

Presenter: Léa Eynaud
Contact: eynaud.lea@gmail.com
Status: 2nd year PhD Student in Sociology under the supervision of D. Cefaï
Institutional affiliation: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris
Chosen Track: Conceiving the urban commons

From the field up: actors' experience of the commons in a Parisian “Ressourcerie”

Léa Eynaud
Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales
eynaud.lea@gmail.com

Abstract: Urban commons have received growing scholarly attention over the past years. Academic literature has engaged in extensive research on the management of urban space and infrastructures, exploring themes such as public parks, neighborhoods and urban planning policies. Some contributions have also addressed the re-appropriation of the commons as a result of collective actions in urban settings, investigating initiatives such as community gardens, re-municipalisation of urban infrastructures or struggles over city space. Our contribution yet departs from a twofold observation. On the one hand, there is a remaining need for urban commons research to go beyond these classical fields of inquiry and to explore the way commons find expression in other domains – particularly in less explicitly space-oriented, but highly urban, grassroots initiatives. On the other hand, we identify a persisting lack of sociological, comprehensive field research accounting for (1) the way urban actors perceive, invoke and use the concept of the commons to describe their endeavors on the ground and (2) the way they give shape to urban commons in the process of their daily activities. The aim of our contribution is to address these main research gaps by developing a combined approach, at the crossroad between commons theory, (grassroots) collective action literature and sociological pragmatism, namely inspired by the work of J. Dewey. Following this theoretical perspective entails accounting for the way commoners organize and mobilize to give shape to resource management alternatives in an urban context. But it also calls for a particular epistemological position, where the researcher gives ear to the meaning actors attach to their actions and observes the way they interact with their environment. The present paper will be based on ethnographic field inquiry led in a Parisian “Ressourcerie”, a community repair, up-cycling and re-use initiative. While systematic collection of unused objects aims at preventing the production of “waste” following a sustainability agenda, the Ressourcerie also works as a social inclusion organization and as a solidarity shop. Analysis will draw from extensive participant observation in the organization’s day-to-day activities and in the occasion of public events, as well as from a series of interviews. How do the actors of the Ressourcerie experience the commons on the ground? To address this central question, our presentation will proceed along two main lines of interrogation. On the one hand, how does the concept of the (re-appropriation of the) commons find verbal expression in this particular setting? On the other hand – and beyond sole discursive accounts – what kind of (social) practices does the activity of “commoning” entail on the ground, in the actor's daily endeavours? After clarifying the heuristic interest of taking urban waste community management and the Ressourceries as a case study for urban commons research, our intervention will address the aforementioned axis successively, using elements derived from field research. It will conclude by highlighting the added-value of leading comprehensive sociological inquiry beyond traditional objects so as to question some of the neo-institutional premisses around (urban) commons theory.

Keywords: urban commons; waste; grassroots collective action; sociology; ethnography

I. Introduction

Urban commons have received growing scholarly attention over the past years (Parker and Johansson 2011). Academic literature has engaged in extensive research on the management of urban space and infrastructures, exploring themes such as public parks, brownfields, neighborhoods, housing systems and urban planning policies (Hess 2008; Borch and Kornberger 2015; O'Brien 2012; Clapp and Meyer 2000; Porter 2011). Some contributions have also addressed the re-appropriation of the commons as a result of collective actions in urban settings, investigating initiatives such as community gardens, the re-municipalisation of urban infrastructures or struggles over city space (Harvey 2012; Blomley 2008; Kuymulu 2013; Susser and Tonnelat 2013; Colding 2011). Our contribution yet departs from a twofold observation. On the one hand, there is a remaining need for urban commons research to go beyond these classical fields of inquiry and to explore the way commons find expression in other domains – particularly in less explicitly space-oriented, but highly urban, grassroots initiatives. On the other hand, we identify a persisting lack of sociological, comprehensive field research accounting for (1) the way urban actors perceive, invoke and use (or not) the concept of the commons to describe their endeavors on the ground and (2) the way they give shape to urban commons in the process of their daily practical and discursive activities.

The aim of our contribution is to address these main research gaps by developing a combined approach, at the crossroad between commons theory, (grassroots) collective action literature (Cefaï 2009; Seyfang and Smith 2007) and sociological pragmatism, namely inspired by the work of J. Dewey (Dewey 2010). Following this theoretical perspective entails accounting for the way commoners organize and mobilize to give shape to resource management alternatives in an urban context, where both the state and the market traditionally play a prominent role. But it also calls for a particular epistemological position, where the researcher gives ear to the meaning actors attach to their actions in a given situation and observes the way they interact with their environment, defined in a broad sense (material, linguistic, political, institutional etc) (Cefaï and Pasquier 2003; Barbier et al. 2012). Instead of presuming actors as rational agents and the commons as a *pre-existing* reality, anchored in the nature of a given resource, such an approach seeks to account for the complexity of the social practices through which commons arise (Dardot and Laval 2014) and for the context in which these processes unfold. To use pragmatist vocabulary, it involves paying close attention to actors' *experiences*, i.e. to the exploratory dynamics through which actors are not only impacted, but also make use of their environment so as to initiate, develop and maintain commons initiatives.

As for today, our presentation will be based on ethnographic field inquiry led in a Parisian “Ressourcerie”, a community repair, up-cycling and re-use initiative. While systematic collection of unused objects aims at preventing the production of “waste” following a sustainability agenda, the Ressourcerie also works as a social inclusion organization and as a solidarity shop. Analysis will draw from extensive participant observation in the organization's day-to-day activities and in the occasion of public events, as well as from a series of interviews.

How do the actors of the Ressourcerie *experience* the commons on the ground? To address this central question, our presentation will proceed along two main lines of interrogation. On the one hand, does the concept of the (re-appropriation of the) commons find verbal expression in this particular setting? If thus, when, by whom and to what purpose is it invoked? On the other hand – and beyond sole discursive accounts – what kind of (social) practices does the activity of “commoning” entail on the ground, in the actor's daily endeavours? After clarifying the heuristic interest of taking urban waste community management and the Ressourceries as a case study for urban commons research, our intervention will address the aforementioned axis successively, using elements derived from field research. Finally, our presentation will conclude by highlighting the added-value of leading comprehensive sociological inquiry in (1) questioning some of the neo-institutional premisses around (urban) commons theory and in (2) enriching the understanding of

the empirical nexus between social movements and the commons. The heuristic interest of expanding research beyond traditional objects will also be underlined, along with the specific benefits derived from the study of re-use initiatives.

2. Community waste management as a relevant field for urban commons research

2.1. Urban waste as heuristic object

Why taking urban waste community management initiatives as a field of interest for urban commons research? While M. Mauss regarded waste as a *total social fact* – meaning that one could understand a whole society by analysing what it considers and produces as a waste – waste has received only limited scholarly attention, be it from social sciences in general, or from commons research in particular. Yet, we argue that waste forms an interesting object of investigation in at least two respects. First of all, it is a good observation point for who wants to approach (re)appropriation dynamics over a resource. In French law for instance, waste is referred to a *good without owner*. It is defined as “any substance, any object, or more generally any tangible, movable asset of which the owner disposes, or has the intention or obligation to dispose” (Art. L. 541-1-1 of the Environmental Code). Contrary to the category of the “épave”, which designates fortuitous disposition, and contrary to donations, which indicate a transfer of property rights over the object, waste is thus considered a “res derelictae” or “res nullius”, potentially appropriable by the first person who seizes it. In theory, waste is thus particularly disposed to be approached as a commons, which makes pragmatist field study of even greater interest: *is it actually so?*

Second of all, waste offer a valuable heuristic perspective over the relations between a society and its material environment. As Sabine Barles shows in the case of France (Barles 2005), defining urban waste through the notion of the abandonment is a modern invention, both as a category and in the praxis. On the one hand, the term (“déchet” in French), appeared around the 13th century, originally comes from the verb “choir” or “déchoir”, which indicates the act of dropping, either falling on the ground or diminishing in volume, quantity, value or utility. The notion of waste thus originally did not imply that the object be of no value or abandoned. On the other hand, and until the 19th century, urban excreta would be the subject of meticulous, more or less formal, sorting activities led by a large and diverse range of actors. For instance, used rags left on the street would be picked up by “chiffonniers” (ragmans) and sold to the paper industry, while urban mud and draining waters would be used as fertilizer in the agriculture. For they were playing a decisive role in sustaining the osmotic development of the city, the industry and the agriculture, urban excreta were thus very unlikely to be abandoned. Until the discovery of new raw materials brought industrials and farmers to envision ways to free themselves from their dependency to the city, Barles argues. As this detour through history suggests, the way waste takes form and is qualified is thus no fixed reality, anchored in the characteristics of a given good and sanctioned by law or economic categories. It is instead the product of a given social and material history, which future, however, remains to be written. Based on this historical background, we now turn to the organization of the urban waste management sector as it currently takes place in France, and to a brief presentation of the Ressourceries.

2.2. The waste management sector in France and the Ressourcerie

At the present date, the vast majority of waste generated in French cities is “treated” through industrial processes, including recycling and incineration¹. While household waste management falls under the competence of municipalities, it is sometimes (as in many Parisian districts)

1 ADEME (2015): Déchets, Chiffres-clés, available at: <http://www.ademe.fr/dechets-chiffres-cles>

delegated to private companies. Moreover, if one considers institutional and political documents published in France over the past years, waste appears to be at the centre of two main concerns. On the one hand, it is often described as a major economic issue, waste management being one of the most important sources of spending for municipalities². On the other hand, it is more and more perceived as a critical environmental concern – most employed treatment techniques being acknowledged for their negative impact in terms of pollution and energy consumption. Over the past years, and namely under the impulse of the European Commission, waste has thus become the subject of a considerable legal apparatus in relation to sustainable development. One of the core features of this evolution is the implementation of the Waste Framework Directive of the European Union which introduces a hierarchy in terms of waste treatment methods, giving top priority to least environmentally harmful procedures, such as waste prevention and re-use.

It is in this context of rising environmental concern regarding waste that the development of the Ressourceries in France must be understood. Inspired by similar initiatives already in place in Canada, they appeared in 2000 as a relatively unified movement spread across the whole country and linked together through a formal network. According to the official presentation of their activity, the Ressourceries are non-profit, local organizations dedicated to the prevention of waste. They collect all kinds of unused objects voluntarily brought by private persons (e.g. clothes, books, toys, electrical appliances, furnitures) and prepare them for re-use. Depending on their nature and on their general state, collected objects are sorted into different categories and oriented towards various uses. They can either be sold directly in the solidarity shop to very low prices; be cleaned-up or repaired before selling; or be dismantled into their constituting parts so as to be re-used in another manner. In case none of the above-mentioned options is made possible, the objects are sent to Producer Responsibility Organizations³, responsible for specific waste treatment, such as clothes or electrical equipments recycling. Finally, objects and other elements that do not find any other utilization are thrown into the garbage, where they are eventually treated by the municipality along with regular household waste. Both incoming and outgoing elements are systematically weighted, which allows the Ressourceries to calculate and eventually publicize their “taux de valorisation” (re-use ratio), defined as the yearly amount of waste that they manage to *rescue* from elimination⁴. Finally, the Ressourceries organize various awareness-raising campaigns or workshops in relation to waste prevention and environmental protection.

2.3. The Ressourceries as urban commons initiatives

After this general presentation of the Ressourceries and the sector in which they take place, we now turn more precisely to our research question: why choosing the Parisian Ressourceries as a relevant case study for urban commons research? Three main levels of answer may be invoked in response to this question. First of all, the Ressourceries themselves tend to use the notion of the commons to qualify their activity – we come back to this more extensively in the following section.

Second of all, their practices are found to be in line with the definition of urban commons or neighbourhood commons, i.e. as local, citizen initiatives taking place in cities through which a community manages a resource collectively and sustainably. On the one hand, the Ressourceries present themselves as an ecological initiative. The objects available in the Ressourcerie having been abandoned by their owners, their production avoids the use of new raw materials and contributes to waste prevention. On the other hand, the Ressourceries put a strong emphasis on citizen re-

2 The French agency for the environment and energy management (ADEME) reports 16.7 billions euros spending at national scale for waste management in 2012.

3 Provided for in the framework of European regulation regarding the extended producer responsibility, Producer Responsibility Organizations are private companies financed by the producers, distributors and importers of a given good. Their mission, declared of general interest, entails the selective collection, recycling and treatment of waste resulting from the sale of their products.

4 i.e. the sum of what is re-used by the Ressourcerie and what is sent to recycling, namely by transfer to Producer Responsibility Organizations.

appropriation of waste at local level. In particular, the Ressourcerie are said to work over a “territory” – most often the neighbourhood – which refers both to the area where most objects are collected and to the place of residence of the majority of end-users. Moreover, the Ressourceries present themselves as a critical space for social encounter and neighbourhood life, and their activity largely relies on the implication of volunteers.

A third reason for choosing the Ressourceries as an interesting object for urban commons research lies, on a more heuristic level, in the specificity of the resource at stake. As a matter of fact, the Ressourceries have developed themselves at the encounter between two sectors: the waste sector on one side, and that of the object on the other (mainly represented by second-hand shops, charities and regular stores, most of whom do not report on their action in environmental terms). To consider collected objects as avoided waste, the Ressourcerie thus has to approach them simultaneously as potential waste in conventional terms, but also as an actual resources, suitable for further use. Investigating the Ressourcerie thus sheds particular light on the institutionalization processes through which socially and historically situated actors can renew the experience of a given resource. Waste is no commons *per se*. Instead, as the Ressourcerie reveals, its collective re-appropriation rests on a whole series of institutionalization practices, including material operations over the resource and active re-qualification.

3. Learning from the field: a sociological investigation in a Parisian Ressourcerie

3.1. Presentation of the case study

We now turn to the second part of this presentation which focuses more directly on analysis of elements derived from a field research led in a Parisian Ressourcerie. Located in the south east part of the city, the organization was founded in 2005 in the form of a squat of a public building. Under the banner of the right to the city, the space was opened up to the public as a self-managed neighbourhood centre. Rooms were made available for local classes, animations, exhibitions as well as concerts and rehearsals. Moreover, the place offered a wide range of services for homeless and socially excluded people including emergency hospitality. The organization was also in close connexion to other squat scenes in Paris and abroad, as well as to the hacker and the guerilla gardening movements. In 2011, as the organization was forced to evacuate the building, it was relocated by the municipality to a new building, under the condition that it would take an acknowledged institutional form. The Ressourcerie was thus founded, along with a non-profit repair café.

At the present date, the organization counts a total of 17 employees and approximately the twice the number of volunteers. While being largely self-financed, it also received subventions from public institutions. Moreover, it is presented as one of the most effective Ressourceries in the Parisian region, with a re-use ratio of 86% in 2014. Its particular history also makes this Ressourcerie a very special case in comparison to similar initiatives in the same region. As a matter of fact, and despite the fact that the organization is no longer a squat, the founders of the Ressourcerie have put great emphasis on maintaining its original social and political mission intact. Taking benefit from its activity as a Ressourcerie, the organization thus continues its assistance and support activities to people in need. Among other, a semi-formal convention was introduced with other organizations working with homeless people. It allows them to collect within the stock a delimited number of items that they might need, such as warm clothes for the winter or baby care accessories for young mothers. Likewise, the organization pursues several of its past activities, such as the cheap leasing of rooms for classes and rehearsals. The Ressourcerie finally maintains strong relations to the squat scene and the hacker movement, both in terms of friendship ties and informal arrangements. In particular, spare objects and needed material are frequently transferred to squats through acquaintances and word of mouth. A hackerspace was also installed in the cave of the

building, acquiring most of its material from objects collected at the Ressourcerie and through hacker-network connections.

3.2. The “commons” as a discursive category for collective action

Having outlined the particular history of the Ressourcerie in which field work was carried, we now turn to one of the main questions addressed by the paper: how does the concept of the (re-appropriation of the) commons find verbal expression in this particular setting? Our research leads us to highlight the following findings. First of all, the invocation of the notion of the commons does not happen on any occasion nor on any lips. In particular, it is never mentioned in the course of the day-to-day collecting and sorting activities in the Ressourcerie. Instead, it mainly pertains to contexts of public justification, i.e. to situation where the relevance of the Ressourcerie is being publicly exposed and/or debated (Thévenot 2011). The notion is thus solely brought up by those who articulate or prepare these public discourses and take part in the public space.

Second of all, the notion is not entirely settled. As a matter of fact, its signification has never been explicitly debated, defined or theoretically clarified in the Ressourcerie. Actors themselves confess not having had time to build a discourse around this matter and to generally favour direct action over theoretical thinking. While discussions on this topic are frequent, they are thus marked by frequent appellation switches, from the “commun” (commons) to the “bien commun” (the common good), and from the plural to the singular. Likewise, some terms can be used to express slightly different meanings. For instance, the term “commun” can refer to the action of the Ressourcerie as being a third path between public and private waste management. But it can also be used to hint to a presumed nature or essence of the resource that shall be recovered. Furthermore, the resource at stake as well as the language used to express it are found to vary greatly depending on the context of enunciation. For instance, when evoked among individuals more or less connected to the hacker community, the notion usually draws from explicit reference to the concept of the *commons* as mobilized in the free software movement and its associated literature. But its meaning can become more spatially oriented when invoked in relation to the squat scene; or more abstract when expressed in public arenas, where the resource often gives way to the further-reaching notion of general interest. In other situations, larger emphasis can finally be put on a more innate, language-related, understanding of the word “commun” (common) as *what is being shared* or *pertains to all*.

Yet, and contrary to a frequent normative remark in the literature according to which the concept of the commons should be clarified so as for it not to be “confused” with other related concepts, the way actors invoke the notion is found to develop its own logic. Even though the notion was never discussed in theoretical terms, sustained ethnographic observation reveals that its meaning tacitly unfolds in situations of discursive practices, and this in at least three respects. First, terms are not always used in an interchangeable manner, which denotes the existence of shared frames of reference. For example, the term “le bien commun” (the common good) is usually used to designate, on a more philosophical and political level, the notion of general interest, while the terms “communs” (commons) or “biens communs” (common goods) generally more directly refer to the idea of a shared resource. Second, none of these appellation or meaning switches are experienced as problematic by the actors on the ground. Instead, extensive ethnographic observation shows that these various understandings are actually held to stand in intrinsic continuity with one another. For instance, the activity of the Ressourcerie, i.e. the collective and local management of waste is considered to be fundamentally inseparable from the seeking of the common good on a larger political level. Likewise, evoking the commons successively as a matter of space, knowledge and waste re-appropriation is never experienced as contradictory as it reflects the engagement of the Ressourcerie, at the interface between the squat scene, the hacker movement and the waste sector. Third, the plural use of the notion is found to result from situated sense-making activities. As a matter of fact, switching meanings and appellations allows actors to produce meaning each time

attuned to a given situation, a point to make and an audience to reach.

These findings, we argue, have critical resonance at theoretical level. Instead of being a sole matter of political or scholarly debate in the public space, the meaning of the commons is thus also to be found as an ongoing practice of re-appropriation taking place in collective action settings – a practice which unfolds its own logic, at the crossroad between shared frames of reference and more particular claims, derived from participation in various (epistemic) communities.

3.3. Commoning as a daily practice

While invoking the commons is found to amount to sense-making activity, the notion, as we mentioned before, is only brought up in situation of public justification. Grasping what the experience of the commons entails for the actors on the ground thus implies looking besides discourses toward other kinds of daily practices. In this respect, ethnographic inquiry in the Ressourcerie highlights the following findings. At operational level, re-appropriating waste as a commons appears to consist in two major activities. On the one hand, it takes shape through a wide array of material and social practices around the object, including repairing, cleaning, presenting, developing new techniques, using creativity and transmitting know-how. On the other hand, re-appropriating waste as a commons seems to consist in an ongoing distribution of incoming objects (and the right pertaining to them) among various collectives: the Ressourcerie and thus the inhabitants as end-users; homeless people; the squat scene; the hackerspace; the employees, the volunteers and people in the street on some occasions; the Producer Responsibility Organizations; and as a last option the municipality, via drop-off in garbage containers. These commoning practices also unfold at collective-choice level through the elaboration of a complex set of rules, including governance and management rules.

Yet our findings suggest that these continuous commoning activities are fundamentally irreducible to rational cost-benefit calculations, and this in at least three respects. First, more or less formal distribution rules such as the right granted to spatters and homeless people to withdraw objects from the stock could not be understood without knowledge of the organization's past, the social milieus to which their members pertain, the friendship and solidarity ties they have built. This reveals the importance of historical and sociological approaches to the commons.

Second, definition of rules at collective-choice level is found to involve concerns which exceed by far the direct interest of the commoners and the resource at stake. A salient example in this respect is a vivid ongoing debate within the Ressourcerie regarding price-setting in the solidarity shop. While setting higher prices means higher revenues for the organization, negotiations are found to proceed from a vast array of (potentially conflicting) considerations, most of which denote experienced responsibility toward society and the environment as a whole. On the one hand, rising prices is held to make sense in environmental terms, as earned money can be invested in extending the storage area, or in hiring a new person to repair electronic objects. Moreover, higher revenues are sought as a crucial asset in relation to public authorities, as higher self-financing capacity results in increased negotiation power, especially in a context of crises. These considerations are yet balanced with an engagement to maintain low prices deriving from a feeling of responsibility towards the end-users. This experienced responsibility namely involves the idea that the re-appropriation of waste should not perpetuate barriers based on unequal ability to pay. But it also denotes the recognition of a tacit right of those in need over the common resource. On the other hand, environmental concerns can also plead in favour of lower prices: given the limited surface of the shop and storage area, lowering the prices means that more objects get sold, thus allowing for higher waste prevention. Finally, maintaining low prices comes in line with the defence of a certain idea of the non-profit third-sector. As a matter of fact, refusing to derive all revenues from shop sales is also a way for actors of the Ressourcerie to protest against a constant retreat of the State from its mission of supporting the organizations which serve the collective interest, and to resist to their constant push toward the competitive sector.

Third, observations at operational level indicate that material, contextual and subjective experiences also play a decisive role in the way resource-management activities are carried. As a matter of fact, and although most far-reaching operational rules are defined in more or less formal arenas, (be it at the weekly meeting of the organization or over a beer, at the counter of the repair café), a significant number of practical decisions are actually found to take place in the course of daily sorting, repairing and up-cycling activities. Besides taking collectively elaborated rules as a general frame for action, these situated decision-making activities are also found to draw on contextual, material and aesthetic considerations, as well as on particular aptitudes, such as creativity and know-how. For instance, the decision to repair, give or throw away a slightly broken table does not rely solely on the collectively agreed-upon rule to prioritize re-use. It also largely depends on the general state of the furniture, its assessed value (*is it worth repairing it?*) as well as on the ability of the actor to repair or up-cycle it (*can we make something out of it?*). Likewise, a given actor is more unlikely to take the time to repair a table if the amount of tables recently received has resulted in a lack of space availability in the storage or shopping area (*do we even have enough room to sell it?*).

A last important finding concerns the extent to which commons practices manage to thrive within the dominant waste-management regime. As a matter of fact, our research suggests that the institutionalization of waste as a commons is actually experienced as *incomplete* by the actors on the ground. In particular, the daily gesture of throwing away a given collected object in the garbage (and even to transfer it to Producer Responsibility Organizations) is often experienced as a *frustration*. Very few objects are thrown away based on experienced repulsion or assessed fundamental lack of utility. Likewise, they are hardly considered or even referred to as waste in the course of day-to-day sorting activities. Instead, most actors comment on their action of throwing away some of these collected objects in the terms of an “incapacity to keep”, be it due to lack of time, lack of space or overwhelming object collection. In the mouth of the actors in charge of producing public discourses on the Ressourcerie, this frustration changes itself in a political matter. Actors then call on public authorities to engage in deeper support in favour of the Ressourcerie so as to allow such initiatives to thrive and actually accomplish their mission – for example by granting them more space, by giving them long term subventions, or by authorizing them to withdraw objects from centres of waste sorting.

On a theoretical level, this experienced incompleteness and the way it is expressed in the public space sheds light on two critical points. On the one hand, what French institutions (the law and the dominant actors of the waste sector in particular) currently produce and designate as waste is not necessarily congruent with what individuals intuitively experience and qualify as such, namely based on material, practical or aesthetic considerations. Making waste a commons thus seems to imply, on a somehow deeper level, a quest of meaning in relation to a shared experience (*this is not a waste! I don't need it anymore but I am sure it could serve someone!*). Following this trail, re-appropriating urban waste thus entails seeking practices which allow it to better fit with what makes sense both for the people and for the environment. Yet on the other hand, this last finding shows that making waste a commons is not just a matter of commoning practices among members. It also relies on an institutionalization process taking place in the public space through political struggle, discourse and narrative building as well as wider attitude change, namely regarding the way individuals deal with their surrounding objects (*this is not a waste! I will bring it to the Ressourcerie!*).

4. Conclusion and directions for further research

Our research highlights, we argue, several important landmarks for future urban commons research. First of all, urban commons are not just to be found in contentious collective action over urban space but also in less explored, yet highly urban, grassroots management initiatives. Second of all, the way actors invoke the notion of the commons to qualify their activities is no passive transposition but active re-appropriation. It consists in highly situated sense-making activities which unfold

through the articulation of shared frames of reference as well as more specific knowledge derived from participation in various (epistemic) communities. Third of all, commoning practices are irreducible to economic rationale. First, they unfold through history and in a given social context, which pleads for more comprehensive research in sociology and contemporary history. Second, they involve concerns ranging far beyond the direct interest of the commoners and the resource at stake, including experienced responsibility toward the environment and the society as a whole. Third, they heavily draw on contextual, practical and subjective decisions taken in the course of operational activities. Finally, investigating re-use initiatives such as the Ressourceries is of particular heuristic and theoretical interest for urban commons in at least two respects. First because it sheds light on the highly historically and socially situated processes through which the characteristics, the status, the shape (and even the existence) of a given resource are instituted. But also because it stresses the nexus between strict commoning practices and all sorts of political activities led in the public realm. In more general terms, this research suggests that the commons is less to be found in an already reached and ongoing state of affairs as represented by the existence of commons initiatives, but rather as an asymptotic process, a constant quest for articulation between the commons and their wider environment.

Literature cited

- Barbier, Rémi, Jean-Paul Bozonnet, Michelle Dobré, Nathalie Lewis, and Collectif. 2012. *Manuel de sociologie de l'environnement*. Québec: Presses Université Laval.
- Barles, Sabine. 2005. *L'invention Des Déchets Urbains : France 1790-1970*. Paris: Champ Vallon.
- Blomley, N. 2008. "Enclosure, Common Right and the Property of the Poor." *Social & Legal Studies* 17 (3): 311–31. doi:10.1177/0964663908093966.
- Borch, Christian, and Martin Kornberger. 2015. *Urban Commons*. Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Cefaï, Daniel. 2009. "Comment Se Mobilise-T-on? L'apport D'une Approche Pragmatiste à La Sociologie de L'action Collective." *Sociologie et Sociétés* 41 (2): 245–69.
- Cefaï, Daniel, and Dominique Pasquier. 2003. *Les Sens Du Public: Publics Politiques, Publics Médiatiques*. Presses Universitaires de France-PUF.
- Clapp, Tara Lynne, and Peter B. Meyer. 2000. "Managing the Urban Commons: Applying Common Property Frameworks to Urban Environmental Quality." In *8th IASCP Conference, Bloomington, Indiana*. <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/handle/10535/1963>.
- Colding, Johan. 2011. "Creating Incentives for Increased Public Engagement in Ecosystem Management through Urban Commons." *Adapting Institutions: Governance, Complexity and Social-Ecological Resilience*, 101–24.
- Dardot, Pierre, and Christian Laval. 2014. *Commun: Essai sur la révolution au XXIe siècle*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Dewey, John. 2010. *Le public et ses problèmes*. Paris: Folio.
- Harvey, David. 2012. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso.
- Hess, Charlotte. 2008. "Mapping the New Commons." Available at SSRN 1356835. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Papers.cfm?abstract_id=1356835.
- Kuymulu, Mehmet Bariş. 2013. "Reclaiming the Right to the City: Reflections on the Urban Uprisings in Turkey." *City* 17 (3): 274–78. doi:10.1080/13604813.2013.815450.
- O'Brien, Daniel Tumminelli. 2012. "Managing the Urban Commons: The Relative Influence of Individual and Social Incentives on the Treatment of Public Space." *Human Nature* 23 (4): 467–89. doi:10.1007/s12110-012-9156-6.
- Parker, Peter, and Magnus Johansson. 2011. "The Uses and Abuses of Elinor Ostrom's Concept of Commons in Urban Theorizing." In *International Conference of the European Urban Research Association (EURA)*. <https://dspace.mah.se/bitstream/handle/2043/12212/EURA%20conf%20version3.pdf?sequence=2>.
- Porter, Libby. 2011. "Informality, the Commons and the Paradoxes for Planning: Concepts and Debates for Informality and Planning." *Planning Theory & Practice* 12 (1): 115–53. doi:10.1080/14649357.2011.545626.
- Seyfang, Gill, and Adrian Smith. 2007. "Grassroots Innovations for Sustainable Development: Towards a New Research and Policy Agenda." *Environmental Politics* 16 (4): 584–603. doi:10.1080/09644010701419121.
- Susser, Ida, and Stéphane Tonnelat. 2013. "Transformative Cities: The Three Urban Commons." *Focaal* 2013 (66): 105–21. doi:10.3167/fcl.2013.660110.
- Thévenot, Laurent. 2011. "Grand résumé de L'Action au pluriel. Sociologie des régimes d'engagement, Paris, Éditions La Découverte, 2006." *SociologieS*, July. <http://sociologies.revues.org/3572>.