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Urban Spaces' Commoning and its Impact on Planning

A Case Study of the Former Slaughterhouse Exchange Building in Milan

Ioanni Delsante, Nadia Bertolino

Thanks to several foundational contributions (De Angelis 2010; Hardt and Negri 2009; Harvey 2012; Ostrom 1990), the topic of urban commons has recently gained much interest, even if there is room to further investigate the relationship between urban commons and planning (Dellenbaugh et al., 2015; Muller 2015). On 5 May 2012, the artists' collective M[^]C[^]O (henceforth Macao) drew public attention by squatting in the iconic Galfa Tower in Milan, a private property abandoned since 1996. Symbolically, it served to shine a light on the need for a radical change in urban policies regarding the reuse of abandoned sites in town (Valli 2015). In opposition to the current planning tools and resolutions adopted by the City Council of Milan, Macao's activists developed and proposed the Constituent City manifesto (Macao 2015).

Starting from these premises, the paper interrogates the issue of how urban commoning can challenge conventional planning procedures and seeks to identify the mutual influences between these practices, local governance and planning tools. It draws on Macao's commoning actions and particularly on the case study of the former Slaughterhouse Exchange Building (henceforth SEB) in Milan, interpreted as a potential urban common. We conclude by offering a reflection on the roles that urban commoning practices and urban commons may have in defining innovative governance and planning processes.

1 Introduction

The notion of the commons has recently gained renewed attention thanks to Ostrom's foundational 1990s work, which ended a period in which the commons had been forgotten after Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968). Several scholars have investigated commons from different perspectives, including their theoretical framework and their social, economic and political dimensions (De Angelis 2010; Hardt and Negri 2009; Harvey 2012). The commons has been deeply investigated through its constituent components (Roggero 2010) and through its particular forms of governance; the latter facilitate the functioning and sustainability of the commons over time (Bollier and Helfrich 2012; Ostrom 1990).

More recently, some scholars have focused on the relationship between the commons and the city (Ramos 2016; Stavrides 2014, 2016), demonstrating their specific conditions in urban environments (Dellenbaugh et al. 2015) or the establishment of collective practices within the urban sphere as a means of capital reproduction (Brenner 2004; Lefebvre 2003; Negri 2009). A number of case studies and social or spatial practices have been developed and interpreted within the framework provided by this research, as an alternative means of urban transformations of the state-market dichotomy.

As commoning practices reveal a relational attitude within urban spaces (Chatterton 2010), they may actively contribute to redefining spatial entities such as urban islands (Ungers and Vieths 1999) or enclosures in the urban archipelago (Hertweck and Marot 1997; Hodkinson 2012; Jeffrey et al. 2011) with its internal thresholds (Aureli 2011; Stavrides 2010). Urban transformations interpreted through the lens of the commons reveal the role of social practices in modifying the spatial dimensions of the city. This connection reveals the potential for further investigating the commons and the related practices of commoning, through or in relationship with disciplines including architecture, urban design and planning (Müller 2015). Even if commons have been already investigated in terms of their urban governance and management (Foster 2011; Parker and Johansson 2011), the relationship between commons, planning and local governance is extremely complex (Moroni 2015). First, commons are typically intimately connected to specific contexts, usually at the neighbourhood or city-wide levels, but also regionally, with several implications in terms of national laws and regulations (including constitutions, where applicable). This condition limits the scope for comparative analysis without an overarching theoretical and normative framework. Moreover, commons are invisible to planning processes, as they do not define any property rights (Moroni 2015; Porter 2011). There are, however, significant areas of overlapping and relationships, as for example with participatory processes (Radywyl and Biggs 2013), especially if they involve public spaces.

In fact, there is room for further research into the relationship between commoning practices, local governance and urban planning, especially in terms of empowering participatory processes or embedding social practices in the process of spatial transformations. Appropriate case studies may help better define a theoretical framework that accommodates local conditions and place-specific features.

2 Aim and methodology

The paper questions how urban commoning practices can challenge conventional planning procedures. Starting from the Macao collective case study in Milan and its proposal for a community-led re-appropriation of vacant urban spaces, we investigate the possible mutual influences between spatial practices, local governance and planning policies.

Drawing on these insights, we structure a reflection on the roles that urban commons may have in planning processes, in particular about the need for hindering top-down planning and enabling participatory and empowering practices. As a fundamental premise, we first question if and to what extent Macao's actions could even be defined as "commoning" practices; to do so, we retrace the key

moments of its history and the ideals underpinning the rise of this cultural movement.

A key challenge in conducting this research was that the scarcity of pre-existing relevant literature and the lack of a sample frame from which to draw a rigorous analysis of Macao and its possible influences on the urban policies recently released by the Milan City Council. Thus, an innovative, multistage research design was developed by the authors and implemented to address the complexity of factors (theoretical, political organisational and spatial) determining the nature and structure of Macao.

The paper employs qualitative research methods. The case study is first introduced through a critical literature review that permits framing the Milanese experience within a broader theoretical framework about urban commoning. In particular, Ostrom's and Bollier's principles of the commons have been mapped against Macao's key actions and resources. The paper draws on data collected during a residency period, which took place in February 2016, and following meetings, visits and interviews held in April 2017. On these occasions, the authors had the opportunity to conduct fieldwork aimed at investigating the linkages between spatial appropriation and the community's governance model. The fieldwork included both interactive and non-interactive methods of data collection: ethnographic participant observation, spatial mapping, informal interviews with members of the collective and active participation in the weekly general assembly.

The following sections of the paper explore the ideals and key moments of Macao as a social movement, based on the outcomes of interviews and a review of the relevant contemporary newspapers and magazines, then map Macao's practices and resources against the principles of the commons and the related contemporary theoretical debate. The third part analyses the current stage in greater detail, mutual influences, and the strengths and shortcomings of planning policies and local governance for the former SEB, the surrounding area and the wider context of Milan.

3 Discussion

3.1 Macao's development from the itinerant phase to settlement in the former SEB

As Macao's activities can best be viewed as a dynamic and ongoing process to enact social practices of broad participation (Valli 2015), commoning as a dynamic social practice (Chatterton 2010) applies to a number of the initiatives developed by Macao. Moreover, to provide better insight into Macao's actions over time, we argue that it is



Figure 1: The Macao open assembly takes place every Tuesday night in the central space of the former Slaughterhouse Exchange Building.

Source: <http://zero.eu/persona/macao-intervista-a-emanuele-braga/> (15.04.2016).

possible to recognise at least two fundamental stages in its development. The first is the birth of the movement and its becoming public through online platforms and other initiatives, followed by temporary squatting in urban spaces and the constitution of small gatherings across the city.

The second stage dates from squatting in the former SEB and the subsequent settlement of the movement into this facility, which has now been used continuously since June 2012. These two phases, seen through the lens of the theory of the commons, are obviously characterised by different spatial strategies and by a shift in the self-governance process (see Figure 1). Furthermore, the meaning of the occupying agency shifted from being “a spectacular provocation to a more stable base for cultural proposals” (Valli 2015, 650).

3.2 Macao's history and evolution through actions and stages

On 5 May 2012, Macao drew the public's attention to the massive amount of unused and underused spaces in Milan by squatting in the Galfa Tower, an iconic building in the city that had been abandoned since 1996. This event, recalling ideals and actions of the social centres that flourished during the 1980s and 1990s in Italy, represented the first public demonstration of the complex and hidden social movements animating the cultural life of Milan. The occupation of the Galfa Tower represented the very first public manifestation of the insurgent cultural move

ment called The Art Workers (henceforth LdA, “Laboratori dell'Arte”), which officially began in July 2011.

From January 2012, LdA began planning what would eventually be called Macao, the New Centre for Art, Culture and Research, in Milan. These plans came to fruition in May 2012, when hundreds of people occupied the iconic skyscraper in the heart of the city. During ten days of occupation, the space hosted free events such as concerts, theatre pieces, workshops and training courses.

Due to its intimate awareness of urban spaces (Molinari 2012), this artist-led movement has been able to stand opposite to globally oriented political choices, acting as a symbol of community values and local resistance. Squatting in the Galfa Tower symbolically shone a light on the need for radical change in urban policies to enable the re-appropriation and re-use of the massive patrimony of abandoned sites that could accommodate unrevealed spatial and social needs (Valli 2015).

The Galfa Tower is a private property owned by the Ligresti Group and widely considered one of the masterpieces of Modernist architecture in Italy. The Italian architect Giò Ponti made clear in 1961 that the Galfa Tower was the symbol of Milan's post-war renaissance: for him, the tower was “a totally frank reflection on a human condition: the industry, enterprise and positive courage of the Milanese people” (1961, 4). The slow but incessant process of the functional and material emptying of the building started 20 years ago. After being home first to an oil company and later a bank, the tower, designed by Melchiorre Bega in 1956, was purchased in 2006 by the Ligresti Group (Fondaria Sai); only very recently has it been undergoing a refurbishment project to turn it into a luxury hotel.



Figure 2: „Piazza Macao“: Public assembly in front of the Galfa Tower, Milan, 5 May 2012.

Source: <http://zero.eu/persona/macao-intervista-a-emanuele-braga/> (15.04.2016).

After being evicted from the Galfa Tower, Macao kept organising events and holding its public assembly in the square at the entrance to the tower, asserting that “Macao was not simply a space” Day after day, an increasing number of long-term supporters and new members joined the movement (Figure 2). An initial attempt to begin a dialogue with political parties occurred in this phase, when the Mayor of Milan, Giuliano Pisapia, attended the public assembly to seek mediation, which was not successful.

The Macao movement grew enormously when it moved from the square to occupy Palazzo Citterio, a historical palace in the Brera neighbourhood, the heart of the creative industry in Milan. This time, the occupation awakened the public’s attention to a valuable 18th-century masterpiece that had been the object of a forty-year project of restoration and reuse that was never completed: Palazzo Citterio, an empty and decaying aristocratic estate, connected to the Botanical Gardens. The National Government paid 1.148 billion Italian lire, in 1972, to gain access to the palace. The director of the operation was the superintendent Franco Russoli, the initial ideologist of the Great Brera vision, which would have run along a theoretical axis from Palazzo Citterio to the Academy up to the Gallery. Ten years later, in 1982, the renovation, led by the architects Ortelli and Senesi, was still not completed, but the public funds to support the project had been exhausted (Stella 2012). Aldo Bassetti, President of the Friends of Brera Association, said: “Palazzo Citterio is a symbol of ineptitude and inability of the public administration to make decisions” (2012). Since 1982, sporadic cultural events have taken place within the Palazzo, but without reference to the original Great Brera

project and without allowing unfettered access to the public. Nothing else happened until the attempted re-appropriation by the Macao movement, which again brought the Palazzo Citterio situation into the spotlight. The collective, along with many supporters from the local community, were violently evicted from the building after three days.

Even more nomadic actions followed, during which Macao activists and their increasing number of supporters met all around the city, organising thematic focus groups and open assemblies in subway stations or other public spaces in the city. It is important to note that, despite not having a stable place for its community, Macao was able to continue the public discussion started in the Galfa Tower, even reinforcing its structural model.

It was during this phase that the collective agreed to occupy what would eventually become its signature location until spring 2017: the Art Nouveau SEB. This building lies within the former communal market area of Milan, which today is the largest abandoned area in Europe¹ (Mazzitelli 2016). The SEB has been abandoned for over thirty years, as a result of the slow decline of the public market area². After an intensive effort to make the space liveable, Macao has slowly started setting up a complex cultural project of everyday activities. It is currently using the SEB to host a lively cross-sector programme of performing arts,

¹ The former market area was included within the itinerary curated by the artist and Macao founder Ferdinando Mazzitelli, which he called “Absent Territories”. It is a provocative walk through some key places in Milan that were once considered places of vitality and sociality. These now stand empty and abandoned, for multiple reasons, and - according to Mazzitelli - represent the greatest potential today for setting up new models of bottom-up spatial regeneration.

² A contextual narrative regarding the former communal market area is discussed in section 3.5.

cinema, visual arts, design, photography, literature, new media, hacking and meetings of citizens committees.

3.3 Macao's actions through the lens of the commons

Macao's activities across its various stages share most of the constituent features of the commons. First, they have consistently involved "some sort of common pool resources" (De Angelis 2010); in light of the focus of this

paper and its link with planning policies, these are meant in terms of spatial resources (e.g. vacant spaces, squares or buildings) even if a wider debate should include other forms of tangible and intangible commons like forms of cultural and peer production that, incidentally, do apply consistently to Macao.

Moreover, Macao itself stands as a "self-defined social group" (Harvey 2012) and as a community that "share(s) these resources and who define for themselves the rules through which they are accessed and used" (De Angelis 2010).

Ostrom's institutional design principles	The "Itinerant Phase" and the commoning of various places in town July 2011- May 2012	The SEB as a common June 2012- Present
<i>Clearly defined boundaries (e.g., boundaries of resources, community of users)</i>	<p>The community is extremely dynamic and permeable to new users, despite having very few members in the beginning.</p> <p>Lack of clearly defined boundaries, at least in terms of resources: the aim is to re-appropriate vacant spaces in Milan and foreground the discussion of creative sector working conditions.</p> <p>Actions target public spaces and private or public buildings (meant to be common-pool resources).</p>	<p>The community rapidly attracts large number of new members, facing new challenges. Other challenges arise while dealing with the local neighbourhood (e.g. residents, tenants).</p> <p>Even if Macao regularly engages with a wide range of vacant spaces in Milan, it settles in one building, a common-pool resource with its physical boundaries.</p>
<p><i>Match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions.</i></p> <p><i>Ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.</i></p> <p><i>Make sure that the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities.</i></p>	<p>One of Macao's goals is to reclaim vacant and under-used spaces to be used by citizens through bottom-up initiatives. In this respect, Macao highlighted a partially unexpressed need among the wider community in Milan.</p> <p>The community is self-managed through open assemblies, with ideas and issues discussed before being voted upon.</p> <p>Several conflicts arise with local authorities, including the City Council and the national government.</p>	<p>Macao progressively structures its activities in collaboration with city-wide partners or stakeholders (e.g., the Comeln initiative). However, its agenda does not appear to be fitting specifically local needs (at the neighbourhood scale).</p> <p>The relationship with local authorities in the neighbourhood and other stakeholders, like the owner of the building, is challenging and often conflicted.</p> <p>The community is self-managed through a weekly open assembly, in which ideas, new projects and issues are discussed before being voted upon. There is no clear evidence that self-defined rules have been accepted by outside authorities.</p> <p>There is evidence of "cultural production" governance (including fees and income re-distribution), but there is no evidence of specific rules for space governance (access, right to use).</p>
<p><i>Develop a system, carried out by community members, to monitor member behaviour.</i></p> <p><i>Use graduated sanctions for rule violators.</i></p> <p><i>Provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution.</i></p> <p><i>Build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.</i></p>	<p>[There is no clear evidence of rules for governing member behaviour and potential disputes between members. However, everyone is informally invited to look after the occupied spaces, which are considered common goods].</p>	<p>There is a set of self-defined rules to monitor access to space and member behaviour. These are not fully communicated to the larger audience.</p> <p>The responsibility for governing the commons is entirely with Macao's members, but it is not clear how potential disputes are addressed.</p> <p>Lack of institutionalised procedures to sanction rule violators and resolve disputes.</p>

Table 1: Ostrom's principles applied to Macao's commoning practices³

Source: Authors' original work 2016.

³ The contents of Table 1 rely mainly on data collected during the residency period in Macao, which were gathered through informal interviews, the analysis of spatial use and participation in the assembly.

Even if in its earliest days the Macao community was not settled in one particular place, we should take into consideration that “communities, however, do not necessarily have to be bound to a locality, they could also operate through trans-local spaces” (De Angelis 2010).

However, it is more complex to assess how Macao in its different stages fits into the institutional element of the commons and “the social process that creates and reproduces the commons” (De Angelis 2010). In this respect, Harvey has highlighted how commons are based on unstable and malleable social relations between the community and the social and physical environment. By mapping Macao’s different stages according to the institutional design principles of the commons as defined by Ostrom (1990), this paper investigates both the potential and the shortcomings of the commoning actions undertaken by Macao (Table 1).

Having highlighted some specific shortcomings in terms of governance, it is worth analysing the former SEB through specific criteria in terms of resources: the commons’ depletability, excludability, competition over scarce resources (“rivalrous use”) and regulation (Bollier 2012) (See Table 2)

Drawing on these premises, we sustain that in the beginning Macao’s boundaries in terms of governance were extremely loose and that there was a lack of institutionalised rules for governing the commons. However, the circumstance that the squatting agencies did not last much does not mean that the institutional side of the commons should be ignored.

Macao’s settlement in the former SEB was an opportunity to challenge the community’s original organisation (Lefebvre 2003), even if it can be argued that the SEB’s physical boundaries may have limited its potential actions in other places.

Criterion	Features and uses of the former SEB
Depletability	This resource (vacant or unused spaces) cannot be depleted through overuse (at this point in time). Over the last six years, Macao has self-funded major work on the restoration of the building (e.g., asbestos removal from the basement, extensive roof repair, bathroom renovations, window and door maintenance, etc.).
Excludability	Day-to-day access to the former SEB is restricted to members* and external guests (only during residency programmes, as approved by the assembly); however an open-door policy is in place during events and during the open assembly on Tuesday nights.
Rivalrous use	It is likely that the simple presence of Macao’s members can prevent others from using the space. However, it is important to note that most events, workshops and courses are open and co-organised with other agencies and stakeholders.
Regulation	The resource is self-regulated through open assemblies, on a weekly basis. Specific governance applies to cultural production, with income redistribution to members who act as volunteers. No formal organisation between members has yet been established. Macao does not have a written charter and is not formally constituted, although these issues have been on the agenda since February 2017. The community’s “rules” are not accessible to the wider public. The external community perceives Macao as an institutionalised system** lacking the necessary level of self-regulation that could allow a higher level of permeability vis-à-vis the neighbourhood.

Table 2 - Bollier’s criteria applied to the former SEB

Source: Authors’ original work, 2016

* It is important to recall that the building has been illegally occupied through a squatting action, so that controlling access represents a mechanism of defence against possible evictions.

** Information gathered during two interviews with Ms. Franca Caffa, Coordinator of the Residents Committee of the Molise-Calvairate-Ponti neighbourhood (interviews conducted on 09.02.2016 and 19.04.2017).

New challenges arose in terms of Macao’s relationship with local institutions and other stakeholders like the neighbourhood authorities, the City Council and the property owner.

In the most recent phase of their activities, even though they are planned and shared with both the local and the

broader community⁴, there is still a lack of an appropriate institutional framework. This is not merely an issue of the use or occasional accessibility of the space or to the governance of cultural production, but to the self-regulation of the community, both between its members and in relationship to external actors.

Without questioning the original intentions or political aims of the actions, it is understood that, since its earliest days, Macao's community has delivered commoning actions in different places and spaces in Milan. Following the commoning actions that focused on the former SEB, the building itself became the resource of a potential commons, but that has yet to be fully implemented.

Whatever the features (and weaknesses) of Macao's activities, they challenge the current planning policies and governance of unused or vacant spaces in town. The following sections of the paper investigate the relationship between Macao's spatial practices and local planning.

3.4 Urban development and planning overview in Milan

Throughout the 20th century, the development of Milan has been directly linked to urban planning through the "Piano Regolatore Generale" (PRG), the city's master plan. The first such plan was designed in 1884, with others following until 1975. The post-World War II master plans accorded with the demands of national laws but were severely and increasingly criticised. They were initially regarded as ineffective in facing the emerging challenges of managing the existing city and later in regenerating the post-industrial one.

Indeed, the most recent PRG is now more than four decades old; it has since largely been amended by so-called planning "variants" that allow large-scale transformations to occur without updating the broader vision. Since the 1980s various strategic plans, such as 2001's Nine Parks for Milan, and planning implementation tools focused on delivering urban regeneration in moribund industrial sites have emerged thanks to a partially "deregulated planning attitude" (Oliva 2002, 96). As a result, since the 1990s, the total surface area of moribund industrial areas in Milan has decreased significantly.

However, there are still large portions of vacant areas within the city's administrative borders, including former barracks and large railway yards: these include the SEB area as well as a railway yard that was supposed to host the European Library for Culture, which was designed but not completed.

3.5 The former slaughterhouse area: History and current planning status

The former SEB occupied by Macao is part of a much broader area known as the former municipal slaughterhouse area (Comune di Milano 2010). With a total area of about 1,000 square meters, the SEB has fifteen rooms on two levels facing a covered central courtyard. The whole complex of buildings and infrastructures was designed by the City Council engineers Ferrini and Filippini as a food supply district close to the Porta Vittoria rail station and built between 1912 and 1929. The morphology of the site is composed by various types of pavilions, similar to other contemporary European examples; it includes five substantial office buildings and three smaller ones facing Viale Molise, a north-south urban axis built according to the Beruto master plan (1884).

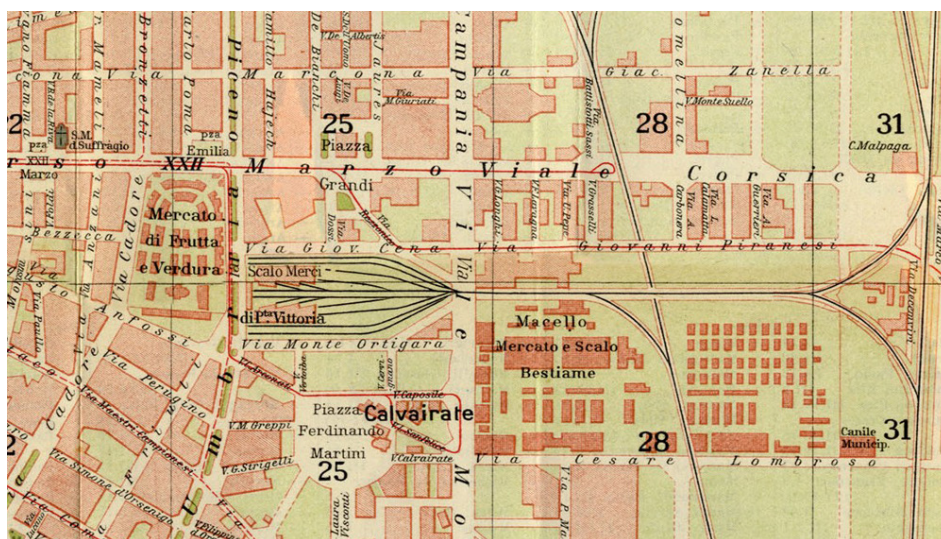


Figure 3: The former slaughterhouse area in a map from the early 1900s.

Source: http://www.turismo.milano.it/wps/portal/tur/it/scoprilacitta/itinerari/ex_macello_comunale (30.07.2015)

⁴ The idea of engaging with the local community is a hotly debated topic within the Macao movement. However, very recently some initiatives have been established, such as Comeln (during which proposals for new projects to take place in Macao, using its spaces and facilities for free, are discussed) or the local community market of self-made products.

The whole area is owned today by So.Ge.MI, a private company in which the Milan City Council holds a major stake. Apart from fish and flower markets, the area has been unused since the 1980s. Looking at current planning policies (known as the PGT, and approved in 2010), the entire former 16-ha slaughterhouse site is included in the pool of “urban transformation areas”; it is intended to act as the “epicentre” for broader transformations that go beyond the edges of the site. It is close to densely populated districts and at the heart of potential networks of public and green areas. The urban transformation areas are planned with specific indications in terms of both densities and services and public spaces, in an ostensible effort to balance the ambitions of private developers and public sector needs. The Milan candidacy dossier for its Expo 2015 bid proposed that the site would host a new Citadel for Taste and Health. The plan included educational and research facilities, restaurants and public services, but offered no details on post-Expo use. The ongoing conversation on the functions to be hosted in the area reinforces the idea of planning as making calculations about “what should be done”, not just about “how it is done” (Fincher and Iveson 2008). Against this background, Macao spotted both the inadequacy of the planning purposes and the inefficacy of urban planning in delivering the expected changes.

We can assume that planning can be justified in various circumstances (Evans 2004; Mills and Hamilton 1984), as for example in dealing with market imperfections by providing crucial elements of urban development that are difficult or impossible for the market to provide. As Couch puts it, “merit goods may be provided by the state because political judgement has been made that certain groups of people should have these goods or services regardless of their ability to pay or indeed their own personal desires in the matter” (2016, 14).

In this respect, Macao (2012) has stated that “a political movement of citizens has the right to take charge of private property in case of clear misuse of the space and proven damage to the community related to that misuse”⁵. With this claim, Macao deliberately challenged not only the status quo but also the existing set of planning policies and their attendant regulations. Strikingly, Macao did not dispute the notion of property rights per se, as it claimed the right to take charge of and manage common-pool resources for the “common good”. Since Macao has squatted in the building in a claim to take the space back for the city, its status is un-sanctioned and it has not been further clarified with either the owner or the City Council.

⁵ The occupying action had a legal foundation, according to Macao’s interpretation of Articles 3, 9 and 43 of the Italian Constitution.

3.6 Urban planning and governance tools for the reallocation of unused spaces in Milan

When Macao first squatted in the Galfa Tower and Palazzo Citterio, it was evicted within days in both cases. Following a substantial political debate, the City Council was able to provide Macao access to some other vacant spaces in the former Ansaldo factory, in a central part of the city. The City Council proposal implied the need to follow the standard public procedure: a call for proposals followed by formal assignment. Macao refused to adhere to the entire process, as it suggested that Macao would have to constitute itself as a non-profit organisation⁶.

In the meantime (March 2012) the City Council signed a collaboration agreement⁷ with Politecnico di Milano and an organisation called Temporiuso.net. The offer and availability of spaces (both private and public) were mapped, together with the requirements, which were partly determined through public consultations in city districts. This initiative provided the ground to the City Council to develop additional planning policies: on 28 September 2012 a resolution listing a set of criteria for the “re-use of vacant spaces” was approved. It is focused on the “development of artistic, social and economic activities”, and calls for the non-profit sector to contribute by delivering elements of urban quality and well-being. An essential component is the reuse of unused buildings, private and public, including the transformation areas listed in the PGT. Even if previous City Council regulations already provided a framework for assigning public properties to non-profit organisations and public companies, the resolution defines four categories of spaces: those “vacant and to be refurbished”; those “assigned to specific projects” led by the non-profit sector; those dedicated to social or innovative entrepreneurship and those within social housing contexts.

“Vacant and to be refurbished” spaces can be assigned through public tender, sometimes free of charge and for a maximum of 30 years. The assignees can be non-profit organisations or public or private companies, if based in Milan⁸. Allowing private companies to manage vacant spaces and earn some profit is aimed at stimulating the

⁶ Significantly, the City Council later decided to initiate a similar procedure and assigned the former Ansaldo spaces, called Officine Creative Ansaldo (henceforth OCA). The initiative was not fully successful. In the first instance there was a lack of hygienic standards, as spotted by an investigation led by the municipality’s technical office. The City Council has recently (2015) found some private investors to provide the necessary investment to complete a refurbishment project, after which the space will be managed following specific procedures (explained in this paper).

⁷ P.G. 205399/2012, 30.5.2012

⁸ The assignees can provide access to parts of the spaces to third parties, with or without a fee, as long as their activities fit into the original proposal. To foster participatory processes, the municipality encourages competition of ideas among the applicants.

competition in the market⁹: in reality, this is likely to exclude non-profit organisations, as this sector that does not have the capacity to take on large initiatives from scratch.

Another type of procedure defined by the resolution refers to “spaces [...] for the realization of specific projects by non-profit organisations”. The City Council has identified on an “experimental basis” a list of spaces that can be assigned through public procedure on the basis of proposals¹⁰ that must be in the public interest and addressed to all citizens; ultimately, the neighbourhood authorities must also approve. These assignments are made free of charge for a maximum of three years with the possibility of renewal, but the assignees must cover operating expenses like utilities and ordinary maintenance. The aim is to develop “social and cultural activities in the broader sense”; in this respect, the City Council bypasses the profitability principle in managing its own properties by acknowledging that profit does not perfectly match the “needs and necessities of the City”.

Even if there is evidence of proposals that meet social and cultural activities in the broader sense (one is called “Palazzina P7” and involves the slaughterhouse area in the same neighbourhood¹¹; various selected spaces are set in other neighbourhoods), it is too early to assess either their successes or their shortcomings¹². In the case of Palazzina P7, the previously vacant building hosted a variety of activities and non-profit organisations (including artists and children’s educational classes). A number of initiatives have been organised together with the local neighbourhood, but, so far, most of the activities and assignees have used the spaces for quite short periods¹³: this circumstance may affect the idea of developing a community with an identity and a sense of belonging over the long term.

As a concluding remark, we note that even if planning policies and resolutions do not make explicit reference to the idea of the commons, the City Council implicitly calls for the idea of the “common good” (Iaione 2013) when it cites the concept of citizens’ well-being and bypasses profitabili-

ty principles in managing (at least some) public properties. Nevertheless, the implementation that followed reveals some shortcomings such as long procedures and cumbersome bureaucracy, excessively short periods of time to use resources and a lack of certainty on future perspectives, potential conflicts of interest of some stakeholders, potential competition between the non-profit sector and private companies and spaces that are too large or too small and thus do not fit the needs or purposes of the assignees.

3.7 The Constituent City: An alternative model proposed by Macao

As part of its political and social agenda, and consistent with the campaigns and actions undertaken since the group’s very first stages, Macao activists have designed and developed an alternative urban model called the Constituent City to institutionalise bottom-up practices for the reuse of vacant spaces in Milan.

The overarching purpose of the Constituent City is to guarantee that vacant and abandoned properties within the Milan metropolitan area (including buildings and open spaces, whether privately or publicly owned), could be directly managed by self-organised groups of what it calls “active citizens”, “through processes of participatory democracy” (Macao 2015). Consistent with the idea of the common good (Iaione 2013), Macao aims to promote a dialogue with institutions to recognize the process by which an abandoned space could be considered a common-pool resource and thus be made available to the community. The experience of Macao itself¹⁴ demonstrates how a self-organised community can establish commoning practices in order to make common-pool resources available, on the basis of the principle that the “full legitimacy of the constituent process is based on participation and active citizenship” (Macao 2015).

According to Macao’s proposal, there is thus no need for self-organised groups to adhere to planning or administrative procedures, which usually caused extended time frames and - in some cases - end without effective implementation. Eliminating these bureaucratic features would smoothen and shorten the process, increasing the possibilities of success management of available spaces by self-organised non-profit communities. In this respect, even if the outcome of the relationship with local institutions and stakeholders may be positive (Prujit 2013), in the case of Macao it is “entirely undefined”; “Macao’s mere participation is per se very important, because the Municipality recognizes Macao not as the (usual) squatted cultural centre, to be normalized or even evicted, but as a partner to work with in a project about the future of the city”. (D’Ovidio and Cossu 2016, 6).

⁹ This is what had already occurred in the OCA case.

¹⁰ Any assignee must be constituted as a non-profit organisation when submitting the proposal or to obtain such status within three months after adjudication.

¹¹ A similar initiative has been led by the organisation Temporiuso.net together with Municipio 4 on another building of in the former slaughterhouse area, identified as Palazzina P7 (Liberty Hospitality and Exchange). Temporiuso.net coordinated a competition of ideas for “services and other activities” to be allocated to the ground floor of the building, while on the floor above would house students from public universities on an annual basis. The call requires assignees to pay the bills and dedicate some time each month to the maintenance and other activities dedicated to the local community.

¹² It should be noted that the resolution was approved in 2012 for a period of three years: recent elections and a change of Mayor may affect future resolutions or their implementation.

¹³ It is not clear how and for how long Temporiuso.net has been identified as coordinator of the entire initiative.

¹⁴ It is important to highlight that Macao (and other social movements similar to it) cannot be institutionalised according to the current traditional criteria (e.g. for the absence of a hierarchical organization, for the adoption of the “method of consent”, etc.).

4 Conclusions

With reference to the Macao case study in Milan, this paper has sought to deepen our understanding of the direct and indirect relations between urban commoning practices and local governance and planning procedures. At the same time, it has highlighted shortcomings and potential contradictions in the broad context of commoning.

First, the data gathered provide evidence of how Macao's activities affected the political agenda in Milan. By identifying and highlighting the inadequacy of planning aims and tools, Macao indirectly called for a renewal of the urban governance and planning agenda. By disseminating the Constituent City proposal, it engaged directly with the political debate: "we can argue that Macao has indeed a political voice that is recognized at the local level. Macao sits at a negotiating table with the municipality in order to define the future of empty and squatted places in the city" (D'Ovidio and Cossu 2016, 6).

It is also important to emphasise how planning policies and resolutions have been informed by the commoning practices existing in Milan since 2012. The City Council has fully recognised the need to use urban resources more effectively in light of the common good: common-pool resources, whether public or privately owned, may be allocated for temporary uses for free, bypassing the principle of profitability. Furthermore, these resources must be accessible and fully usable by both immediately adjacent communities and the broader public.

Nevertheless, the paper questions the effectiveness and the sustainability of both commoning and the planning processes in Milan. In terms of the latter, the City Council resolutions do not allow unsanctioned initiatives - squatting - to be legally acknowledged¹⁵. Moreover, public

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that other Italian cities (Naples, Bologna)

procedures still require the formal legal constitution of citizens into non-profit organisations without taking into consideration a range of looser social connections. Planning policies are not yet flexible enough to accommodate the malleable and unstable relationships that characterise common-pool resources. Furthermore, the by definition temporary nature of assignments does not support the process of the formation and self-governance of communities.

As to commoning practices, Macao's activities also show some contradictions. These are not related to the aims of commoning actions, but rather to the governance of the common-pool resources that Macao has identified. If such resources are to be considered truly common, they should be appropriately self-governed and regulated, by creating a charter for the community or by legally establishing a non-profit organisation to avoid the risks of rivalrous use and excludability¹⁶.

In the end, we recognise that the ongoing process of negotiation on how to define and manage common-pool resources between self-defined communities and the Milan City Council is far from being settled. Its complexity is also linked to the presence of multiple stakeholders. By mapping how the Macao case study matches the essential elements of the commons during the various stages of its experience, the paper has traced the trajectory of its relationship with local institutions, through the latter's planning policies and resolutions. Rigorous and critical studies of this kind may be a fruitful pathway to further research on the relationships between commons, local governance and planning.

have recently amended their planning regulations in order to legalise, eventually, unsanctioned initiatives including commoning actions.

¹⁶ As potentially highlighted in the case of the SEB.

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