take financially care of the maintenance. The impact is visible on the narrow local dimension of the intersection where Carmela is.

Thanks to Carmela, now Placa de Luis Millet has acquired a dignity of its own. It is now worthwhile for both tourists and locals to spend time here. The space works differently, better, on at least two levels. On the one hand, Carmela is an element of urban design. In particular, its base is used as a bench and interacts with the existing benches next to it. People 'use' Carmela to have a break and sit down. Eventually, the rounded shape of the bench is also conducive of social interactions. This leads to a second level of impact. The aesthetic attributes of Carmela work as a real device for engagement in the space.

Carmela has a very peculiar figure. In fact, its three-dimensional shape has been adapted from the scan of a photograph. The outcome is a very accentuated 3D effect, in which the shape of the face strongly depends on the point of view. This feature makes Carmela highly interactive. People are curious about its forms and get surprised to see how the image builds when walking around it. As a result, the space is not an intersection anymore, yet it is not just a nice spot to have a break. It is actually interesting to stay here. The new place, as Carmela enables it, entails now necessary, optional, and purposively social activities (Gehl 1971), that can be observed in public space.

(iii)   **Representation in Copenhagen: I am Queen Mary**

In March 2018, the prototype of a tall statue of an unknown queen has been unveiled in Larsens Plads, Copenhagen's waterfront, just on the way to the unmissable Little Mermaid. The statue depicts Queen Mary, a former slave from the Virgin Islands, who, in 1879, triggered a revolt in the Danish colony to fight for fair treatment of former slaves workers, uprising that eventually led to the liberation of the Virgin Islands from Denmark.

The news from all over the globe have titled the appearance of Queen Mary as Denmark's first statue of a black woman, implying that the statue was a national project. Instead, this public artwork was an initiative of the two artists Jeannette Ehlers and La Vaughn Belle; the lack of public support explains the fact that the statute is currently a prototype. The project originated from the artists' dissatisfaction for the lack of public discourse around Demark's colonial past. Ironically, their thoughts were confirmed by the public bodies' renitence to support their proposal for a monument about Queen Mary.

Nonetheless, the artist duo managed to find the support of SMK, thanks to its curator Henrik Holm. The museum is a rich collection of cast copies of sculpture from the whole western history of civilisation. But the most crucial fact is that the collection is hosted in the former warehouse where the goods imported from the colonies were first stocked. Also, here is where Queen Mary, imprisoned after the infamous "fireburn" was brought before being imprisoned in Christianshavn's prison. It is in front of this building that I am Queen Mary lies and its collocation in such a meaningful place was possible thanks to the artists' alliance with SMK's curator, who fought to obtain the concession for the sculpture to be installed here.

The presence of Queen Mary has substantiated the discourse about colonisation, lurking in the public realm. While the space has not drastically changed, the statue has changed various patterns of the use of the city. After a couple of demonstrations held by far right-wing deniers against the installation of Queen Mary, the statue has entered tour guides and it has become the gathering point of minority groups such as Black Lives Matter Denmark, that feel now finally represented thanks to a work of art that so explicitly tackles issues that are so relevant—not just—to them.

4 Discussion: An Institutional Economics Perspective on Public Art

Public art has evolved over the centuries. Although the social element has always been central in public art, from graffiti in caves to giant mirroring beans in the metropolis, today's art in public space has gained a new aspect, not just social, rather relational. In fact, what seems to be peculiar of the last decades' public art is that its functioning implies interaction with its recipients, either free or forced-riders.

The value of today's public art is not entirely the message, rather the conversation. Four main areas of impact can be looked at in order to interpret the selected cases. They are the type of the initiative, the intrinsic features for the artwork, the use of the space and the image acquired. These areas entail the virtual trajectory of an artwork in public space that is influenced by the way meanings evolve within them.

The **type of initiative** is the beginning of the artwork. Street art has, traditionally, a marked bottom-up initiative, whereas an equestrian bronze is the most sublime form of top-down initiative. The four cases belong to mixed styles of initiative and nonetheless the ways they have been proposed and promoted still exert a cascade of impacts on the lives of the artworks.

The **intrinsic features** of an artwork are connected to its artistic qualities, such as the style, the genre, the specific meanings, and the messages conveyed, or even the technical features chosen. Most of the times these features are intertwined. Richard Serra's Tilted Arc encountered problems mainly due to its intrinsic features, namely the cumbersome size of the arc and the artistic intention that this

choice carried, that is to change the space and consequently draw attention to the atmosphere of the square (Balfe and Wyszomirski 1986; Kelly 1996).

The **use of the space** can be a consequence of the other areas of interpretation of a public artwork. In the famous case of Tilted Arc, the intrinsic features of the piece had huge consequences on the use of the space that was considered unbearable by its users, so that eventually the piece had to be removed. On a general note, it can be safely stated that the ambition of public art is to change the use of the surrounding space. Even in the turbulent case of Tilted Arc, Richard Serra said that the artwork meant to change the space and its removal is in fact a proof of the impact of that (Kelly 1996).

However, the life of today's public art is not limited to influencing its surroundings. Instead, a prominent role is played by those surroundings that, on different extents yet inevitably, do change the artwork. The **image of the artwork** is to be meant as the latest 'result' of the public art project and the negotiation of its meanings. Seldom the result is to be considered definitive, being the social life of public spaces evolutionary in nature. An abstract object of art could pass unnoticed without acquiring a particularly large resonance, as it is the case of Søren Georg Jensen's abstract piece close to I am Queen Mary[1]. The image of artwork can depend or influence the use of the space, it can be reflected by the nickname and can eventually have a positive or negative impact on the urban fabric and the local economy.

Each of the public art experiences investigated sheds light on how public art functions today. The cases can be analysed based on the four aforementioned areas. The installation of each artwork begins with a project initiative and gradually entails the intrinsic features of the piece. Only once the recipients of the artwork enter the discussion, that is, when the artworks are put on public display, the negotiations of meanings begins, with implications on the image acquired and the use of the space where the artwork sits (Senie 1992).

Santa Claus was commissioned by the municipality of Rotterdam advised by the public art organisation of the city. The original intention was to enrich the collection of public artworks of the city with a strikingly controversial piece. However, a strong push back was given to this first intention by the public opinion. Nonetheless, the group of shopkeepers subverted the original initiative and, along with it, the intrinsic features of the artwork. A negotiated public artwork has resulted after Santa Claus was installed in Eendtrachtsplein. The outcry was not so smoothly put down, as observed by Zebracki (2012), and it took some time before the statue was adopted by the surroundings. Eventually, such an adoption resulted in an increased importance of Santa Claus in terms of image. It is now regarded as a symbol of the city, due to its allusive intrinsic feature, but also because its installation coincided with the beginning of a gentrification process of the whole area. This resulted in changes in the way the space is now used. Pedestrian flows are redrawn around the statue, that is, included in touristic tours but also used as a

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[1]On the same location of I am Queen Mary, an abstract, untitled marble sculpture by Danish artist Søren Georg Jensen sits since 1979.

reference point by many. What has started as a great controversy seems to have turned into a clever adoption of the polemic Santa Claus by first, a group of interest, then a local community and eventually the whole city and its touristic patterns.

In Barcelona, Carmela was introduced to a space that was no more than a stalemate. Here, the intriguing intrinsic feature of the statue favours a playful experience for passers-by, resulting in a mutated use of the space. Now, with Carmela, the intersection is not a deadlock anymore. People are surprised and engaged by the statue, and they end up staying more time in the space. Comparatively to Santa Claus, the relationship between the areas in interpretation is inverted, insofar the initiative is the result of a visible impact of the installation, initially meant to be temporary, on the space. In fact, the local community of neighbours started a petition for the statue to remain after the end of the exhibition of which it was a part because they could see the difference in the space. It can be concluded that Carmela has been an intelligent operation of urban design carried out by a visual artist.

Unlike the significant impact that Carmela has had on the use of the space, I am Queen Mary has impacted more prominently other areas. In fact, while Larsens Plads has not changed much in terms of pedestrian flows, the statue has had a grand impact on the public realm at large. The initiative that has led to Queen Mary's installation originates from the artists' intention to bring the topic of colonisation in the public realm. In order to do that, they have used public space as a means to diffuse their message, conveyed by the intrinsic feature of Queen Mary and what she represents. The lack of institutional support did not prevent a public discourse about Denmark's colonial past to be triggered. The image of the statue is possibly the most impacted of the areas of interpretation, and it goes together with the intrinsic feature of it. Queen Mary has literally done what the lettering of the informative sign promises, she speaks to many resistance movements and claims a space to challenge the historical narrative.

The three experiences of public art scrutinised offer an understanding of the way art in public space works today. Unlike the art as propaganda, beautification and regeneration (Appleton 2006), today's public art depends heavily on the continuous exchange and negotiation of meanings among the art, its surroundings and the individuals, users, taxpayers, free- and forced-riders. A further question arises after this investigation. How to interpret the process of meaning and values creation, simply put the functioning, of public art in a way that is comprehensive of the contribution of all the actors of the process and at the same time applicable in practice?

A possible answer is found in the theoretical framework of institutional economics and the adoption of the framework of the commons. From the experiences considered, it can be noted that the value of public art is generated socially. Art in public space triggers conversations and shared practices (Klamer 2017), of which the artwork is no more than an important participant. Carmela in Barcelona has activated a space that is now convivial, sociability is favoured yet not univocally provided by the statue. Similarly, Queen Mary in Copenhagen, has been used as a means to substantiate a public discourse that, as a conversation, is constantly

nurtured and challenged by the participants. Moreover, people are aware of their relative power to start a conversation and to benefit from an existing one, as it was the case of Santa Claus in Rotterdam.

These evidences allow for an interpretation grounded in the theory of commons as made popular by Elinor Ostrom (1990), and the Institutional Analysis and Development framework, but also in light of the developments of the theory that have embraced intangibility and non-rivalry as essential attributes of cultural commons (Ostrom and Hess 2007; Bertacchini et al. 2012). This is possible because of the infrastructural features of public art, as emerged from the experiences analysed.

Drawing from Frischmann (2012), an infrastructural resource: "(1) may be consumed nonrivalrously for some appreciable range of demand. (2) Social demand for the resource is driven primarily by downstream productive activities that require the resource as an input. (3) The resource may be used as an input into a wide range of goods and services, which may include private goods, public goods and social goods" (Frischmann 2012, 61).

In other terms, the demand for art in public space derives from the activities, the practices and the negotiation of meanings that the installation of an artwork implies. Public art is, at least to some extent, an input. In the case of Santa Claus, it has worked as an input for the development of the community and the local economy. In Barcelona, Carmela has turned a space into a place, and this was the driver of the collective action aimed at keeping the statue there.

This, hence implies that an infrastructure is a shared resource. And the other side of the coin of the potential non-rivalry is that the users contribute to the resource. As Frischmann puts it: "Users determine what to do with the capabilities that infrastructure(s) provide. Genericness [i.e. the fact that they can be used as an input to different downstream outputs] implies a range of capabilities, options, opportunities, choices, freedoms" (Frischmann 2012, 65). This is the case of what happens with public artworks, whose functioning depends on the genericness of the activities of its recipients, that are the city's users. In fact, "Users choose their activities; they can choose to experiment, to innovate, to roam freely (…) Ultimately, the value of an infrastructure resource is realised by producers and consumers of these outputs" (Frischmann 2012, 65). As a consequence, if these aspects are leveraged, the opportunity of maximisation of the externalities is taken.

Art, when put in a public space, becomes part of the built environment. This characteristic makes it comparable to Frischmann's environmental infrastructures. In fact, following the dynamics of infrastructural resources, the urban fabric absorbs the artwork, that becomes an urban node (Sennett 2018). However, the role that public art plays in the environmental context in which it is posed does not only deal with tangible attributes of the urban experience. While Carmela, in Barcelona, has become an urban node on a predominantly physical level, I am Queen Mary, in Copenhagen, triggers a discourse about colonialism that mainly happens elsewhere, on newspapers or social media and Santa Claus, in Rotterdam, has been holistically adopted as a symbol of the city. Nonetheless, in both cases, art "stops you, makes you think and perhaps represents something that you feel or believe" (Appleton 2006, 68). This means that art in public space, playing the role of an urban node,

works as an intellectual infrastructure,[2] defined as a cultural environment that deals with information, community making and socialisation (Frischmann 2012). These types of infrastructure are particular because a distinction between inputs and outputs is hardly possible: it takes an idea to create new ideas.

Hence, acknowledging public art's character of mixed infrastructure seems to be useful to understand today's public art functioning and, as a consequence, the way it can be governed. In fact, the value of public art is generated within the process of its 'consumption'. The commission or the installation of an artwork in public space is no more than just the beginning of its life. As all other goods, also artworks have a biography (Kopytoff 1986).

This process can be interpreted as a common resource. The actors of the commons at hand, based on the Institutional Analysis and Development framework (Ostrom 1990; Hess and Ostrom 2003 and Hess 2007, 2008, 2012), are: (1) the providers, in this case, the artists, the government, the art institutions whose role is to provide the conditions for the resource to exist through external arrangements; (3) the producers, who *make* the commons and *are* the citizens, the tourists and the city users at large; and finally (4) the consumers, who, in fact, as in the case of intellectual infrastructures and cultural commons, are difficult to distinguish from the producers, and sometimes, they may coincide. These roles relate to each other with a strong relation of interdependence, that can be explained in-depth only within the framework of collective resources.

Differently than the traditional commons and some of the urban commons, a cultural aspect here is central. In fact, the resource does not come from the land or natural or built environment as it is the case of the traditional or urban commons. Nonetheless, the tangible element of the artworks displayed in a physical, openly accessible space is not to overlook. At the same time, the life of public art depends on what happens around the artwork, and its value is produced and consumed, and hence constantly negotiated and changed by the 'commoners'.

Such an aspect is of interest for the scholarship on the commons. Although urban phenomena are an integral part of the theorisation of commons, they have often been studied as 'enclaves' (Stavrides 2014), hub, districts, or clusters (Bertacchini and Santagata 2012; Bertacchini et al. 2012). At the same time, the most essential element responsible for what could be called a 'comedy' of the commons, viz. the seminal 'tragedy' of the commons as foreseen by Hardin (1968), is the social aspect of the commons, what Harvey (2014) has identified as an expression of the act of 'commoning'. The element of sociation is increasingly recognised as the most important feature of common resources (Euler 2018), and yet a conceptualisation of it lurks.

5 Conclusions: The Importance of Social Practices

Public art works as an urban node and belongs to its urban fabric. It is part of the built environment and has a character of infrastructure. As a consequence, public art today is no more—and not in a reductive way—than one element of a bigger system

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[2]Examples of intellectual infrastructures are: basic research, ideas, languages (Frischmann 2012).

where individuals find a vast range of good reason to benefit from the experience of the space. The demand for public art and its appreciation are derived from the range of capabilities and possibilities that enable and from which it is also shaped. At the same time, it seems that the same behaviours of people contribute to others' experiences. This process is to be interpreted as a matter of interdependence and such a delicate balance of dynamics follows the process of collective resources.

Indeed more than the essence of a certain good, it is the way the good is treated, i.e. governed, that makes a good a commons. It could be implied that it is possible to enhance the value of the common resource if treated appropriately. Thus, it seems important to acknowledge that today's experiences of public art work in a way that follows the patterns of commons resource. More importantly, combining public art to the commons sheds light on the most crucial feature of the current perspectives on commons, as founded on social practices that connect with the urban experience at large. Since Lascaux graffiti, public art has been meant to be a commons.

Today's public art, and most likely tomorrow's too, shows such a disposition towards collective practices much more than in the past, even in semi-institutional artworks as the ones investigated in this research. It seems crucial to recognise that public art generates a collective resource, in order to do justice to the value of the artwork and to re-evaluate, especially viz. the current trends in commodification and endangerment of the commons (Borch et al. 2016; Pratt 2017; Standing and Guy 2019), the importance of people in public spaces, as contributors and not just consumers.

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