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# Cultural democracy in the reactivation of urban voids:
# contributions from a theatrical commons

Tesi di dottorato in Economia della Cultura

Dottoranda Francesca Sabatini

**Coordinatore** Prof. Adolfo Santini

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**Relatore** Prof. Michele Trimarchi

_____

**Correlatore** Prof. Alberto De Capua

_____

**Correlatrice** Dr. Alice Borchi (University of Leeds)

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## Abstract

The research analyzes the role of culture and the commons in urban regeneration, and in particular the contribution of culture-led commoning practices in the reactivation of urban voids, observed in the experience of a theatrical project in three different Italian cities: Rome, Reggio Emilia and Palermo. Drawing from urban studies on planning, governance and regeneration, the thesis sets up the theoretical framework, observing how the modern city and the contemporary city have seen the progressive shrinking of collective agency in the production of urban spaces and processes, delegated to a central authority. In the post-industrial city, culture has played the role of panacea to urban illnesses in the hands of neoliberal governments, in fact adhering to the previous paradigm of marginalization and delegation: the rebranding of cities with iconic architectures and politics aimed at boosting the creative economy have but exasperated urban crises. An alternative to such governance model is offered by the commons, which have claimed back the collective management of urban resources, and the political discourse on cultural democracy, aimed at redistributing the means of cultural production. The research presents a stance that aligns the commons and urban democracy in a twofold way: first, by theorizing a theatrical commons, consisting of three types of co-produced resources (space, relations, dramaturgy); second, by presenting a theatrical project, OperaCamion, consisting of a truck touring Italian peripheries, and bringing opera for free in disadvantaged areas. The research uses ethnography (semi-structured interviews, participant observation, deep hanging out) and triangulation with secondary sources (photos and videos) to observe how OperaCamion has represented a stance of commoning of the theatrical resource and a reactivation of urban voids, specifically dismissed squares. In Palermo, the performance became a coproduction with local citizens in the Danisinni neighbourhood, a urban commons where the community has engaged in partnerships with cultural institutions since 2017. Impacts of the projects are seen to span from the increased security of the squares to the enhancement of human and cultural capabilities through cultural opportunity and coproduction. The research advocates for the redesign of impact indicators subtended to public funding to the arts in the light of its findings, for the role of cultural institutions as mediators between public decision-making bodies and citizens; and for the commons as collaborative and enabling ecosystems to create multi-scalar partnerships aimed at the regeneration of peripheries and the reactivation of urban voids.

## Dissemination, impact and inclusion in the thesis of published works

**Seminars and conferences.** OperaCamion in Rome and Palermo has been presented during a lecture for the course of Economic Geography of Creativity at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, University of Rotterdam, December 8th 2020.

A specific focus on the Danisinni commons has been presented at the "Brownbag Seminar Series" at the Department of Strategy, Globalization and Society di HEC, School of "Hautes Etudes Commerciales" at the University of Lausanne on May 5th, 2021, during a period as a *chercheuse invitée* of the School.

**Inclusion of published work.** The research on the theatrical commons has been presented at the conference "Cultural Commons and Urban Dynamics: a new economic paradigm for a complex social map", held in Catanzaro in October 2019, organized by Innovate Heritage and the Department of Law, Economics and Sociology of the University of Catanzaro. An article was written from the presentation, featured in a book edited by E. Macrì, V. Morea, M. Trimarchi and published by Springer in 2020, "Cultural commons and urban dynamics: a multidisciplinary perspective".

A first description of the work on theatre and city, which cited OperaCamion as an emerging paradigm, presented in its extended form in the chapters 1 and 2, was presented at the 2019 conference "Chances: practices, spaces and buildings in cities' transformation", organized by the Department of Architecture and Design Culture of the University of Bologna. The article was then featured in the conference proceedings in 2021.

The theoretical chapters have been presented at theAIMAC Doctoral Symposium of the Judge Business School of the University of Cambridge in September 2020.

**Extra-academic dissemination.** During the fieldwork in Palermo, in July 2021, journalists from the Regional TV News (TG Regione Sicilia) came to Danisinni to visit the artistic residency, which had been recently built, and the Farm. In those days Danisinni had entered Lonely Planet's "perfect itinerary" of Palermo[1]. During that time, I have been interviewed by the journalists, and an excerpt of my interview was broadcasted during the news on July 9th 2021.[2]

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[1] https://www.lonelyplanetitalia.it/articoli/idee-per-il-weekend/48-ore-a-palermo-l-itinerario-perfetto
[2] https://www.rainews.it/tgr/sicilia/video/2021/07/sic-danisinni-turisti-0fe0bac7-434d-4c11-bd8a-0051c1b44aea.html

## Introduction

The research explores the reactivation of urban voids (neglected spaces of the city that were deprived of their function and meaning) through cultural actions. Specifically, it analyzes participatory regeneration action (though at different levels) in which citizens and cultural institutions contribute to create a collaborative ecosystem and a shared cultural experience; these actions can be variously inscribed in the framework of cultural and urban democracy, and of the commons. The empirical focus of the research is a theatrical project that brought opera performances for free in peripheral squares in cities. Originally developed by Teatro del'Opera di Roma and Teatro Massimo di Palermo, it has touched different cities and towns in Italy, including Reggio Emilia – which, with Roma and Palermo, represents the third case analysed in the thesis.

The theoretical framework in which this thesis posits itself is multidisciplinary: it draws from urban studies, which intercept notions of urban planning, critical theory and economic geography, to discuss the shape of the city, its economic development and the production mechanisms of its space; from cultural economics, for what concerns the role of culture in urban regeneration, and theatre, which is the empirical focus of this study; conclusively, political economy, and specifically neoinstitutionalism, which has flourished after Elinor Ostrom's research on common-pool resource systems, known as the commons; at the urban level (on which this thesis focuses), the commons create new modalities of producing the city, of using and appropriating its spaces, that are alternative to the neoliberal mechanisms subtended to contemporary urban governance. Ostrom's theses are applied to the theatrical case to observe theatre as a shared resource, produced and used in common (though it is not co-owned in the proprietary sense of the term). Both urban studies and cultural economics are integrated by a historical overview, which traces back the production of the contemporary city and its cultural infrastructure to the dynamics of XIX century urbanization.

In this framework, the research asks three questions, which articulate the three main sections of the thesis: who produces (and regenerates) the city? Who produces culture in the city, and where? How can commoning practices, with a strong cultural (theatrical) component, generate urban reactivation? The thesis is articulated in four chapters: the first two chapters answer the first two questions, providing evidence from two different paradigms, contrasting and conflictual, of producing the city and its cultural infrastructure (and, thus, two different ways of answering these questions). The third chapter explains the methodology, the fourth answers the third question through case study.

The first chapter is focused on the development of the city: the late-capitalist, post-industrial economic mechanisms have led to the creation of a cultural and creative economy which is now the primary engine of urban development in the Global North. These processes are rooted in XIX century urban transformations: the unorthodox starting point of the thesis is a chapter from *Notre Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo, "Bird's eye view of Paris", to reflect on how the production of spaces and meanings in the contemporary city is a stratified process. In Hugo's Medieval Paris, which was progressively disappearing, "there was nothing without its originality, its reason, its genius, its beauty, nothing which did not derive from art, from the humblest house […] to the royal Louvre" (Hugo 1831: 265). Hugo had identified two different levels of production of urban spaces, "the humblest house" and "the Royal Louvre", attributing to both levels the ability to transform the cultural infrastructure of the city. Hugo sees Medieval Paris as a collective construct, chaotic and creative, worth preserving from the massive changes that were turning the city upside down as he was writing

This passage can be considered questionable from a variety of perspectives: Hugo romanticized the Paris of the past as he demonized the new one, with an *elan* which can be mistaken as conservatism; his analysis of urban phenomena is, moreover, partial (he wasn't an historian). And yet, "Bird's eye view of Paris" describes a city very similar to our own: produced by collective cultural processes, threatened by predatory urbanization which is progressively diminishing accessibility through unsustainable interventions. To describe these dynamics with a contemporary example, the thesis jumps two centuries ahead to introduce Hudson Yards, an important New York cluster consisting of luxurious lofts with a view on the river, towering malls and a square dominated by the Vessel, a spectacular building accessible by paying a ticket. North of Hudson Yards, about to be swept away, lies the popular neighbourhood of Hell's Kitchen, formerly diverse, now gentrifying with finance brokers and creatives.

In other words, the production of the city (of its spaces, from the built environment to the in-betweens and its functions) is progressively being delegated to the market, which through massive interventions is modifying its shape at often-unsustainable social costs (Harvey 2012, 1993; Sassen 2013, 2000) – as spaces of the city are devoured by these predatory operations, the people are denied everyday spaces of socialization, and are relegated to the margins of urban infrastructure.

Culture-led urban regeneration has contributed to this process. This topic is all but new: starting from the 1980s, starting from Zukin's *Loft Living*, the literature had begun to point out

the ways in which the cultural and creative industries, born from the ashes of the industrial economy, was able to alter the development paradigm of the urban economy and, as a consequence, its shape -it is, precisely, *Loft Living* the first research to discuss gentrification. The topic has been explored, among others, by Harvey (1993), McGuigan (2005; 1996) and Throsby, in his 2001 "Economics and culture" (foundational for cultural economics). In the 1990s, then, research (and critical theory specifically) had already warned against the hideous approach that saw culture as a panacea to urban illnesses. For Harvey, "the trouble with all of this cultural emphasis is that it has directed attention away from the general problem" (Harvey 1993: 14). For Throsby, "in a society where government pursuits an economic agenda, the balance between the policy mix will tend to favour individualistic at the expense of collective goals" (Throsby, 2001: 138).

Urban regeneration through arts factories (High 2017) and macro-investments *à la* Guggenheim, in Bilbao (Dickson 2017) has the same roots as the predatory urban development which has generated inaccessible urban spaces and cultural services, which are now exlusive for important segments of the population (Scott 2007; Rosenstein 2011).

Once again, these processes have historical, identifiable roots: the theatrical example, which is the focus of the present research, sheds a light on how the articulation of the cultural infrastructure has always responded to cultural hierarchies and political meanings, alternatively asserting power or contesting it in the urban space (Schwarte 2012). The progressive atrophization of spaces and modalities of the theatrical practice within XIX-century architectures and rites has turned theatre into a bourgeois prerogative, it has cut the thread that tied theatre to the public sphere and which made it a social, collective form of art (Sennett 1977).

A series of tensions and questions emerge from the analysis: tensions between building and dwelling (Sennett 2018), between different ways of producing the city; and the questions of how it is possible to reconcile the cultural infrastructure with a plural city, with complex needs, and how it is possible to regenerate abandoned spaces in a sustainable way, without adopting modalities that would imply further marginalization.

The alternative paradigms to these two questions, at the urban and cultural levels, are observed in the second chapters through the lens of two literatures: urban democracy and that on the commons. The debate on cultural democracy developed in a prominent way in the UK, but its reach goes beyond national borders, and can (or, better, must) inform research and cultural

policy. It developed in the 1970s (Hadley 2018) and was subject to an epistemological shift due to political and social changes, which has been reported by Gross e Wilson in a crucial text for the debate on cultural democracy (Gross, Wilson 2018); this transition has led to the polarization of two streams of thought, one oriented on the democratization of culture, and the other on cultural democracy *per se*. The first aspires at bringing culture beyond the boundaries in which it has been constrained by XIX-century spatial and formal categories; the approach deriving from this consideration has been polemically defined "eccellence and access"; the second pushes towards an expansion of the category of culture in and of itself, to include everyday forms of creativity, which had for long been excluded by an elitist approach. With the advent of the politics of recognition and identity politics (Taylor 1992; Calhoun 1995, this approach gained particular relevance. Politics of recognition and cultural democracy developed in parallel throughout the 1980s and 1990s, reinforced by the experience of community arts which, starting from the 1970s, had transformed art in a political act which gave voice to communities. The political dimension of cultural democracy (and, consequently, its ability to converge towards political stances) has clearly been expressed by Hadley and Belfiore, for whom 'A politics of recognition sensitive to issues of class would be the necessary accompaniment to a politics of distribution in struggles for equality and fairness' (Hadley, Belfiore 2018: 222).

In time, a need has emerged to readapt the discourse over cultural democracy to a transformative context (Hadley, Belfiore 2018), and to redefine the meaning of 'right to culture'. This need, however, is counterbalanced by the awareness that 'It is far less challenging, but easier to place the search for "cultural democracy" firmly to one side of the main stream of "high culture"' (Braden 1978 in Gross and Wilson 2018: 7). A possible conjunction between these two approaches, proposed by Gross and Wilson (2018), is the *capabilities approach* inspired by the work of (1999) about sustainable development: in this approach, wellbeing is not defined by income as a primary indicator, but rather 'capabilities', 'a person's substantive freedom to do and be what they have reason to value' (Sen 1999 in Gross, Wilson 2018: 8), and the possibility to 'shape the meanings and structures of their social existence together' (Smith 2010). Since the structures of social existence find their tangible manifestation in the space of the city, discourses of cultural and urban democracy converge.

The possibility to take part to social and cultural processes echo in the theory and practice of the commons. The term 'commons' originally referred to natural resource systems managed and appropriated collectively on the basis of common rules, locally established. Elinor Ostrom, the main theoretician of the commons and Nobel prize for economics, showed, through the

study of local governance systems, that the dualism State-market could be overcome. Ostrom identified seven design principles for the effective governance of the commons: clearly defined boundaries; congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local condition; collective-choice arrangements; monitoring; graduated sanctions; conflict-resolution mechanisms; minimal recognition of rights to organize; nested enterprises (Ostrom 1990: 100).

After her research on natural resources, new research branches have developed that observed the number of resources that could be shared, from knowledge (Hess, Ostrom 2007) to culture (Bertacchini et al. 2012), to urban spaces. The latter, known as urban commons, have been intensely investigated in different research streams (from architecture, to critical theory, to political economy): this is because of their inner complexity, and because they are stances of crucial conflicts which now characterise cities as "frontier zones" (Sassen 2013) e "ground zero" of struggles for the urban space (García Lamarca 2015). The urban commons, therefore, take the form of occupied spaces, but are not limited to this: they are claims for the right to the city, the right to appropriate it and produce it, creating a dimension, in urban planning, for the "vital little plans" which Jane Jacobs saw as the productive collective force of the city. As such, they not only embed a spatial dimension, but also a symbolic and political force, shared by those who take part to it (Jacobs 2016).

From a theorical point of view, the urban commons posit several challenges to commons theory: the first challenge concerns the commons as goods – starting from research on the urban commons, theory has emphasized the relational dimension of the commons, "commoning" (Euler 2018); the second, consequently concerns the notion of the common sas a proprietary notion, which in the case of the natural commons seemed the necessary condition for its collective appropriation, whereas the urban commons originate starting from an often unresolved conflict over property (i.e., the occupation of public or private dismissed spaces), and which then pivot their common nature around relations of production (Wilson 2018; Roggero 2010) and around social practices; the third concerns community boundaries, which in Ostrom's theorization were more marked, and which in the urban dimension, and which in the urban dimension are challenged by the fluidity of urban social relations (Huron 2015). At the same time, some are noted (De Angelis 2017; Manzini 2019) that some boundaries are necessary, as they mark the difference between 'public' and 'common', and because the care subtended to the commoning process calls for the existence of a real community, consisting of 'a web of recognisable faces, names and characters and dispositions' (De Angelis 2017: 125). The fourth challenge concerns the seventh design principle identified by Ostrom, that is, the minimal recognition of the right to organize, which presupposes a sharp

distinction between the commons and the outer world (and its economic mechanisms). It has been noted (Euler 2018; De Angelis 2017) that at the urban scale this separation does not exist. It is necessary to reconsider the hybrid nature of the commons and the role that institutions can play in the urban commons and in producing commoning practices. It is on this particular point that the work of the observed cases has been pivoted.

The two political answers (of cultural democracy and of the commons) to the enclosure of cities and of cultrue converge on several points, and propose alternatives to the current paradigm of economic development, in which culture regenerates places at an unsustainable social cost, and the production of spaces is entirely delegated, generating gentrification, commodification and privatization mechanisms. The experiences introduced in the empirical section show a different way of operating on the urban fabric: they are about a theatrical (operatic) project which, travelling on a truck, has taken three operatic productions in peripheries to thousands of people. Starting from 2016 up to the present day, they bave been entirely free. The project, born from the coproduction of Opera di Roma and Teatro Massimo di Palermo, has toured in different cities and peripheries of Italy, including Milano and Bologna. The last journey of OperaCamion dates back to September 2020, when, in the middle of the COVID pandemic, the Teatri di Reggio Emilia have brought opera in the public square overlooking the theatre.

After analysing the state of the art, the thesis presents its original contribution, and presents the methodology of analysis (third chapter) and the empirical results (fourth section). The method uses case study (Farquhar 2012), and specifically observes Roma, Palermo e Reggio Emilia. The choice of focusing on theatre, and on a form of art that is proverbially "unpopular" as opera theatre, has the goal of showing how it is possible to go beyond the dichotomies imposed by the discourse over cultrual emocracy, and how to challenge the formal and spatial features of theatre in order to give it a collective dimension, producing sociability, able to produce urban regeneration. A short overview of the theatrical history is presented and read through the lens of the commons: every society in every era has adapted theatre to its needs, modifying the three resources that are at the core of the theatrical resource: spaces (the built ones, which articulate the stage-audience dynamics), relations (between audience and performers and between audiences) and dramaturgy, which has been codified with a common lexicon (shared by the theatrical community in different times) (Sabatini 2020). This articulation allows to look at theatre as a commons, composed by a set of resources (relational, spatial, dramaturgic), practices of appropriation and production which have been tacitly shared by the theatrical community, which reflected its publis sphere in theatre (the stage-street *fil*

*rouge* is exhaustively described by Richard Sennett in his work of 1977, "*The fall of public man*"). In the XIX century, when theatre fossilized in the archetypical structure it has today, and the access mechanisms to the theatrical resource where superimposed by the dominating class, theatre, like many other resources, was subject to an enclosure which is still ongoing, even though some emerging actions for the production and fruition of theatre are challenging it. To theorize a theatrical commons is not a taxonomical cavill: it means to understand how theatre can have a role in public sphere, understand its commons-like nature and a better distribution of public funding for the performing arts (in the framework of cultural democracy); ultimately, it helps understand how challenging the spatial, formal and behavioural boundaries of theatre and of cultural practices it is possible to make them more accessible.

From a methodological viewpoint, a period of fieldwork was made impossible due to the pandemic, which has prevented performances from taking place. This phase of observation was obviated with participant observation, because in 2018 I was an intern at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma and I could take part to the OperaCamion production, which was then performing *Rigoletto*. Through triangulation of direct and indirect sources (Srivastava and Thomson 2009), and of different research methodologies, the limits of case study analysis were partially overcome. In particular, the methodology was articulated in three steps: semi-structured interviews were made with the institutional representatives of theatres (the Artistic Director of Teatri di Reggio Emilia, the Administrative Director of Opera di Roma, the Superintendent of Teatro Massimo di Palermo), the project manager of OperaCamion, the singers (interviewed in a group interview), the creative team (director and scenographer), the actress that took part to the productions. In the case of Palermo, the Franciscan friar which, with the Danisinni community, takes care of the regeneration of the neighbourhood. Interviews have been codified and analysed using the method proposed by Christiane Schmidt (2004) through the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti. Theatres and artists have provided a great amount of secondary materia, totaling more than 550 photos and 4 videos (other videos are available online), besides the press reviews. The relevance of the regeneration process of Danisinni emerged during the study, and a phase of observation occurred in July 2021. The ethnographic method used for the fieldwork is that of *deep hanging out*, appreciated in anthropological studies and revived in recent cultural studies (Walmsley 2018b): the population is not observed, but turned into co-researchers, becoming 'a practice of observation grounded in participatory dialogue' (Walmsley 2018b: 276). The biases that inevitably emerge from the intersubjective,

dual position of participant and researcher within this approach are discussed in a section of the methodology.

The empirical research is introduced in the fourth chapter. The cases are presented as three distinct way of developing a project which has, nonetheless, an aesthetic coherence and a commonality of views: in Rome, the truck has toured all of the city's municipalities, bringing in neglected and peripheral squares an operatic performance on a truck; the performance is freely accessible, and audiences bring their seats from home and shape an *impromptu* theatrical space. In Reggio Emilia, OperaCamion happened in a square in the middle of the COVID crisis; the freedom of the Roman model was limited by the circumstances in which the performances occurred – due to social distancing, the space was entrenched, and seats were provided by the theatre. In Palermo, OperaCamion toured peripheries in 2016. When, in 2017, it reached the Danisinni periphery, it 'clashed' with a very active community which called for the performance to be transformed into a co-production with the neighbors. In 2018 and 2019, two operas were performed in the community Farm of Danisinni, where the inhabitants were staged as the choir after 6 months of rehearsals with the Theatre's choir master.

An analytical matrix has been produced to observe the features of OperaCamion in the light of different categories: type of intervention in space, governance model, type of co-produced resource, level of commoning (type of commons).

In Rome, it was possible to observe the theatrical commons theorized in section 3.2: the relations generated among people in the unbuilt environment allow to redesign the access mechanisms and behavioural rules at the local level, while coproduction of the theatrical space is delegated to citizens which gather around the truck spontaneously, as in a sort of Do-it-yourself urbanism (o DIY) which, it has been observed, produces urban commons (Volont 2019); in a neglected, peripheral space, this type of urban commons produce a new cultural use, suggesting alternatives for urban voids, reappropriated by the citizenship and enriched with meaning. The dimension of sociability generated between artists, audience, and within these two groups; the co-production of the theatrical space in a urban void (space); the artistic innovation made possible by the context, where artists and singers are able to innovate the operatic canon and to improvise (dramaturgy): these three resources are common in the OperaCamion experience, showing the commons nature of theatre.

In Reggio Emilia the context was very different: first, because the city has a strong operatic tradition, in a rich Region in Italy; secondly, because it is an intra-pandemic performance,

which happened in the open space while theatres were shut. For the artistic director, these circumstances have provided the occasion for a radical innovation of the tradition, in a city where opera lovers would have contested an unorthodox performance. Curiously, then, OperaCamion operated a *renversement* of the typical access mechanisms to the operatic resource, with the potential to cut off the "adepts". Actually, the performance (which was sold out on both dates) represented a 'hug to the city' (in the words of the Artistic Director), where melomaniacs and newcomers could all be welcome. The spontaneous process of gathering around the truck could not take place (but the performance was still free to watch). At the same time, it was impossible to prevent people from gathering around the barriers to take part to the experience. Especially after a national lockdown and closures imposed by the emergency, the performance has allowed citizens to reappropriate a long-denied public space,

Danisinni represented for the thesis what in grounded theory is known as a 'research situation' (McGee et al. 2007: 335): in an early stage of the research, while investigating the theatrical commons, what has been found is an actual urban commons. Danisinni is a 'urban depression', a ghettoed place cut off from the city in spite of its central position, with dramatic rates of unemployment and school dropout. When, in 2017, Teatro Massimo had planned with the Municipality to bring OperaCamion to Danisinni, the community opposed this choice, arguing that the performance would have represented 'a shopping window for the theatre', and it suggested to transform the performance in a coproduction where the inhabitants could play an active role. The result was a performance entirely coproduced, hosted in the Danisinni farm, a pivotal place for the development of the community (a semi-rural area which was given in loan for use to the community). This creation of a common sense, the possibility of expressing their own creativity and to give form to their social existence together are at the core of the capabilities approach (Sen 1999; Jones 2010; Gross, Wilson 2018) and show how OperaCamion in Danisinni can be read through the lens of cultural democracy, as a project able to generate social impacts which, though hardly measurable, need to be accounted for in order to reach a democratic urban development.

In Danisinni, the community has waged a series of actions which allowed them to reach decisional authority over the neighborhood's territory, managing to first appropriate the spaces, and then developing a shared project for the area with the different actors of the territory, from volunteer associations to cultural institutions (Teatro Massimo, Teatro Biondo, Academy of Fine Arts). The commoners-inhabitants managed to ensure the production and provision of new cultural goods and services, while monitoring the 'entrance' of the institutions in the neighborhood, and establishing rules by which this access had to be granted.

Danisinni has all the characteristics of Ostrom's commons, and yet it goes beyong the 'minimal recognition of the rights to organise', because the resource-neighbourhood is sustained by the active cooperation of commoners, private foundations, volunteers of the civil service, cultural institutions – an actual 'collaborative ecosystem', the definition which Iaione (2015) attributes to the urban commons.

OperaCamion preserves an aesthetic coherence (which challenges aesthetic canons) in the three cases and a common goal (that of rethinking the relationship between culture and city, combining artistic and social goals). At the same time, however, it has acquired some site-specific characteristics deriving from the interaction with the urban environment, the economic and social context, the responses of communities and the decisions of theatres. This makes it particularly interesting to observe: it shows a potentially scalable and replicable response to the open themes of urban regeneration, showing how this can happen in a gradual, temporary way. The processes illustrated here allow citizens to reappropriate, even for a brief moment, urban voids, redefine their uses, and, through DIY urbanism, to produce urban commons; to activate social practices of commoning under the aegis of a shared cultural activity, in which spaces, performances, or the public sphere are reproduced – the public sphere, not by chance, has at its core the act of being together, rather than having together (Arendt 1958; Mattei 2012).

The research aims at showing how temporary acts of urban regeneration are able to reactivate urban voids, proposing new uses for neglected spaces and new re-productions of the unbuilt environment through micro design and DIY urbanism; in this temporary reactivation, the role of theatre as a commons is preeminent, in that it allows to elicit sociability and produce options of spatial coproduction. Another fundamental element for a sustainable action of regeneration is the involvement of communities in processes of reactivation, be them temporary or permanent. In these processes cultural institutions act as mediators between different governance levels, providing spaces and tools to activate collaborative governance and to develop citizens' human capabilities.

The main limits of the cases are, first, that temporary regeneration, though being an act of prefigurative politics (Maeckelberg 2011), is not sufficient in producing lasting effects, and needs to be embedded in a broader cultural programming; second, to obtain the effects of the Danisinni case, the presence of an active community is a necessary precondition. How to activate them without losing the spontaneity of grassroot initiative is an open question of this thesis, and enabling ecosystems need to be sought (Manzini 2019). A third limit is structural,

especially in Italy: the obsolete measurements of cultural funding, still grounded on monetary indicators, do not account for projects such as OperaCamion, because it does not produce tickets; concerning Danisinni, it is a precious and fragile stance in the context of political instability and dramatic abandonment of the city in its most delicate areas. Nonetheless, this experience testifies that the active and dynamic cooperation with a urban commons has forced institutional actors to a process of institutional adaptation (Emerson, Gerlak 2014), where the monitored cooperation, from the part of the commoners, has produced lasting results. Reggio Emilia, despite its limited experience, shows a potential configuration for the post-COVID theatre, that is not limited to the (necessary) digitalization of fruition modes; a reconciling between culture, public space and citizens occurs in this experience. In Rome, this unconventional DIY urbanism operation allows to reactivate urban voids with the active contribution of the inhabitants, activating a social practice of commoning which, if places in a broader cultrual programming shared with the citizens, has the potential to produce new regeneration opportunities for the unbuilt environment. The three projects are important examples of how challenging the spatial and formal boundaries of culture also challenges the categories of 'high' and 'low' in the arts, thus allowing to imagine a more innovative and more accessible cultural offer in the spaces of the city.

Diffusione, impatto, e inclusione nella tesi di articoli pubblicati
**Seminari e conferenze.** Il lavoro di OperaCamion a Roma e a Palermo è stato presentato durante una lezione per il corso di Economic Geography of Creativity alla Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, University di Rotterdam, l'8 dicembre 2020.

Un focus specifico sul commons di Danisinni è stato presentato durante la serie di seminari "Brownbag Seminar Series" al Dipartimento di Strategy, Globalization and Society di HEC, la Scuola di "Hautes Etudes Commerciales" dell'Università di Losanna il 5 maggio 2021, nel corso di un periodo da *chercheuse invitée* presso la Scuola.

**Inclusione di articoli pubblicati.** La ricerca sul commons teatrale è stata presentata alla conferenza dal titolo "Cultural Commons and Urban Dynamics: a new economic paradigm for a complex social map", tenutosi nell'ottobre del 2019 a Catanzaro, organizzato da Innovate Heritage e dal Dipartimento di Giurisprudenza, Economia e Sociologia dell'Università di Catanzaro. Dalla presentazione è stato tratto un articolo che è stato poi inserito nel libro a cura di E. Macrì, V. Morea, M. Trimarchi e pubblicato da Springer nel 2020, "Cultural commons and urban dynamics: a multidisciplinary perspective".

Una prima elaborazione del lavoro su teatro e città, che annoverava OperaCamion fra i paradigmi emergenti e qui presentato nella sua forma estesa nei capitoli 1 e 2, è stata presentata nel 2019 alla conferenza "Chances: practices, spaces and buildings in cities' transformation", organizzata presso il Dipartimento di Architettura e Culture del Progetto dell'Università di Bologna. L'articolo è stato poi inserito negli atti del convegno pubblicati nel 2021.

I capitoli teorici della tesi sono stati presentati all'AIMAC Doctoral Symposium della Judge Business School dell'Università di Cambridge nel mese di settembre 2020.

**Divulgazione extra-accademica.** Durante il periodo di osservazione in presenza e ricerca etnografica a Palermo, a luglio 2021, una troupe di giornalisti dal TG Regione Sicilia si è recata a Danisinni per visitare la residenza per artisti e ospiti di recente costruzione e la Fattoria – in quei giorni Danisinni era stata inserita ne 'l'itinerario perfetto', fra i luoghi palermitani da non perdere nel blog di Lonely Planet "48 ore a"[3]. In quell'occasione sono stata intervistata dai giornalisti, e un estratto del mio contributo è stato riprodotto nell'edizione del telegiornale del 9 luglio 2021[4].

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[3] https://www.lonelyplanetitalia.it/articoli/idee-per-il-weekend/48-ore-a-palermo-l-itinerario-perfetto
[4] https://www.rainews.it/tgr/sicilia/video/2021/07/sic-danisinni-turisti-0fe0bac7-434d-4c11-bd8a-0051c1b44aea.html

Introduzione

La ricerca affronta il tema della riattivazione dei vuoti urbani (spazi negletti della città che sono stati privati di funzione e, quindi, di significato) tramite interventi culturali. In particolare, tratta di azioni di rigenerazione urbana partecipate (seppur a diversi livelli), in cui i cittadini e le istituzioni culturali contribuiscono a creare un ecosistema collaborativo e un'esperienza culturale condivisa; queste azioni possono essere variamente iscritte nel quadro della democrazia culturale e urbana, e dei beni comuni. Il focus empirico della tesi è su un progetto teatrale che ha portato degli spettacoli d'opera gratis nelle piazze delle periferie di diverse città. Originariamente sviluppato dal Teatro dell'Opera di Roma e dal Teatro Massimo di Palermo, ha poi toccato diversi paesi e città d'Italia, fra cui Reggio Emilia; quest'ultima, con Roma e Palermo, costituisce i casi studio della tesi.

La cornice teorica in cui questa tesi si inserisce è interdisciplinare: attinge infatti agli studi urbani, che intercettano nozioni di pianificazione urbana, teoria critica e geografia economica, per parlare della forma della città, del suo sviluppo economico e dei meccanismi di produzione dei suoi spazi; di economia della cultura, per quanto riguarda il ruolo della cultura nella rigenerazione urbana, e il teatro, che è il focus empirico di questo studio; infine, l'economia politica, e nello specifico il neoistituzionalismo che è stato riportato in auge dalle teorie di Elinor Ostrom sui sistemi di risorse comuni (common-pool resource systems) note come commons; a livello urbano, quello affrontato dalla tesi, i commons danno vita a nuove modalità di 'produrre' la città, di usufruire e appropriarsi dei suoi spazi, che sono alternative ai meccanismi neoliberali sottesi alla governance urbana contemporanea; le tesi di Ostrom sono, inoltre, applicate al caso teatrale per osservare il teatro come risorsa prodotta e fruita in comune (sebbene non sia comune nel senso proprietario del termine). Sia gli studi urbanistici che quelli dell'economia della cultura sono integrati da un prospetto storico, che fa risalire la produzione della città contemporanea e l'infrastruttura culturale di quest'ultima alle dinamiche della città del XIX secolo.

In questa cornice, le domande che la tesi si pone sono tre, e articolano i tre principali momenti della tesi: chi produce (e rigenera) la città? Chi produce la cultura nella città, e dove? In che modo delle azioni di commoning, con una forte componente culturale (teatrale) possono produrre rigenerazione urbana? La tesi si sviluppa in quattro capitoli: i primi due capitoli rispondono alle prime due domande, fornendo esempi di due paradigmi differenti, contrastanti e conflittuali di produrre e fruire la città e la sua infrastruttura culturale (e quindi di due modi

diversi di rispondere a queste domande). Il terzo capitolo è dedicato alla metodologia, mentre il quarto sviluppa una risposta alla terza domanda tramite l'indagine empirica sui casi studio.

Il primo capitolo è incentrato sullo sviluppo della città: i meccanismi economici tardocapitalistici e post-industriali, che hanno visto l'insorgere dell'economia culturale e creativa come il principale motore dello sviluppo urbano nel cosiddetto "Nord globale", affondano in realtà le proprie radici nelle trasformazioni urbane dell'Ottocento. La tesi assurge a punto di partenza (di certo poco ortodosso) alcuni passaggi del capitolo "Parigi a volo d'uccello" (da *Notre dame de Paris* di Victor Hugo) per riflettere su come la produzione di spazi e di significati nella città contemporanea sia il risultato di un processo stratificato. Nella Parigi medievale di Hugo, che egli vedeva scomparire progressivamente, spazzata via dall'incipiente pianificazione urbana, "non c'era niente che non avesse la sua originalità, la sua ragione, la sua nota geniale, la sua bellezza, niente che non fosse artistico, dalla modesta casa […] fino al maestoso Louvre" (Hugo 2011: 265). Hugo aveva identificato i due diversi livelli di produzione degli spazi urbani, "la modesta casa" e il "maestoso Louvre", attribuendo a entrambi i livelli la capacità di articolare l'infrastruttura culturale delle città. Hugo vede la Parigi medievale come un costrutto collettivo, caotico e creativo, da preservare a fronte dei cambiamenti massicci che stravolgevano la città mentre scriveva.

Questo passaggio può essere considerato opinabile da una serie di punti di vista: Hugo romantizzava la Parigi del passato e demonizzava la nuova, con uno slancio che rischia di apparire conservatore; inoltre, fa un'analisi quantomeno parziale dei fenomeni urbani (dopotutto, non era uno storico). E tuttavia, "Parigi a volo d'uccello" descrive una città che è molto simile alle nostre: prodotta da fermenti creativi collettivi, minacciata da forme di urbanizzazione predatoria che ne stanno progressivamente limitando l'accessibilità tramite interventi insostenibili. Per descrivere queste dinamiche con un esempio contemporaneo, la tesi fa un salto di diversi secoli per presentare Hudson Yards, un imponente cluster di New York composto da loft lussuosi con vista sul fiume, imponenti centri commerciali e, al suo centro, una piazza dominata da the Vessel, una spettacolare architettura cui si accede pagando un biglietto. Poco più a Nord, pronto a essere spazzato via, c'è il vecchio quartiere popolare di Hell's Kitchen, che da multietnico va gentrificandosi per lasciare spazio ai broker della finanza e alla 'classe creativa'.

In altre parole, la produzione della città (dei suoi spazi, da quelli costruiti a quelli interstiziali, e delle sue funzioni) sta venendo progressivamente delegata al mercato, che tramite investimenti massicci ne modifica l'assetto con dei costi sociali spesso insostenibili (Harvey

2012, 1993; Sassen 2013, 2000) – man mano che gli spazi della città vengono infatti divorati da queste operazioni predatorie, la popolazione vede negati gli spazi quotidiani della socialità, e viene relegata ai margini dell'infrastruttura urbana.

A questo meccanismo hanno contribuito le politiche per la rigenerazione urbana a trazione culturale. Questo tema è tutt'altro che emergente: già a partire dalla fine degli anni '80, con *Loft Living* di Sharon Zukin, la letteratura aveva iniziato a mettere in evidenza il modo in cui l'industria culturale e creativa, nata dalle ceneri del paradigma industriale, è in grado di alterare il paradigma di sviluppo dell'economia urbana e, di conseguenza, la sua forma stessa – è proprio *Loft Living* il primo testo a parlare del fenomeno della gentrificazione). Il tema era già stato affrontato, fra gli altri, da Harvey (1993), da McGuigan (2005; 1996) e da Throsby, nel suo testo del 2001 "Economics and culture" (seminale per l'economia della cultura). Già negli anni '90, dunque, la ricerca (e la teoria critica nello specifico) aveva già avvertito le insidie dietro un approccio che vedeva nella cultura la panacea ai mali della città – per Harvey, "the trouble with all of this cultural emphasis is that it has directed attention away from the general problem" (Harvey 1993: 14). Per Throsby, parlando appunto di rigenerazione urbana a trazione culturale, "in a society where government pursuits an economic agenda, the balance between the policy mix will tend to favour individualistic at the expense of collective goals" (Throsby, 2001: 138).

La rigenerazione urbana delle arts factories (High 2017) e dei macro-interventi *à la* Guggenheim, a Bilbao (Dickson 2017) è frutto di quella stessa governance neoliberale che nelle città ha favorito uno sviluppo urbano predatorio e un'inaccessibilità diffusa non solo agli spazi della città, ma anche ai servizi culturali, che sono divenuti tanto infungibili quanto inaccessibili (da un punto di vista percettivo e spaziale) da segmenti importanti della popolazione (Scott 2007; Rosenstein 2011).

Ancora una volta, questi processi hanno radici storiche ben identificabili: l'esempio teatrale, che fa da focus a questa ricerca, risulta utile a illustrare come l'articolazione dell'infrastruttura culturale abbia da sempre risposto a gerarchie sociali e intenti politici, alternativamente affermando o contestando il potere nello spazio della città (Schwarte 2012). La progressiva atrofizzazione degli spazi e delle modalità del teatro all'interno delle architetture e dei riti ottocenteschi, che lo hanno reso una prerogativa borghese, hanno reciso il filo che connetteva il teatro alla sfera pubblica e che lo rendevano una forma d'arte eminentemente sociale, collettiva (Sennett 1977).

Emergono, da questa analisi, una serie di tensioni e di domande: tensioni fra il costruire e l'abitare (Sennett 2018), e fra i diversi modi di produrre la città; la domanda di come si possa riconciliare l'infrastruttura culturale con una città plurale, dai bisogni complessi, e come si possa rigenerare in modo sostenibile degli spazi che sono stati a lungo abbandonati, senza ricorrere a delle modalità che implicherebbero ulteriore marginalizzazione.

I paradigmi alternativi emergenti per queste due domande, a livello urbano e culturale, sono stati osservati nel secondo capitolo attraverso la lente di due letterature: quella sulla democrazia culturale e quella sui commons. Il dibattito sulla democrazia culturale si è sviluppato in modo prominente nel Regno Unito, ma ha un respiro che va oltre i confini nazionali, e che può (anzi, deve) informare la ricerca e le politiche per la cultura. Quest'ambito di riflessione, sviluppatosi già negli anni '70 (Hadley 2018) ha subito una transizione epistemologica dovuta ai mutamenti politici e sociali, transizione che è stata ampiamente riportata da Gross e Wilson in un testo cruciale per il dibattito contemporaneo sulla democrazia culturale (Gross, Wilson 2018); questa transizione ha portato alla polarizzazione di due scuole di pensiero, una orientata alla democratizzazione della cultura, e l'altra alla democrazia culturale propriamente detta; la prima che aspira a portare la cultura oltre le barriere in cui è stata costretta da categorie spaziali e formali prettamente ottocentesche (rappresentate dal museo, dal teatro, e dai 'luoghi preposti'), in un modello che è stato definito (non senza una vena polemica), di "eccellenza e accessibilità"; la seconda spinge invece a espandere la categoria stessa di cultura per ricomprendere al suo interno nuove forme di creatività quotidiana, contemporanea, che i fautori di un'arte 'alta' avevano disdegnato – quest'ultima forma ha goduto di particolare successo con l'avvento delle politiche di riconoscimento (*politics of recognition* o *identity politics* nella letteratura anglosassone che più estensivamente ne discute – si vedano i testi fondativi di Taylor 1992 e Calhoun 1995). Le politiche di riconoscimento e la democrazia culturale hanno, di conseguenza, avuto uno sviluppo parallelo nel corso degli anni 80 e 90, rafforzati anche dall'esperienza delle community arts che, a partire dagli anni '70, avevano trasformato l'arte in un gesto politico che dava voce alle comunità. La dimensione politica della democrazia culturale (e, di conseguenza, la sua possibilità di convergere verso altre istanze politiche) è stata chiaramente espressa da Hadley e Belfiore, per i quali 'A politics of recognition sensitive to issues of class would be the necessary accompaniment to a politics of distribution in struggles for equality and fairness' (Hadley, Belfiore 2018: 222).

È emerso, nel corso del tempo, il bisogno di riadattare il discorso sulla democrazia culturale a un contesto in trasformazione (Hadley, Belfiore 2018), e di ridefinire dunque il senso del diritto alla cultura – bisogno che è, in ogni caso, controbilanciato dalla consapevolezza che 'It is far

less challenging, but easier to place the search for "cultural democracy" firmly to one side of the main stream of "high culture"' (Braden 1978 in Gross and Wilson 2018: 7). Un possibile punto di giunzione fra questi due approcci, proposto da Gross e Wilson (2018), è il *capabilities approach* ispirato al lavoro di Sen (1999) sullo sviluppo sostenibile, in cui alla base della definizione di benessere non c'è il reddito come indicatore primario, ma le 'capacità', che sono state presentate come 'a person's substantive freedom to do and be what they have reason to value' (Sen 1999 in Gross, Wilson 2018: 8), e come la possibilità di 'shape the meanings and structures of their social existence together' (Smith 2010). Dal momento che le strutture dell'esistenza sociale citate da Smith hanno nello spazio della città la loro manifestazione tangibile, i discorsi di democrazia urbana e democrazia culturale convergono.

Questa possibilità di prendere parte a un processo sociale e culturale riecheggia nella teoria e nella pratica dei commons. Il termine commons era originariamente riferito a dei sistemi di risorse naturali gestiti e appropriati collettivamente sulla base di regole comuni stabilite a livello locale. Elinor Ostrom, la principale teorica dei commons e premio Nobel per l'economia, ha mostrato, attraverso lo studio di sistemi locali di governance collettiva delle risorse, che esisteva un'alternativa al binomio Stato-mercato. Ostrom aveva identificato sette principi per la governance efficace dei commons: definizione dei confini; congruenza fra le regole di appropriazione e di produzione; accordi collettivi; monitoraggio; sanzioni graduate; meccanismi di risoluzione del conflitto; riconoscimento minimo del diritto a organizzarsi (Ostrom 1990).

Dopo le sue ricerche sulle risorse naturali, una serie di branche di ricerca si sono sviluppate che andavano a osservare la molteplicità di risorse che può essere condivisa, dalla conoscenza (Hess, Ostrom 2007) alla cultura (Bertacchini et al. 2012), fino agli spazi della città. Questi ultimi, noti come urban commons, godono di particolare fortuna in vari ambiti di ricerca (dall'architettura, alla teoria critica, all'economia politica) in ragione sia della loro complessità, che chiama in causa diverse discipline, sia perché sono importanti istanze dei conflitti che attraversano la città come zona di frontiera (Sassen 2013) e "ground zero" (García Lamarca 2015) delle lotte per lo spazio urbano. Gli urban commons, di conseguenza, prendono spesso la forma di spazi occupati, ma non si limitano a questo: sono delle rivendicazioni del diritto alla città, del diritto di appropriarsene e di produrla, ricavando una dimensione, nella pianificazione urbana, per i "vital little plans" in cui Jane Jacobs identificava la vera forza produttrice collettiva della città. In quanto tali, hanno una dimensione non solo 'spaziale', ma anche simbolica e politica molto forte, condivisa da coloro che ne fanno parte (Jacobs 2016).

Da un punto di vista teorico, gli urban commons pongono diverse sfide alla teoria dei commons così come era stata elaborata per le risorse naturali: la prima sfida riguarda i commons come beni – è soprattutto a partire dagli studi sugli urban commons che si è sviluppata una riflessione sulla dimensione relazionale dei commons, e quindi sul commoning come pratica sociale (Euler 2018); la seconda concerne, conseguentemente, la nozione di commons come istituzione *proprietaria*, che nel caso dei commons naturali appariva come condizione necessaria alla sua appropriazione collettiva, laddove invece gli urban commons sorgono, molto spesso, proprio a partire da un conflitto di matrice proprietaria (ad esempio, l'occupazione di spazi pubblici o privati dismessi) per poi imperniare la propria natura di commons attorno alle relazioni di produzione (Roggero 2010) e alle pratiche sociali che su questo si innestano; il terzo sviluppo della teoria dei commons riguarda i limiti della comunità, che nella teorizzazione di Ostrom erano molto più definiti e che invece nella dimensione urbana fanno i conti con la fluidità delle relazioni fra gli individui alla scala urbana (Huron 2015). Al tempo stesso c'è stato chi ha notato, come De Angelis, 2017 e Manzini, 2019, che alcuni confini sono necessari, perché marcano la differenza fra il pubblico e il comune, e perché la cura sottesa al processo di commoning prevede la presenza di una comunità reale, che compone 'a web of recognisable faces, names and characters and dispositions' (De Angelis 2017: 125). La quarta sfida che gli urban commons pongono alla teoria dei commons riguarda il settimo principio di Ostrom, ovvero il riconoscimento minimo del diritto a organizzarsi, che presuppone una netta distinzione fra il commons e il mondo esterno (e i suoi meccanismi economici) che, è stato notato (Euler 2018; De Angelis 2017), alla scala urbana non esiste. È necessario dunque considerare la natura ibrida dei commons e il ruolo che agenti e istituzioni esterne possono giocare negli urban commons o nel produrre azioni di commoning – ed è su questo punto in particolare che si innesta il lavoro fatto dai casi studio presentati in questa tesi.

Le due risposte politiche (della democrazia culturale e dei commons) all'enclosure della città e della cultura convergono dunque su numerosi punti, e propongono delle alternative al paradigma corrente di sviluppo urbano, in cui la cultura rigenera i luoghi a un costo sociale insostenibile e la produzione degli spazi della città viene delegata interamente, generando meccanismi di gentrificazione, commodificazione e privatizzazione. Le esperienze presentate nella sezione empirica di questa tesi testimoniano di un modo diverso di operare sul tessuto della città: si tratta di un progetto d'opera che, viaggiando a bordo di un camion, ha portato tre produzioni operistiche fuori dagli schemi nelle periferie a migliaia di persone a partire dal 2016 a oggi, a titolo completamente gratuito. Il progetto, nato dalla coproduzione fra Opera di Roma e Teatro Massimo di Palermo, ha poi viaggiato in diverse cittadine e periferie d'Italia

(fra cui Milano e Bologna). L'ultimo viaggio di OperaCamion risale al settembre 2020, quando, in piena crisi pandemica, i Teatri di Reggio Emilia hanno portato l'opera nella piazza pubblica di fronte al teatro.

Dopo l'analisi dello stato dell'arte sui processi di produzione della città e di rigenerazione urbana a trazione culturale, la tesi entra nel merito del proprio contributo originale, e presenta la metodologia di indagine (nel terzo capitolo) e la sezione empirica (nel quarto capitolo). Il metodo scelto è quello dell'analisi dei casi studio (Farquhar 2012), che nello specifico sono Roma, Palermo e Reggio Emilia. La scelta di concentrarsi sul teatro, e su una forma d'arte proverbialmente 'impopolare' come il teatro d'opera, ha precisamente lo scopo di mostrare come si possa andare oltre le dicotomie imposte dal discorso sulla democrazia culturale, e come sfidando le categorie formali e spaziali del teatro sia possibile restituirlo a una dimensione collettiva, generatrice di socialità, in grado di produrre rigenerazione urbana. A tal fine, una breve storia del teatro viene delineata in questa sessione prodotta attraverso la lente analitica dei commons: ogni società in ogni epoca ha adattato il teatro alle proprie esigenze modificando le tre risorse che sono alla base dell'esperienza teatrale, ovvero gli spazi (quelli edificati e quelli che articolano la dicotomia fra scena e spettatori), le relazioni (quelle fra attori e spettatori e quelle fra gli spettatori stessi, che sono state sollecitate o impedite dalle trasformazioni spaziali) e la drammaturgia, che ha assunto dei tratti codificati e un lessico comune condiviso dalla comunità teatrale delle varie società e delle varie epoche (Sabatini 2020). Questa articolazione consente di guardare al teatro come a un commons, composto da una serie di risorse (relazionali, spaziali, drammaturgiche), da pratiche di appropriazione e produzione che sono state tacitamente o esplicitamente condivise dalla comunità teatrale, che rispecchiava nel teatro la propria sfera pubblica (il fil rouge che lega *stage* e *street* è stato affrontato da Richard Sennett nel 1977). Nell'ottocento, quando il teatro si è fossilizzato nella struttura archetipica che ha assunto oggi, e i meccanismi di accesso alla risorsa teatrale sono stati irrigiditi dalla classe borghese dominante, il teatro, come molte altre risorse, ha subito una *enclosure* che perdura tuttora, anche se viene sfidata da paradigmi emergenti di produzione e fruizione teatrale. Teorizzare un commons teatrale non è un semplice cavillo tassonomico: significa andare alla radice del modo in cui il teatro può tornare ad avere rilievo nella sfera pubblica, comprenderne la natura di bene comune composto ai fini di una migliore distribuzione del supporto pubblico allo spettacolo (in un'ottica di democrazia culturale) e, infine, aiuta a capire come sfidando i confini spaziali, formali e comportamentali del teatro e delle pratiche culturali in generale si possa renderle risorse più accessibili.

Sul piano metodologico, l'indagine prevedeva un periodo di ricerca sul campo che è stato reso impossibile dalla pandemia da COVID-19, che ha impedito il regolare svolgersi delle performance teatrali negli anni previsti per l'osservazione (2020-2021). In mancanza di questa fase di osservazione, si è potuto attingere alla participant observation, poiché nel 2018 ero tirocinante al Teatro dell'Opera di Roma e ho potuto prendere parte alla produzione di OperaCamion, che all'epoca portava in scena la sua audace trasposizione di *Rigoletto*. Inoltre, attraverso la triangolazione (Srivastava and Thomson 2009) di fonti dirette e indirette, e di diverse metodologie di ricerca, si è cercato di ovviare ai limiti dell'analisi di casi studio. In particolare, la metodologia si è articolata in diversi passaggi: in una prima fase sono state effettuate interviste ad alcuni rappresentanti istituzionali dei vari teatri (il Direttore Artistico per i Teatri di Reggio Emilia, il Direttore Amministrativo per l'Opera di Roma, il Sovrintendente per il Teatro Massimo di Palermo), alla responsabile del progetto di OperaCamion a Roma, ai cantanti (che sono stati coinvolti in un'intervista di gruppo), al team creativo (regista e scenografo) del progetto, all'attrice che ha preso parte alle diverse produzioni; per Palermo, è stato intervistato il frate francescano che, assieme alla comunità, si occupa la rigenerazione del quartiere Danisinni. Le interviste sono poi state codificate e analizzate utilizzando il metodo proposto da Christiane Schmidt (2004) attraverso il software di analisi qualitativa Atlas.ti. I teatri e gli artisti hanno fornito una grande quantità di materiale secondario, per un totale di oltre 550 foto e 4 video (altri video sono disponibili online), oltre alla rassegna stampa. Nel corso dello studio, è emersa la rilevanza del progetto di rigenerazione urbana di Danisinni, e si è deciso di svolgere una fase di osservazione in presenza, della durata di una settimana, nel luglio 2021. In quell'occasione, la metodologia etnografica utilizzata è stata quella del *deep hanging out*, apprezzata nel campo dell'antropologia e riportata in auge negli studi culturali di recente (Walmsley 2018b), in cui la popolazione non è osservata, ma è resa co-ricercatrice, e in cui la pratica dell'osservazione trova le proprie basi nel dialogo partecipativo (Walmsley 2018b: 276). I condizionamenti che insorgono necessariamente dalla posizione intersoggettiva del ricercatore all'interno di questo approccio sono discussi in un'apposita sezione della metodologia.

La ricerca empirica è presentata nel quarto capitolo. I casi studio si presentano come tre modi distinti di sviluppare un progetto con una propria coerenza estetica e di visione: a Roma, il camion ha toccato tutti i municipi della città, portando in piazze pubbliche neglette e/o periferiche uno spettacolo d'opera a bordo di un camion; lo spettacolo è accessibile gratuitamente, e gli spettatori portano le proprie sedie da casa e si dispongono a piacimento attorno al camion, formando uno spazio teatrale improvvisato. A Reggio Emilia,

OperaCamion è stata portata in piazza durante la crisi sanitaria; la libertà del modello romano è stata limitata dalle circostanze in cui si sono svolti gli spettacoli – le misure per il distanziamento sociale hanno fatto sì che lo spazio fosse transennato e che le sedie fossero predisposte in file ordinate. A Palermo, OperaCamion ha girato nelle periferie nell'anno 2016. Quando, nel 2017, ha raggiunto la periferia di Danisinni, ha trovato una comunità già attiva che ha richiesto che lo spettacolo venisse trasformato in una coproduzione; da allora fino al 2019, sono state messe in scena a Danisinni due opere all'interno della fattoria comunitaria, in cui gli abitanti del quartiere si sono esibiti come coro (dopo sei mesi di prove per ciascuno spettacolo).

Una matrice analitica è stata prodotta per osservare le caratteristiche di OperaCamion alla luce di diverse categorie: il tipo di intervento nello spazio, il modello di governance, il tipo di risorsa co-prodotta, il livello di *commoning* (o tipo di *commons*) generato.

A Roma è stato possibile osservare quel theatrical commons che è stato teorizzato nella sezione 3.2: le relazioni che la performance innesca fra le persone nell'ambiente non costruito consentono di ridisegnare i meccanismi di accesso e le regole comportamentali a livello locale, mentre la co-produzione dello spazio teatrale viene affidata ai cittadini che si dispongono attorno al camion in modo spontaneo, in una sorta di Do-it-yourself urbanism (o DIY) che, è stato osservato, produce urban commons (Volont 2019); a maggior ragione in uno spazio negletto di periferia, questo urban commons produce un nuovo uso culturale e suggerisce alternative per i vuoti urbani, che vengono riappropriati dalla cittadinanza e rivestiti di significato. La dimensione di socialità generata fra artisti, pubblico, e all'interno di questi due gruppi (relazioni); la co-produzione dello spazio teatrale in un vuoto urbano (spazio); l'innovazione artistica resa possibile dal contesto, in cui artisti e cantanti erano in grado di innovare il canone operistico e financo di improvvisare (drammaturgia): queste tre risorse sono 'messe in comune' nell'esperienza di OperaCamion, mostrando la natura di *commons* del teatro.

A Reggio Emilia il contesto in cui si è innestato OperaCamion era molto differente. In primis perché è una città dalla forte tradizione operistica, in una Regione fra le più ricche d'Italia; in secundis perché si è trattato di uno fra i primi spettacoli intra-pandemici in Italia, che ha avuto luogo all'aperto mentre i teatri erano ancora chiusi. Per il direttore artistico queste circostanze eccezionali hanno presentato il pretesto per innovare radicalmente rispetto alla tradizione in una città in cui, altrimenti, i loggionisti e gli affezionati avrebbero contestato la performance in quanto poco canonica. Curiosamente, quindi, OperaCamion a Reggio Emilia ha operato un *renversement* dei meccanismi di accesso tipici del teatro d'opera, che aveva il potenziale di tagliare

fuori gli adepti. In realtà, lo spettacolo (che ha fatto il tutto esaurito in entrambe le serate) ha rappresentato 'un abbraccio alla città' (nelle parole del Direttore Artistico), cui hanno preso parte melomani e neofiti. Il processo spontaneo di assembramento attorno al camion non ha potuto avere luogo: l'ambiente era transennato e i posti erano distribuiti in file ordinate e prenotabili (ma comunque gratuiti). Allo stesso tempo, è stato impossibile impedire alle persone di radunarsi attorno alle transenne per prendere comunque parte all'esperienza. Soprattutto a seguito dei lockdown e delle chiusure imposte dall'emergenza sanitaria, lo spettacolo ha consentito ai cittadini di riappropriarsi dello spazio pubblico lungamente negato, e di fruire di un'esperienza culturale in modo collettivo dopo mesi di isolamento.

Danisinni ha rappresentato, per la tesi, quella che in grounded theory si chiama una 'research situation' (McGee et al. 2007: 335): in una fase ancora iniziale, ma già avviata dello studio, andando alla ricerca del commons teatrale ci si è imbattuti in un vero e proprio urban commons. Danisinni è una 'depressione urbana', un luogo ghettizzato rispetto al resto della città nonostante la posizione centralissima per via della sua struttura a *cul de sac*, caratterizzata da tassi drammatici di abbandono scolastico e disoccupazione. Quando nel 2017 il Teatro Massimo aveva pianificato, d'accordo con il Comune, di portare OperaCamion a Danisinni, la comunità si è opposta, con la motivazione che la performance avrebbe rappresentato una 'vetrina per il teatro', e ha proposto di trasformare lo spettacolo in una coproduzione cui gli abitanti potessero prendere parte attiva. Il risultato è stato uno spettacolo interamente coprodotto all'interno della Fattoria di Danisinni, luogo focale per lo sviluppo della comunità – un luogo semi-rurale concesso al quartiere da un privato in comodato d'uso. Questa creazione di un senso comune, la possibilità di esprimere la propria creatività e di dare forma alla propria esistenza sociale condivisa, sono alla base del *capabilities approach* (Sen 1999; Jones 2010; Gross, Wilson 2018) e mostrano come OperaCamion a Danisinni possa essere letto attraverso la lente della democrazia culturale, come un progetto in grado di generare impatti sociali difficilmente quantificabili, ma di cui è imperativo tenere conto nell'ottica di uno sviluppo urbano democratico.

A Danisinni, la comunità ha intrapreso nel tempo una serie di battaglie orientate a ottenere potere decisionale sul territorio del quartiere, riuscendo dapprima ad appropriarsi degli spazi, e poi portando avanti una progettualità condivisa con i diversi attori sul territorio, dalle associazioni di volontari fino alle istituzioni culturali (il Teatro Massimo, che ha portato OperaCamion nel quartiere, il Teatro Biondo, l'Accademia di Belle Arti). Gli abitanti-commoners sono riusciti così ad assicurarsi la produzione e provvigione di nuovi servizi e beni culturali, monitorando però l'ingresso delle istituzioni nel quartiere, e stabilendo le regole

secondo cui questo ingresso doveva avvenire. Danisinni presenta tutte le caratteristiche identificate come costitutive dei commons; per quanto riguarda il settimo, ovvero il riconoscimento minimo del diritto a organizzarsi, oggi va oltre questo minimo riconoscimento, perché la risorsa-quartiere è sostenuta dalla cooperazione attiva di commoners, fondazioni private, volontari del servizio civile, istituzioni culturali – un vero e proprio ecosistema collaborativo, nella lettura che Iaione (2015) dà dei commons.

OperaCamion conserva nei tre casi una coerenza estetica (che scardina i canoni operistici) e di visione (in quanto aspira a ripensare il rapporto fra cultura e città, combinando obiettivi artistici e sociali). Al tempo stesso, però, ha assunto una serie di caratteristiche peculiari ai luoghi dovuti all'interazione con l'ambiente urbano, con il contesto sociale ed economico, con le risposte delle comunità e con le decisioni dei teatri – il che lo rende particolarmente interessante da osservare: presenta una risposta potenzialmente scalabile e replicabile ai temi aperti della rigenerazione urbana, e a come questa possa avvenire in modo graduale, temporaneo. I processi presentati consentono infatti ai cittadini di riappropriarsi, anche solo per un momento temporaneo, dei vuoti urbani, di ridefinirne gli usi – e, tramite il DIY urbanism, di produrre urban commons; di avviare delle pratiche sociali di commoning sotto l'egida di un'attività culturale condivisa, in cui a essere coprodotti sono, a seconda delle circostanze, gli spazi, le rappresentazioni stesse, o la sfera pubblica attraverso dei momenti di socialità (che ha alla base, proprio come i commons, l'essere insieme, anziché l'avere insieme, secondo Arendt, 1958 e Mattei, 2012).

La ricerca aspira dunque a mostrare come le azioni temporanee di rigenerazione siano in grado di riattivare i vuoti urbani, proponendo nuovi usi per gli spazi negletti e nuove ri-produzioni dello spazio nell'ambiente non costruito tramite micro-design e DIY urbanism; in questa riattivazione temporanea il ruolo del teatro come *commons* è preminente, in quanto in grado di sollecitare la socialità e proporre opzioni di coproduzione dello spazio. Altro elemento fondamentale, per un'azione sostenibile di rigenerazione, è il coinvolgimento delle comunità nei processi di riattivazione, siano essi effimeri come nel caso di eventi temporanei, o di lungo periodo: in questi processi le istituzioni culturali fanno da mediatrici fra i diversi livelli della governance, fornendo spazi e strumenti per attivare una governance collaborativa e per sviluppare le capacità umane dei cittadini.

I limiti principali dei casi sono due: *in primis*, che la rigenerazione temporanea, come atto di politica prefigurativa (Maeckelberg 2011), non è sufficiente a produrre effetti duraturi, e necessita di essere inserita in una programmazione culturale più intensa; *in secundis*, che per

ottenere degli effetti come quelli avuti a Danisinni occorre che esistano delle comunità attive. Come attivarle senza perdere la spontaneità delle relazioni è un tema aperto di questa tesi, e dei sistemi abilitanti (Manzini 2019) devono essere messi in pratica. Esistono inoltre forti limiti strutturali che impediscono il moltiplicarsi di queste esperienze, soprattutto nel contesto italiano: le metriche obsolete del finanziamento alla cultura, assestate su indicatori monetari e quantitativi, non tengono conto di progetti come OperaCamion perché non producono bigliettazione, mentre le tensioni interne con alcuni musicisti e cantanti che vedono la propria professionalità 'offesa' da simili esperienze sono state fonte di frizioni; al tempo stesso, per quanto riguarda l'esperienza di Danisinni, le instabilità politiche e la situazione di drammatico abbandono in cui verte la città nei suoi punti più svantaggiati la rendono un'istanza tanto preziosa quanto fragile. Nondimeno, quest'ultima è in grado di mostrare come la cooperazione attiva e dinamica con gli urban commons abbia indotto gli attori esterni a un adattamento istituzionale (Emerson, Gerlak 2014), in cui la cooperazione 'monitorata' da parte dei commoners ha prodotto risultati duraturi e progetti autonomi sul territorio. Reggio Emilia, pur nella sua esperienza limitata, mostra invece come può configurarsi il teatro per il post-COVID, anziché limitarsi alla (pur necessaria) digitalizzazione delle modalità di fruizione; la riconciliazione fra cittadinanza, spazio pubblico e cultura trova in questa esperienza un'istanza necessaria di democrazia culturale e urbana. Roma, tramite questa operazione *sui generis* di DIY urbanism, consente di riattivare i vuoti urbani con il contributo attivo degli abitanti, attivando una pratica sociale di condivisione (di commoning) che, se inserita in una progettazione culturale di più ampio respiro concertata con i cittadini, ha il potenziale per produrre nuove opportunità per la riqualificazione dell'ambiente non costruito. Tutti e tre i progetti sono esempi importanti di come, una volta sfidati i confini formali e spaziali della cultura, si possa ragionare al di fuori delle categorie di 'alto' e 'basso' per la cultura, per immaginare un'offerta culturale più accessibile (oltre che più artisticamente innovativa) negli spazi della città.

## Chapter 1: of barricades and creative districts

### 1.1 Research background and aims

The present research positions itself within the research framework of the creative economy of cities. After the industrial revolution, a second revolution occurred: post-industrial, creativity-driven and design-intensive, which has re-shaped the city spatially and economically. This has occurred in mostly two ways: in the first, the creative economy has adhered to the modalities of the preexisting industrial model, with centre-periphery dynamics, exploitative mechanisms and gentrification patterns dominating global urban development. Culture-led urban regeneration, in this scheme, has often intensified the inequalities deriving from this model. In the second, grassroot movements and cultural initiatives have responded to these distortions: public spaces have been claimed back and cultural actions have been developed that could better respond to the needs and the expressive urges of urban dwellers. This response to the neoliberal governmentality of cities has often taken the form of occupied spaces which have later developed as urban commons.

Urban and cultural claims often converge in their struggles: this thesis illustrates a stance in which they do. In facts, it observes an operatic project, OperaCamion, which has developed in Italy in three different cities (Palermo, Roma and Reggio Emilia), touring public squares in peripheries, and variously engaging with the local population and the socioeconomic context. In Rome, a truck was transformed into an operatic stage in neglected public spaces, or 'urban voids', where local dwellers could bring their own seat and co-create the theatrical space in an informal ambiance; in Reggio Emila, the performance took place in the central public square, in front of the theatre, after Italy's national lockdowns – therefore, people were able to reappropriate public spaces collectively through performance after such an harsh caesura. In Palermo, in the Danisinni neighbourhood, the opera was transformed into a choral work co-produced with the population, casted as the choir. The performance took place in the Danisinni commons, an environment produced and appropriated in common by its dwellers.

Culture, having a high symbolic and positional value, has been used to exert (or contest) power and to assert (or challenge) hierarchies in the urban space. The urban space, thus, has been affected by the presence of cultural venues and amenities only accessible to specific segments of the population. Today, behavioural and spatial barriers exist in the city that still prevent large segments of the population from engaging with the arts – or, at least, from the

publicly subsidized ones, which are conventionally considered as 'high' arts. These barriers are of different sorts: cultural venues located in the heart of the city centre, increasingly destined to those who can afford to consume, are likely to divert some people from them; similarly, the design and look of a building might induce awe, instead of curiosity – a XIX-century opera theatre, with its high ceilings, sumptuous chandeliers and marble halls, will most probably convey a message of exclusion to many.

This process is reaching a considerable apex but has historical roots: the following sections, in facts, focus on examples spanning from the 1840s to 2017. The first example features a passage from Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, which illustrates the origins of modern urbanization through the story of the Church of Sainte-Geneviève (which as a cultural and political symbol epitomizes the vivacious transformations of the modern city) and the depiction of Medieval Paris – a somewhat idealized description, perhaps, which nonetheless illustrates an idea of city (open, collectively creative, produced and accessed by many) which very much recalls Sennett's principles for a contemporary *ethics for the city* (2018). The second example is the Vessel in Hudson Yards, New York, which has an interesting development story, as it is about to sweep away a popular neighbourhood, Hell's Kitchen, to leave room to rampant young workers of the financial sector; in addition, it represents an example of how contemporary urban spaces are construed to become inaccessible, and to assert once more power hierarchies in the city.

A third section in the chapter looks more into detail at how cultural city boosterism and culture-led urban regeneration have operated in the same direction, being framed in the same neoliberal governmentality, having pursued creative-driven growth regardless of the high social costs that his may have caused.

Thus, the research theoretical framework is grounded in three main fields:

- **Culture-led urban regeneration**: from the paradigmatic case of Bilbao to the spectacular smart district of Hudson Yards (NY), most operations of urban regeneration have maintained the Haussmannian proportions of XIX-century urban development, in which top-down approaches prevail over participative and inclusive modalities. The often-unsustainable social costs that these operations have caused (triggering gentrification and marginalisation) have since long time called for a new way of reactivating urban voids: the involvement of what Jane Jacobs called "vital little plans", might produce more sustainable social impacts in the long term, regenerating disadvantaged urban areas progressively.

The active involvement of citizens in regeneration and in processes of cultural production are bound to sustainable development intended as the enhancement of human capabilities: urban democracy and cultural democracy meet at this convergence.

- **Urban commons**: Since the first theorisation of the commons developed by Nobel prize Elinor Ostrom, the collective management of common pool resources has achieved great political relevance at both the urban and the territorial level. The ecosystems in which the commons are embedded, however, is never a commons *per se* (Euler 2018) - nor is its economic paradigm commons-oriented. This implies that the recognition of the rights to organise (two of the eight design principles Ostrom had indicated as foundational to the commons) has come to the fore as the political challenge for the commons in our times: first, because it is not sufficient for the very sustainability of the commons themselves, and second, because commons can only emerge as actual 'alternatives' if they are sustained by a system which is able to intercept commons stances and support them not only with recognition, but with resources.

The commons, rather than representing isolated conflictual stances, are now becoming clusters of active citizenship able to inspire governance and to activate multi-scalar exchanges between institutions and citizens.

- **Cultural democracy**, which has been tied for years to an "excellence and access" model of providing people with supposedly "high" art from the top-down, has progressively shifted to the concern of redistributing the means of cultural production and, therefore, to embrace a capabilities approach, intended as 'shape the meanings and structures of their social existence together' (Smith 2010). These two views of cultural democracy, historically conceived as dichotomous, can and should be reconciled: when pushed beyond conventional formats, even 'high' art loses the social superstructures with which it has been associated.

Therefore, the object of cultural democracy should not be the *content* of art, but rather its *context*, i.e. the formats with which it is produced*:* the convergence between cultural accessibility and cultural representation is a challenge worth pursuing in the debate on cultural democracy.

## 1.2 The enclosed city

Whenever a society is at a crucial turning point, the restructuring inevitably involves the cultural domain. Throughout history, this restructuring has often been dramatic and radical: reforms and revolutions have turned upside down entire cultural and cognitive paradigms, which in some cases have implied the loss of massive cultural stocks – numerous iconoclastic movements, the most vivid example of which being the Byzantine one, caused the destruction of books, artefacts, or statues - Savonarola's fire, or the iconoclastic frenzy of the Protestant era, echo today in the destruction of statues in public space, during a spectacular global momentum arising from the Black Lives Matter movement.

For a society, such acts of destruction prove almost cathartic, testifying for the vivid fervour which culture instills in humans as a collective. As relics of a former system of rules and beliefs, those cultural symbols convey meaning and value, and as such become part of the struggle for the sensemaking of reality. What is more, these transformation are triggered by a multifarious set of actors: from the State to social movements, from individual artists to established institutions.

This is true for artefacts, such as books and statues, for cultural spaces, and for their position in the urban space: the articulation and distribution of such spaces, their meaning and function, has been subject to immense changes in time, adhering to the urban map in ways in which were probably impossible to conceive for the previous civilisation: not even in their worst nightmares would the Romans have imagined that the columns of their temples and their public squares could sustain the ceilings of Christian churches. In more recent times, a delightful example of the turbulent wars of meaning can be found in Victor Hugo's "bird's eye view" of Paris, one of the most famous chapters of his *Notre Dame de Paris*, where he vividly depicts the city a traveller would have seen, had he climbed one of Notre Dame's towers in the XV century. This description is, to be true, fascinating for more than one reason.

The first is related to the shifts in meaning (or in position) which occur to paces of symbolic and cultural significance whenever the Weltanschauung of a society is shaken to the ground. The second describes the city as a complex entity, collectively construed and articulated into layers.

The chapter is a passionate harangue in defence of Medieval Paris, against the urban transformations that were put in place in his times, in one of the first top-down urbanisation

strategies of the Modern era. In one of his most inspired moments, he addresses the church of Sainte Geneviève, by the architect Jacques Germain Soufflot, as "the finest sponge cake [*gâteau de Savoie*] ever made out of stone" (Hugo 1999: 172).

A search of the church of Sainte Geneviève on contemporary maps of Paris would lead to very unsatisfying results: more than a dozen churches appear, none of which is the one Hugo is referring to. The church doesn't exist anymore. At least, not anymore as a church.

It wasn't demolished: it simply shifted in meaning and function. A few months after its erection, the church of Sainte Geneviève was nominated *Panthéon* by the revolutionaries. Yet, Hugo does not refer to it as *Panthéon,* but as *église.* At the time of his writing, the sponge cake was not even 50 years old (it was completed in 1789), and yet had been at the heart of an improbably warlike struggle over its public significance. In 1821 Louis XVIII restored its religious function, which was, however, taken back to public building by the July Monarchy (it was 1830, when Hugo was already in the process of writing). In 1851 Sainte Geneviève was a church again before it achieved its laic status again, almost thirty years later.

How could a simple building carved in stone be at the heart of such a fierce war of meanings?

It is because spaces and places matter. They matter because they signify. And as society changes and evolves around them, meanings are negotiated, reconstrued, shifted, sometimes intensely – as was the case of the *Panthéon.*

Sadly (yet quite hilariously), fate played Hugo the worst of cosmic jokes: in 1885 the Church was ultimately deconsecrated and restored to its public (and laic) function of *Panthéon,* a temple of the Nation hosting the burials of the most remarkable French heroes – from Napoleon himself to writers. Among them was Victor Hugo: he was buried in his detested sponge cake.

The tragicomic story of Hugo's resentment aptly epitomizes the struggle over meanings, and whatever embodies them (from statues to buildings); it testifies for the transformative nature of cities under the push of new social stances. A wide range of contemporary phenomena can fit within this matrix of meaning shifts: the re-functionalization of heritage sites (e.g. the pagan Colosseum being used for the Christian *Via Crucis*); the adaptive reuse of old factories (once the exploitative prison of industrial labour, now the cradle of creativity and art – High 2017); even statues have recently demonstrated their power to ambiguously symbolise either power or its contestation in public space, as was the case with the iconoclastic fury which

followed the Black Lives Matter protest. With respect to an analogous movement developed in 2015 in South Africa, Chaudhuri (2016) has noted the relevance of symbols in space as the tangible manifestation of power and ideology:

> most of the controversy generated by the movement has revolved around the figure of Cecil Rhodes – but Rhodes himself is not really central to its aims. What is at issue is an ethos that gives space and even preëminence to such a figure, and hesitates to interrogate Rhodes's legacy (Chaudhuri 2016, np)

A second takeaway can be taken from the few following paragraphs, when Hugo moves the focus of its depiction from simple urban spots (the buildings) to the wider urban domain. Speaking of cities, in facts, he describes them as follows:

> They are like funnels into which drain all the geographical, political, moral, intellectual slopes of a nation, all the natural inclinations of people; wells of civilization, so to speak, but also sewers, where trade, industry, intelligence, population, all the sap, all the life, all the soul of a nation is filtered and collected, drop by drop, century by century. (Hugo 1831: 154)

Not only are cities the catalyst of broader movements (the rise of Nation-States at his time, globalization today): they are a collective process both from a diachronic (historical) and a synchronic point of view. With specific respect to the latter, he describes in a following passage the subterranean mechanisms which operated slowly and tenaciously to carve the structure of the medieval city:

> there was nothing without its originality, its reason, its genius, its beauty, nothing which did not derive from art, from the humblest house with carved and painted front, external timbers, low doorway, overhanging storeys, to the royal Louvre, which at that time had a colonnade of towers. (Hugo 1831: 159)

His concerns can be interpreted as somewhat exaggerated for the time, as he was writing in the 1830s: it was not until 1853 (more than 20 years after the publication of *Notre Dame de Paris*) that one of the most relevant (and debated) actors of XIX century Paris, Baron Haussmann, appeared on the stage of urban policy. It was him who began his massive restructuring of the city under the rule of Napoleon III, demolishing entire neighbourhoods to leave room for large, elegant boulevards and sumptuous buildings.

And yet Hugo was clairvoyant: he had identified the primary features of the city is admirable: the city's ability to catalyse national stances (which are now global), individual desires, collective identities; the overlap of different layers and of intertwining dimensions, from the creative one to the political, the economic and the social; the historical stratification of spaces and infrastructures and the progressive shifts of meanings; above all, the intuition of cities as the result of a synergy, of collective creativity.

Even if just intuitively and from a novelist's perspective, the premises of Hugo's reasoning do not differ much than those of the present research: with his heartfelt defence of the chaotically creative Medieval Paris he was advocating for a more unstructured, 'bottom-up' construction of cities, opposed to the regulatory planning which was emerging as the new rule: the "humblest house" and the "royal Louvre" stand against each other, embodying the struggle between regulation and participation in the city.

The identification of these two levels is variously echoed in academia; with particular reference to public art (but with generalizable implications), Sharp et al. note that

> it is too easy for both policymakers and academics to focus disproportionately on the more spectacular, particularly the iconic, in its ability to reinscribe place. A blinkered gaze risks the failure to identify the *different scales* [emphasis added] at which public art has come into play just as it tends to give emphasis to particular representations of it (Sharp, Pollock, Paddison 2005: 1020).

Very much like Hugo's Medieval Paris, in the contemporary, nested urban warp, layers intertwine and spheres merge - political participation, cultural representation, public spaces for both participation and representation, issues of confrontation and coexistence of diversity, and the distribution of value (be it cultural, social, economic, or a miscellaneous result of the three). From a political point of view, he was somehow anticipating contemporary stances of urban democracy (Fung 2004; Lama-Rewal, Zérah 2011) and of cultural democracy (Gross, Wilson 2018), while from an economic point of view he had grasped what the Marxists would later call "general intellect": knowledge, dispersed through society (Hayek 1945), as a direct force of production in the city (Virno 2007).

The collective dimension of cities has come to the fore in the 1960s with the eminent contribution of namely two scholars: Jane Jacobs (1961) and Henri Lefebvre (1968), who advocated for a plural, more democratic and radically accessible urban planning, paving the way to a distinct school of thought. It is within this collective understanding of the city which

have developed recent theories on the urban commons, more on which will be said in the second chapter.

After decades of magmatic transformations, agitated by the invisible hands of migration, commerce, exchanges and social changes, the XIX century was marked by an attempt to *shape* cities, to control their development and to alter the somewhat intrinsic mechanisms that had regulated them. Of course, this might seem an oversimplification of the complex processes that lied at the core of urban development of the 19th Century; however, top-down planning and the birth of urbanism can be considered paradigmatic of the time, and mark the beginning of a regulatory approach which has continued to shape cities up to the present time. Today, on the contrary, after decades of massive infrastructural transformations and unsustainable urban regulations, citizens are claiming back the right to give shape to the city they inhabit, to contribute to its governance and even to resist to such regulatory mechanisms: in other words, they are claiming back the right to the city (Lefebvre 1968; Harvey 2008) and to culture. But before turning to what this means in the contemporary era, it is necessary to trace back the origins of the contemporary city.

Under the rule of Napoleon III, the city (and Paris specifically) became cleaner and more functional: a segmentation of uses and functions allowed for a redesign of urban spaces in a functional fashion (causing, as a somewhat desired spillover, the marginalisation of specific fringes of the population); at the same time, the redesign of urban fluxes through a more effective transportation occurred, reducing traffic jams and making it easier and faster for people to reach the other side of the city. As such, "The Haussmannian city privileged space over place. Its transport networks connected people spatially, but diminished their experience of place" (Sennett 2018: 45).

This functionality also applied to the rearticulation of functions and services in the city: the urban grid became segmented, as the centre-periphery model of the manufacturing paradigm designed precise boundaries: dormitory neighbourhoods for the working class coming from rural areas in search of work were located at the outskirts of the city, while other services (and other social classes) progressively appropriated the urban centre: the accessibility of spaces became contingent upon consumption, a phenomenon which still pervades cities today (Scott 2007; Carmona 2010; Mörtenböck, Mooshammer 2021).

Entertainment achieved its industrialised form and began clustering - the first modern creative district, predecessor of Broadway and the London South Bank, was the Boulevard du Temple, rising as a theatrical cluster in the pre-Romantic era in Paris (Sorba 2015).

Noisy, dirty, lousy markets were replaced with department stores and *passages* (Sennett 1977; Benjamin 2000): miniature cities made for sale, long halls where all retail activities were located; here, a twofold change had occurred, one physical, the other behavioural. The first is that such places for shopping and leisure were located at the heart of the city, thus reaching a specific (and mostly well-off) segment of the urban population; the first is that the behavioural norms and codes which regulated public life in such places were transformed: while the market was a place for negotiation and chatter, the department store was a somewhat quiet place, where purchases could be made with discretion and silence. This behavioural rule, coinciding with bourgeois respectability, determined exclusion from such activities just as much as physical displacement (Sennett 1977: 209).

Segmentation, in this respect, is but a mild word for ghettoization, and for an early form of gentrification: leisure, entertainment, shopping and even political life in urban space, collectively epitomised as "the right to the city" had become a bourgeois prerogative: the functional city did by no means coincide with a just city.

Sennett describes this shift in the XIX century:

> In Paris there were, of course, rich and poor districts—but the meaning of a "rich" district was that many rich people lived there. The term did not mean that prices for food or drink or housing would be consistently higher than in a district with less rich people. Today's urbanite is so accustomed to think that the economy of an area "fits" the level of affluence of its inhabitants that it is difficult to picture the pre-19th Century neighbourhood as it actually was, with an intermixing of diverse classes in neighboring buildings if not in the same house, and an intermixing of different qualities of stalls, shops, and even little fairs to serve these various clienteles. (Sennett, 1977: 198).

This geographic condensation is still evident today in the spatial segmentation which reflects economic equilibria. Carmona, following Minton, describes this segmentation in terms of hot and cold spots of, respectively, affluence and exclusion:

> 'Hot spots' – such as urban regeneration areas or BIDS – are characterised by having clean and safe policies that displace social problems. 'Cold spots' are characterised by the socially excluded who are unwelcome in the cold spots. By this analysis, public space

management is actively creating socially polarised urban public spaces (Carmona 2010a, 141).

In this rebranding of the city in a functional key, another change occurred which accompanied the segmentation of functions and the effectiveness of transportation to the expense of places' meaningfulness. The *production* of space began to be delegated, and its political reappropriation, from the part of its citizens, became more problematic: among the many advantages of Haussmann's boulevards was their width, which made it impossible to build barricades as it once was in narrow, crooked streets (Sennett 2018: 41).

One of the last literary heroes who could make use of barricades for rioting was, once more, featured in a novel by Hugo: Enjolras from *Les Misérables*, who would die with his comrades on a barricade during the 1832 insurrection.

Then more than ever, the production of space in the city had become a prerogative of ruling classes and occurred through regulatory mechanisms from institutional bodies: access and inclusion were determined by the economic status and the ability to pay, even more than prestige.

In the urban domain, this shift began widening the gap between what Richard Sennett has epitomised as building and dwelling the city (Sennett 2018) – a gap which still exists today in the process of building, delegated for decades to either market or State, opposed to "how people want to live collectively", "a political mentality" (Sennett 2018: 12).

Precisely because of this separation, the reappropriation of such spaces from the part of citizens achieves paramount importance: from the Paris Commune to the occupation of Gezi Park in Istanbul, claims for space and for a new urban economy meet in collective political action. It is not by chance that David Harvey has taken interest in the Paris Commune as a paradigmatic case in this respect: the struggle for rights was also a struggle for space, and the turmoil that preceded the Commune in the 1860s had the aspiration

> to find *political, economic, organizational, and physical spaces* [emphasis added] in which to mobilize and from which to press demands. It was, in all these senses, a geopolitical struggle for the transformation of the Parisian economy, as well as of the city's politics and culture. (Harvey 2005: 332).

Citizens as a collective were not simply excluded from the production of space, and, to a certain extent, from the possibility to use it: they became an unconscious gear in the

mechanisms that sustained (and still sustain today) the economic life of cities. The value they generated, in its turn, was (and is) not equally redistributed, but rather seized. Most Marxist critique has focused on these processes, describing the alienation of labour and the seizing of value surplus, a process which has had immense consequences in the controversial interaction between the development of cities and the benefits that its inhabitants could derive from it (Burdeau 2015).

The ability of people to directly contribute to and benefit from both spaces and economic processes has been amply analysed by critical theory, starting from Karl Polanyi. He was, in facts, clairvoyant in grasping the *reification* of the economy, which he postulated in *The Great Transformation* of 1944 and *The livelihood of man* (posthumously published in 1977), where he identified a distinction between the *substantive* and the *formal* meaning of the word 'economy': the former presupposed the embeddedness of economic mechanisms in human social life, while the other, which he saw as predominant in the current economic discourse, embraced what he defined an "economistic fallacy", which "consists in a tendency to equate the human economy with its market form" (Polanyi 1977: 20).

Recalling Polanyi, Wall (2014) notes that

> economics in pre-capitalist societies is not separate from the rest of society but embedded within wider social behaviour. Social goals, such as status achievement, drive economic decisions rather than the other way round. Economics is just one part of a whole way of life. (Wall 2014)

The Greeks had, quite predictably, anticipated this dichotomy already - Aristotle would make a distinction between the *economy* (the root *oikos*, as is known, stands for "home", thus resounding with the substantive meaning identified by Polanyi) and *chrematistic* – which is capital accumulation in and of itself. Just like Don DeLillo would write in his novel *Cosmopolis*, "Money has lost its narrative quality the way painting did once upon a time. Money is talking to itself" (DeLillo, 2003: 33).

More authoritative critical sources have postulated this polarization, with economy having a life of its own with respect to the very mechanisms that contribute to the livelihood of man. Luc Boltanski, bypassing the mediation of Polanyi and echoing Aristotle's taxonomy, identifies contemporary capitalist accumulation as chrematistic (Boltanski in Keucheyan 2010: 165).

Years later, this same discourse will be brought up by scholars from different fields: in the wake of a reflection on economics and on its interrelation with human activity, Throsby has noted how

> The increasing dominance of macro-economics as the foundation stone of national and international public policy over recent decades has led to perceptions of the economy as having an identity of its own which seems to transcend its constituent elements. (Throsby 2001: 2)

Contemporary struggles over spaces and urban governance mechanisms can be seen as a reaction between this separation. The geopolitical struggle for the transformation of the urban economy, of its politics and culture, which subtended to the Paris Commune and to the above theoretical discourses, resonates with unchanged strength in the contemporary claims for the right to the city – which is intended as a right to its opportunities, to its public spaces, and the right to contribute to the political and economic forces which shape the city itself.

The city emerges as a frontier zone, having become crucial for both the assertion and the contestation of political and economic power (Sassen 2013). As is true, indeed, at a general political level,

> the erosion of traditional forms of sovereign political control by the nation state, the transnationalization of economic activity, and the shift to a service-based economy have all increased the political centrality of the city, reversing the centuries long historical trends toward the increasing subordination of urban politics to national state apparatuses (Tilly 2010 in Lama-Rewal, Zérah, 2011)

The urban domain 'has re-emerged across the world as ground zero for insurgent struggles over democracy, capitalism, and urban space itself' (García Lamarca 2015: 165). In the words of Dellenbaugh et al.,

> Imagined as a cultural process of mediating individual and everyday experiences with the requirements of capital accumulation and political hegemony, "the urban" functions as a prism to scrutinize how the logic of capital and state power seeps into the various experiences and tactics for coping with day-to-day life. (Dellenbaugh et al. 2015: 16)

What can be potentially identified as the first urban commons, the Paris Commune of 1871, was found on these very premises: making political and civil rights coincide with rights to

space. This radical outburst of urban protest emerged at the end of the first wave of Hausmann's urbanization, at the convergence with the reification of the economic processes which regulate the life of cities.

The evil of Haussmann's projects, Sennett warns (2018: 41) shouldn't be magnified; and yet, years before, Hugo already had his fair reasons to be concerned: the Medieval city, a collective resource (along with the forestry which surrounded it) had ceased to exist – its two major features, pluralism and polycentrism (Mattei 2012: 10), had been purportedly destroyed to leave room for development plans and finance; the right to the city had plunged with them.

## 1.3 The devil of Hell's Kitchen: urban development and citizenship in the smart era

Let us jump now continents and years ahead of Hugo, and cross the Ocean to meet Hudson Yards.

I happened to visit Hudson Yards and its majestic square in 2019, accompanied by a couple of veteran New Yorkers, two Italians emigrated in the Big Apple 30 years ago. They proudly eulogised the project as "an investment for the city" – the statement hid a somewhat contemptuous undertone in reference to Italian renowned inertia when it comes to infrastructural investments.

In 2010, following a development plan approved in 2004, a massive construction site gave birth to what is now Hudson Yards; the site features towering skyscrapers; offices from leading corporations, from L'Oréal to Boston Consulting Group; luxury apartments and a mall; abundant open space, and specifically a square solemnly dominated by the Vessel, a honeycomb-like structure planned by the designer Thomas Heatherwick which has been accessible with an admission fee until January 2021. After this date, the last of a series of suicides has led to the decision to close the structure (Shanahan, Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura 2021).

Hudson Yards and its bright, lean buildings are located South of Hell's Kitchen, a once-popular residential district vivaciously populated by an ethnic mix and which saw its rents rise dramatically over the past ten years, with the advent of young Wall Street financiers in the area. The origin of the name has different explanations, all related to its being an immigrant neighbourhood (originally Irish) home to some of the popular comic book myths of New York (from Daredevil, "The Devil of Hell's Kitchen" to Jessica Jones).

Matterns (2016), who has provided a most insightful and complete account on the processes that led to the development of the area, cunningly called the shareholders of the project "modern-day Haussmen" who "now intend to use their new weapon — data — to revolutionize the old urban regime" (Matterns 2016, np).

The Hausmannisation of European cities in the 19th century and its 'imposed' nature and socially divisive outcomes have their parallels in the contemporary restructuring of the city under what has been described as 'neoliberalised urban authoritarianism'. (Harvey 2000 in Sharp, Pollock, Paddison 2005: 1003). Under the aegis of such new urbanization, public space is denied: despite its apparent accessibility, public ownership hinders public uses. As emphasized by Carmona, following Low and Smith (2006)

> during the past 20years, privatisation of urban public space has accelerated through the closing, redesign and policing of public parks and plazas, the development of business improvement distincts that monitor and control local streets and parks, and the transfer of public air rights for the building of corporate plazas ostensibly open to the public. (Carmona 2010a: 134)

Speaking of data, the district is supposedly built to be a "smart" neighbourhood where people

> "behave" like citizens — by installing smart thermostats in their homes, depositing trash in the appropriate chutes, monitoring air quality and noise levels while they walk the dog, and FitBitting their way to good health [...] and the voluntary provision of personal data to some central repository. (Matterns 2016)

In other words, the superimposed smartness of the district is created by a massive physical infrastructure for the collection and storage of data; the modalities of collection, storage and usage are, as a matter of fact, blurry, and delivered by private patrons. She places an emphasis, therefore, on the fact that

> Smart citizenship is equated with monitoring and managing one's relationship to the urban environment — "operationalizing the cybernetic functions of the smart city" — rather than with "exercising rights and responsibilities" or "advancing democratic engagement through dialogue and debate", as Arendt would prefer. (Matterns 2016)

These modern-day Haussmenn, as she defines them, are pushing forward the boundaries of planning and, to some extent, of control (the equation of planning and control has been amply illustrated by Zuboff in her recent work on surveillance capitalism, 2019): the

smartness, resilience and sustainability of cities are no longer tied to collective action and to exerting democratic engagement, but rather through a sophisticated system which filters information and solves problems from above. This raises a twofold problem: the first is that smart citizenship has been equated with deliberative democracy by the neoliberal governmentality of cities without considering the actual opportunities of access of disadvantaged citizens, who may lack the material or knowledge capabilities to be included in the process. In the words of Zandbergen and Uiterman (2020: 1744),

> critical scholars and public commentators have voiced their critique of how smart cities limit civic agency by eroding the basis for deliberative politics and sustaining environments of permanent, sensorial nudging and surveillance.

The second implication is that the smartness of cities might result in but another form of power delegation through data submission to a central authority. The new design-intensive, "platform-oriented" and data-driven drift of urbanism is overlapping to pre-existing patterns of marginalisation, creating a world where "the urban living space is being increasingly transformed by means of software into a service package coupled with other services which are coupled by digital platforms" (Mörtenböck, Mooshammer 2021: 13). In this context, a process of empowering the empowered is in place (Fung 2004; Zandbergen and Uiterman 2020).

The shift from Haussmann's boulevards to hyper-specialised data collection systems might seem quite shocking, and yet the two poles are tied by an explicit *fil rouge* – the contemporary city is a daughter of the modern one.

Even before transnational capitalism shaped the panorama of cities, the perils of highly centralised economic and urban models had been signalled by scholars from a variety of domains: what Lefebvre would call technocratic urbanism (Lefebvre 1968: 36) was echoed in Jane Jacobs concerns over the substantial disregard of the actual functioning of cities, of its inner social and economic mechanisms, to the advantages of an abstract (and socially costly) idea of how cities should work. In addition to that, she defined the magnification of interventions in the urban space as an "orgiastic assemblage of the rich and monumental" (Jacobs 1961: 34). This "rich and monumental" actually recalls with curious intensity our familiar sponge cake, or "the royal Louvre", in antithesis with the "humblest house" – and has, more recently, been echoed in the disproportionate attention 'on the more spectacular, particularly the iconic, in its ability to reinscribe place' (Sharp, Pollock, Paddison 2005: 1020).

The reification of the economy and the control over the processes that build and regulate the economic life of cities (and the social and cultural life within it) from the part of external agency has increased and become more complex, being dominated by the investment mechanisms of globalisation (Sassen 2000; Stiglitz 2002; Harvey 2012) and financialisation (Harvey 2007; Guironnet and Halbert 2014).

In this respect, Hudson Yards sure is an example of an extreme sort; its features, however, amply derive from XIX century urbanization, and shares some of its major features: the emphasis on efficiency and control, the exclusionary mechanisms which are subtended to the development of the area, and consumption-based access.

In the meantime, the popular neighbourhood right up North of Hudson Yards is being transformed into a lofty paradise for rampant start-uppers - a huge investment, Matterns notes again, has been made to turn Hudson Yards in what she calls "Sylicon Alley": an incubator for tech start-ups, in which the new major capital force in the city, knowledge, can be clustered and massively implemented.

Just like it had happened in the city centre at Haussmann's times, public space is commodified - in the case of Hudson Yards, the square is densely populated with attractions: from the Vessel, whose access is granted upon payment, to the many shopping and leisure venues which surround it, towering with their immensity on passers-by. The perception is that, despite its supposedly public accessibility, this public space is of the sort which "brings together those in society who can afford to consume" (Carmona 2010b: 158).

The public spaces "the others" have access to, as a consequence, are scarce, often badly kept and pushed to the margins of the creative city. As noted by Scott, in facts, "large segments of the population face serious impediments to participation" (Scott 2007: 1472). The urgent need to "search for meaningful forms of solidarity, sociability and mutual and aid in everyday work and life" (Scott 2007: 1478) emerges as a direct consequence of the urban crises caused by these unsustainable mechanisms.

Hell's Kitchen, like many other neighbourhoods across the globe, is about to be swept away, with Hudson Yards investors ignorning light-heartedly the social costs of its transformation. Its social diversity, the accessibility of its housing and the variety of the cultures which inhabited it will leave room for that "loft living" which already back in 1989 Zukin had identified as one of the major consequences of such relentless financial investments on regeneration.

At the time of my visit, it was still resisting the "sky-scrapeization" of the area with its red bricks, four-floored houses and Lebanese restaurants. It very much recalled what the imaginary time traveller in Hugo's novel would have seen of Medieval Paris: resisting the advent of immense boulevards, transplanted by the ominous invisible hand of urban planning.

And so the struggle goes on in the urban domain: the sumptuous sponge cakes and the vertiginous, spectacular architectures of Hudson Yards are now in opposition to the "originality, genius and beauty" which Hugo attributed to collective creativity and intelligence (Hugo 1831: 159), what a century and a half later Jane Jacobs used to call the "vital little plans" of the city (2016), and which his pupil Richard Sennett identified in sociality, "both a modest and an honest social bond" (Sennett 2018: 259).

It is in defence of these vital little plans, of this modest and honest social bond and of common goods that new frontiers of resistance are rising in the urban domain. Within such frontiers, new paradigms for the production of space and for the reappropriation of the economic life of cities are being produced. Some of these stances intersect with cultural practices to produce new modes of inhabiting the city, and new ways of producing culture.

## 1.4 Urban regeneration through culture: a Haussmannian perspective

The theme of the creative city and of the gentrification effects it produces has been widely explored, and Hudson Yards is but one of many Bilbaos before it. Many have noted the fact that the economy (and, from a Marxist perspective, capitalism) has entered in a new dimension, the cognitive-cultural one, which has proven on the one hand extremely beneficial, and on the other has soon shown his many dark sides.

The knowledge economy was welcomed as the new engine for boosting cities: according to a most famous and cited argument made by Richard Florida in 2002, in order to accelerate urban growth it was necessary to create amenities for the creative class, creating gentrification mechanisms through fluxes of humans with willingness and ability to pay.

It was only later that it was also acknowledged that the new creative economy played an unsettling role as the heir of industrial capitalism: generating the same segmentation, exploitation and exclusion mechanisms of the XIX century city under the manufacturing rule. Haussmann had created a beautiful showcase for a golden-faced Paris which was "branded" as the city of leisure, entertainment, and fashion; similarly, the "generic city

boosterism" (McGuigan 1996: 96; McKinnie 2012: 75) of cultural and creative cities have turned culture into a commodity, with creativity and innovation becoming the heralds of growth. The conditions at which this growth is happening and its consequences have long been accounted for as a necessary externality: higher control through data, unregulated privatisation, on the one hand; gentrification and the inability of citizens to enact their citizenship by "exercising rights and responsibilities"(Matterns 2016).

The neoliberal drift of the economy, therefore, has produced a neoliberal conception of cities: of the consumption-based exclusionary mechanisms that these combined factors were able to create. Hudson Yards, specifically, comes at the end of a centuries-long period of urban development centred on investments and boosterism that had knowledge, creativity and information at their core. One of the first experiments of urban revitalisation, that of Bilbao in the 1990s, has become paradigmatic in this respect, illustrating both the potential and the dark side of creative and culture-led urban regeneration: the building of the Guggenheim Museum had boosted the local economy in long-lasting ways whose positive effects and downsides are still to be evaluated.

Especially in postindustrial contexts the construction of new buildings (as in Bilbao) and the adaptive reuse of others, sharing a cultural driver, has been used for regenerative purposes and for boosting the local economy. The NDSM wharf in Amsterdam, once a warehouse, transformed into a "creative factory" hosting artists residencies and exhibitions; the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, constructed over an abandoned pier and turned into the eminently spectacular symbol of the city, a technically-advanced and dashing multifunctional building, hosting music halls and a luxury hotel; similarly, an old gin distillery in Milan is now home to the fancy Prada Foundation for contemporary art. New York, which has been useful in the previous section as a viewpoint, has been a global leader in this respect, with the massive creative restructuring of former industrial sites such as the downtown Brooklyn Waterfront (which now goes under the name Dumbo) and the renowned arts cluster of the Chelsea neighbourhood.

Arts factories have proven their ability to revitalise cities (High 2017) as the culture and creative-driven economy has been able to boost urban development - to the point that the European Union has placed cities at the core of its cultural development strategies in most of its funding programmes.

The fact that the former industrial temples such as plants and factories are now being populated by arts-related activities hints at the correspondence of the cultural paradigm to its manufacturing predecessor (let aside that it also testifies for the constant renegotiation of meanings and functions of places in the city, which had already been clearly epitomised by the Sainte-Geneviève/*Panthéon* transitions).

Not only arts factories specifically, but arts, creative and culture-led city planning for boosting the economy have been saluted as the panacea for the illnesses of modern urbanization. Theatrical architecture and infrastructure, which are the focus of this research, have played a role in the creative frenzy of the post-industrial city: as urban regeneration dictates the rule for city planning, the positioning of a theatre (as that of cultural venues in general) still holds precise political connotations – in Paris, again, the reformative frenzy of the 1970s led to the building of theatres in peripheries in order to reinforce the cultural infrastructure of disadvantaged areas. The most famous example of city branding through theatre probably remains Sidney's Opera House, which managed to become the actual icon of the city.

Other experiments were conducted in peripheries: in 2005, in Tor Bella Monaca, a marginalized neighbourhood in Rome, a theatre was erected that was expected to represent an attraction pole for the Roman population in the area. A famous Italian actor, Michele Placido, was chosen as the Artistic Director to create visibility. Today, Tor Bella Monaca is still perceived as largely abandoned and unsafe, regardless of the regeneration intervention, and the theatre has not attracted the external visitors whose curiosity it was supposed to arise.[5]

Of analogous strategic weakness is the architectural experiment of Elbphilharmonie in the Hannover pier. The rigid structures and hierarchies of conventional theatrical architecture were simply transferred from the centre to a new, regenerated part of the city which, however daring, failed to shake the stern foundations of institutional rules: quite the reverse, it stands as a cathedral in the desert, fascinatingly towering on the Elbe river. The Philharmonie's has been seen as an example of "iconic architecture's role within contemporary urban

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[55] During a workshop conducted in 2019 and 2020 by SITDA, the Italian Society of Architecture Technology, Tor Bella Monaca was chosen as the core topic; a series of unstructured interviews conducted throughout the workshop demonstrated the poor results of the regeneration interventions, and how the area is still perceived as largely abandoned and unsafe – regardless of the presence of the theatre.

development" which "elucidates the extent to which iconic architecture contributes to the re-ordering of the urban fabric in the neoliberal era". They go on by saying that

> Considering the relationship between post-political neoliberal governmentality and iconic architecture, the specific case of Hamburg's Elbe Philharmonic Hall sheds new light on the place-specific discourses and practices through which iconic architecture is socially legitimised and politically enforced (Balke, Reuber, Wood 2017: 4-6).

More broadly, yet on the same wavelength, Sharp, Pollock, and Paddison, quoting Balibrea (2001), note how

> it is clear that competitive success is far from incompatible with persistent concentrations of unemployment and social deprivation and high levels of social and economic inequality. (Sharp, Pollock, Paddison, 2005: 1005).

A concern that had been expressed by Harvey already in 1989:

> Such urban regeneration articulates the interests and tastes of postmodern professional and managerial class, without solving the problem of a diminishing production base, growing disparities of wealth and opportunity, and multiple forms of social exclusion (Harvey 1989).

Significant criticism has been moved to this model which, as has been said, is more able to convey efficiency than equity, a common yet worrying tendency of contemporary economic discourse: administrations have been "extolling the panacea of cultural policy for troubled towns and cities" (Worpole 1991 in McGuigan 1996: 95), and yet, as noted by Harvey, "the trouble with all of this cultural emphasis is that it has directed attention away from the general problem" (Harvey 1993: 14).

More recently, a similar consideration has been formulated by Gross and Wilson, following Hope, 2011, for whom

> involvement in art is connected to emancipation, liberation and empowerment, but of course the political and economic frameworks of these terms vary dramatically depending on the agendas of who is using them. (Gross, Wilson 2018: 4)

When speaking of Bilbao specifically, the sociologist Lorenzo Vicario has noted how "It's not culture-led redevelopment, it's property-led redevelopment" (in Dickson 2017, np), thus

marking very precise (and income-bound) conditions of accessibility of the new creative city and of its cultural amenities:

> it was only a boom in private high-end apartment blocks, underwritten by large-scale, publicly funded infrastructure projects, that were keeping the city alive […] Industrial livelihoods had been replaced by McJobs, neighbourhoods were gentrifying, multinational stores had moved in and the fabric of the city was being torn down rather than repurposed (Dickson 2017, np)

Already in 1993 Gonzalez, echoing Hugo's dichotomy once more, highlighted an existing tension between the two layers of cultural development in the city of Bilbao: the first layer consisted in the quest for iconic flagship projects with the purpose of rebranding the city and exiting a period of economic contraction, and the second in the indigenous cultural economy, which was shrinking due to the shock provoked by the mass-scale transformation. Similar criticism has been moved to the development of the Chelsea district of contemporary art, in which a massive phenomenon of gentrification has pushed more fragile individuals to the margins and had transformed the independent art scenario in a cluster of established galleries (Yoon, Currid-Halkett 2015).

Keating and de Frantz (2003: 2-3) have provided a long and exhaustive depiction of the effects of such neoliberal urban governance, orbiting around the creative economy and urban revitalization:

> Urban renewal, which has often concentrated on gentrifying city centres and run-down industrial districts by bringing back business and the middle classes, may price lower income residents out of their neighbourhoods. Conservation policies may increase the wealth of affluent property owners. Urban renewal may destroy old communities, with their social and political networks. Economic development may have negative environmental consequences. Small, local businesses may be upset by the arrival of better-resourced competitors with access to outside capital. Investment in economic development may divert expenditure away from social or cultural priorities. (Keating, de Frantz 2003: 2-3).

Far from having "replaced" the labour-intensive manufacturing economy, therefore, the creative city paradigm has adhered to its exploitative and marginalising mechanisms. More dramatically, Gross and Wilson have pointed out how the new creative economy has, in facts, worsened this paradigm,

'enabling the pernicious transformation of the economy as a whole, towards conditions of weakened labour rights, diminished solidarity and increased precarity' (Gross & Wilson 2018: 1)

Neoliberal governmentality, therefore, most often subtends to the culture-led urban development, implying a de-politicisation of urban processes, its impermeability to collective stances and "the subtraction of commerce, and of culture too, from the intimate and casual life of cities" (Jacobs 1961: 16). This subtraction, in more recent times, has been noted by Richard Sennett as a form of self-ghettoization (2018: 152) of iconic buildings, impermeable to the life of cities. He was referring in particular to the Googleplex, built to plans by the same Thomas Heatherwick who signed Hudson Yards' spectacular Vessel.

With cultural spaces being impermeable to their surroundings, and the ability they have demonstrated to marginalise and divide, culture becomes an amenity, around which gather "those who can afford to consume" (Carmona 2010b: 158); cultural goods, in turn, become a self-fulfilling experiential commodity (Harvey 2002, 2012; Scott 2007, 2000; Frith, Savage 1993 in McGuigan 1996; Mattei 2012). A tendency which is echoed in 'the desire of the ordinary citizen to have 'interesting' experiences' in public space (Carmona 2010a: 137).

This commodification of culture is reflected, additionally, in the distribution of the cultural infrastructure in the city:

'there are important ways in which the cultural policies and cultural policy infrastructure of today's cities are less responsive, transparent and democratic than they must be in order to cultivate diverse and sustainable urban cultural life' […] 'Cultural development tends to geographically concentrate cultural resources into downtowns and cultural districts and away from neighbourhoods' (Rosenstein 2011: 9-10).

Therefore, while culture-led regeneration produced tangible economic benefits in the form of new creative and cultural districts, populated by cultural amenities and inhabited by young and well-off creatives, it also produced "cold" spots of marginalisation. Examples are available worldwide, from New York's Chelsea to Paso Ancho, in Costa Rica, "a periphery marginalised by spatial urban planning" (Opazo Ortiz 2015: 137) to Liberty City in Miami, characterised by a dramatic lack of affordable housing due to gentrification mechanisms (Rameau 2013), to Berlin, where the ambition to become a leading creative city has pushed towards a liberalisation of urban governance and a privatisation of urban spaces: "As a result,

the center is now filled with luxury homes, hotels, and office buildings, and the city has, to a certain extent, lost control over its own urban development" (Müller 2015: 148).

Cultural policies have, for a long time, provided their controversial contribution to this model, and pursued efficiency over equity – as noted by Throsby (2001: 138) "in a society where government pursuits an economic agenda, the balance between the policy mix will tend to favour individualistic at the expense of collective goals".

Keating and de Frantz, following Bianchini (1993) have similarly noted that

> the political objectives associated with culture confront urban decision-makers with a strategic choice, particularly as the emerging economic paradigm adds up to and increasingly covers other, pre-existing socio-cultural priorities (Keating, de Frantz 2003: 4)

The economic framework in which cultural policymaking is inscribed has not only triggered the drift towards individualism, but also led to a distorted interpretation of cultural goods and services as a commodity – and, as a consequence, to the association of cultural value to its economic proxy: money. This extractivist modality (Borchi 2017, 2019; Plaza Azuaje 2019) is presented as the well-known "no-alternative" model of neoliberalism. Borchi, 2019, following Settis, 2002:

> in Italian cultural policy the push towards the maximisation of the economic value of culture is presented as a necessary move to modernise an otherwise obsolete relationship between state and culture. (Borchi 2019: 3).

Just like in many culture-led urban regeneration projects, from Hudson Yards to Elbphilharmonie, culture seems to bring a fresh new touch to the urban allure – regardless of the very restricted target that this benefit might serve – and this new touch is more effective if it's *big*.

### *Theatre and exclusion in the city: a case study*
Culture, having a high symbolic power and political relevance, its position in the city testified for social hierarchies and power relationships. It was true in the XIX century, when museums and theatres began constellating the city centre, as testimonies of imperial magnitude and social power, and it is true now. This is mostly because most of the cultural venues have remained unchanged (celebrations of the triumphant bourgeois city) but also because the newly built venues, though spectacular and able, indeed, to inspire city branding, still evoke

hierarchies and exclusionary mechanisms. Be them old or new, these spaces are still the 'temples of culture', as aptly epitomized in a 2015 event at the Tate Liverpool (Oman, 2015).

While this is true for most cultural spaces in urban infrastructure, for the purposes of the present research a specific attention will be devoted to theatre. Being one of the most ancient cultural practices, and an eminently social art, it can be used as a fruitful lens for observing how its position in the urban warp has either asserted or contested the status quo, challenging accessibility patterns or enforcing rules of exclusion.

Theatre, in fact, is not just about the architectural space in which it happens, nor is it just about the social relationships that occur within it – it is also about the urban grid in which it is inscribed. This urban grid, in turn, is connoted by hierarchies and social ties. As noted by Carlson (2012: 36), following Murray (1977) 'theatre represent a system of social power relationships'.

Theatres, just like many other forms of art, have always been used either to represent and embody power, or to question and criticise it, as "the existence of theatres is of itself a politically charged matter" (Schwarte 2012: 153).

In ancient Greece, the (widely cited) golden age of theatre, theatre played an eminent position in the urban fabric as well as in the public life of their citizens (Baldry 1971). In the middle ages, with the political and public life being heavily impacted by the pervasive presence of religion, miracle and mystery plays took place in public squares in front of religious buildings; itinerant theatre companies, jongleurs and storytellers would draw from the most diverse written and oral traditions of religious tales to craft languages and modalities which were at a time transversal to the entirety of religious Europe, and hyper-local, due to the instances of the isolated communities of villages and rising cities.

Rather than being a mere mimesis of reality, theatrical expressions of the medieval society came in the form of allegories, whose evocative power enforced the feudal and religious system of the time[6]. Theatre gathered communities around the most important social infrastructure of the time: the church, while theatrical language served as a moral code and a warning accompanying peasants in their everyday life.

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[6] The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Miracle Play, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 6th February, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/art/miracle-play, Accessed 30th April, 2020.
The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Miracle Play, *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 30th April, 2018, https://www.britannica.com/art/mystery-play, Accessed 30th April, 2020.

The function of theatre was, then, political and religious. In a rapidly secularizing world, these values were progressively overcome by the social relevance of the performing arts in a world of rigidly structured social classes. From the XVI century onward, in facts, the theatrical experience became a dominant element in the infrastructure of interactions as shaped by social classes and their respective economic attributes; courtly society in central Europe, commissioning, patronising and benefitting from the arts, built the identity of its upper classes around the cultural world, expressed in the form of salons and, of course, theatre. A sophisticated society generated a form of entertainment which was just as sophisticated as itself (Craveri 2001), from the baroquely intrigued love plays to the elegant adaptations of Greek tragedies. The fruition of such culture was private and exclusive: theatre had become a club good.

In the complicated castle of social rules there was, however, room for evasion: it was theatre (again) in the form of theatrical representations of reality such as carnivals and festivals, which allowed for the creation of a temporary heterotopia (Primavesi 2012: 205), the state of exception of a society overwhelmed by conventional practices. On that occasion, the physical and behavioural barriers of theatre were stretched and challenged, and theatre became a collective stance.

In the years before and after the French revolution, theatre was more than mere entertainment: as the revolution was coming into being, theatres started to overcrowd boulevards in France and, later on, the streets of European cities, producing narratives on the recent events and, more meaningfully, influencing political perceptions, political formats and political narratives: theatre, the pre-eminent cultural and social infrastructure of the Revolution, represented the apex and the crafter of the emerging public sphere, and as such it produced a massive impact on the rise of modern politics (Sorba 2015). The political afflatus of theatre resurged in the middle and late XIX century – it was a time in which intellectuals such as Tolstoy and Rolland saw 'in the emerging communal drama movement one of the great possibilities of the arts in their time' (Gard, Burley 1959: 74).

In XVIII and XIX century Paris, the 1er arrondissement was the protagonist of a lively clustering of theatres, whereas at the end of the XIX century this centripetal organisation began to be questioned, as was the case with André Antoine's Théâtre Libre, polemically located in the popular (and peripheral) Place Pigalle (Carlson 2012: 40).

According to Richard Sennett, until the 1800s a certain theatricality articulated life in cities itself, and cities, with the complexity of their public sphere, became the stage of the *theatrum mundi*:

> By the 18th Century, when people spoke of the world as a theater, they began to imagine a new audience for their posturing—each other, the divine anguish giving way to the sense of an audience willing to enjoy, if somewhat cynically, the playacting and pretenses of everyday life. And in more recent times, this identification of theater and society has been continued in Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*, in Baudelaire, Mann, and, curiously, Freud. (Sennett 1977: 57)

The affinity between the city and theatre, at an imaginative, metaphorical plan, have been remarked by more than one intellectual. Makeham (2005), quoting Mumford, 1937, identified the city as 'the stage of social drama', and for Carmona, quoting Jacobs (1984) 'users of the public space and occupiers of the surrounding buildings are active participants in *the drama of civilisation* versus barbarism' (Carmona 2010a: 131, emphasis added). Nancy Fraser, one of the greatest theoreticians of the postmodern public sphere, described the public sphere itself as '*a theatre in modern societies* in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk […], *a theatre for debating* and deliberating rather than for buying and selling' (Fraser 1995: 287, emphasis added).

A *fil rouge* connects the city and the theatrical space as an expression of sociability and a catalyser of relations. This is probably the reason why conflict between physically structuring, actually living, and co-actively regulating the theatrical space is probably stronger than that of any other cultural venue: theatre as a social infrastructure manifested mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, it was an actual litmus test of social stratifications and equilibria, and its enclosure was an overtly political act from the part of the ruling bourgeoisie.

It is Sennett who, again, follows the step of the theatrical enclosure in the XIX century. He postulated a direct interrelation between public life and theatre as a social infrastructure:

> In a society with a strong public life there should be affinities between the domains of stage and street; there should be something comparable in the expressive experience crowds have had in these two realms. As public life declines, these affinities should erode (Sennett 1977: 61)

"The intimate society", as Sennett calls it, triumphed, as bourgeois respectability came to coincide with a new way of living public spaces - it was in this period that the respectable

audience became silent in theatrical halls, to distinguish themselves from the populace – they were not forming what has gone under the collective noun 'audience', but a group of atomized individuals. As Sedgman (2018: 18) notes, in theatre "people navigate spatial and social constraints": behavioural codes and social norms are tightly intertwined in the 'theatrical contract' between actor and spectator, and among spectators themselves. As public life shrank, the architecture and structure of theatres semantically shifted from being like squares to being like temples. Even its architectural dimension now was supposed to elicit awe and reverence in the audience, and to create a space that was impermeable to the life outside of it. Inside, where for centuries people used to stand, come and go, talk and eat, and respond vivaciously to the performance, there were now silent spectators. According again to Sennett, this coincided with a social transformation: "passive silence in public is a means of withdrawal; to the extent that silence can be enforced, to that extent every person is free of the social bond itself" (Sennett 1977: 414).

This process culminated with Wagner's theatre in Bayreuth: lights went dim in the hall, preventing people from perceiving each other. Seats were installed in the parterre, thus losing its square-like shape to resemble contemporary concert halls: modern theatre was born, and the sociability associated with its fruition, gone.

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The commodification of culture and the neoliberal governmentality of cities are historically rooted, then, with their mechanisms having further exasperated in recent times: the participation of individuals – of citizens – in the life of the places they inhabit is diminished, shrunk to mere consumption – or to passive contribution through the blurry provision of personal data, as is the case with Hudson Yards. As the adaptive reuse of industrial buildings and the massive investments placed on the regeneration of cities is galvanised by culture into a new life, questions arise over access opportunity, and on the possibility of enacting more democratic modalities of governing cities and of regenerating them through culture.

As posited by Matterns,

> Within this model, people do possess agency, but their actions are framed by their roles
> as consumers and generators of data. […] What about human activities that cannot be
> observed? What about other modes of action, other means by which people perform
> their urban citizenship? (Matterns 2016, np)

Even more explicitly, the stringent matter of urban democracy has been defined by David Harvey's words on the right to the city, expressed as

> far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is […] one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. (Harvey 2008: 23)

Culture-led urban regeneration can only be aligned with urban democracy through a more attentive observation of contexts; a more balanced distribution of the means of production of urban spaces; a more participative approach to cultural restructuring, which accounts for local needs.

Culture, therefore, can still play a different role in urban development; this role, however, would imply a shift in the modes and approaches to regeneration, and a more democratic conception of participation and involvement of people in cultural and artistic processes. In other words, urban democracy needs to be matched with cultural democracy.

## Chapter 2: cultural participation and commoning as a response to urban enclosure

### 2.1 Cultural democracy in urban development

The right to the city and urban democracy are very much aligned from a definitional point of view, and a shared cognition of their meaning characterizes much of the literature on the topic; on the contrary, cultural democracy seems to have a less univocal meaning, and the expression has been long debated up to the present day. This debate has been particularly lively in the United Kingdom starting from the 1970s (and still is nowadays), but its scope and significance extend beyond national borders. In the discourse of cultural democracy a distinction must be made between two understanding of the concept: the first and initial meaning coincided with an "excellence and access" (Street 2011) model, epitomised with the expression 'great art for everyone', as the Arts Council England still titled in 2013. Already in the late 1960s, with the development of community arts, cultural democracy was distinguished by the "democratization of culture" (embedded in the first concept), as community arts unfolded the overtly political nature of their cultural actions. Whereas in the previous conception culture could be "poured from above" as a panacea for regenerating

cities and educating the masses, the emerging conception of cultural democracy implies that people are enabled and made capable of contributing to cultural processes in ways that can both enrich them as individuals and regenerate the spaces and the communities within which they live.

That period saw the "proliferation of 'artists' working with communities, with a commitment to the voices of those communities" (Gross, Wilson 2018: 4). Political awareness in time rose over two facts: the first is that "even if we successfully reduce or remove these barriers, there will still be some people who choose not to engage in the types of arts activities that typically receive public funding". The second is that cultural policy is still mostly handled by cultural elites, and that decision-making for culture reflects social hierarchies in ways which should be challenged by including a wider array of voices in the debate (Jankovich 2017). As polemically posited by Hadley, cultural democracy must guarantee the expression of unpopular ideas (Marable, 1983) and doing so it inevitably engenders political debate (Hadley 2018: 53).

These two views, then, are matched with two notions: the first (related to the 'excellence and access' model) is that of cultural *accessibility*; the second, related to expanding opportunities for cultural expression, is that of cultural *representation* of plural cultural identity – a feature of contemporary globalized societies which has produced, in recent times, the emergence of politics of identity and of recognition (Taylor 1992; Calhoun 1995).

Accessibility and representation have been seen a dichotomous for a long time, reflecting opposite views over, respectively, the democratization of culture and cultural democracy. Recent research, however, has attempted to reconcile these two views by proposing a new approach to cultural democracy, centred on 'widening or redistributing the means of cultural production – the resources and powers of self-expression, voice and culture-making' (Gross, Wilson 2018: 2), and on cultural opportunity, defined as 'freedom people have, or lack, to co-create culture' (Gross, Wilson 2018: 5).

The notion of cultural opportunity is, in turn, linked to a "capabilities approach" to cultural democracy. The first and major reference to capabilities as a preferable lens through which to look at development was made by Amartya Sen, who, in 1999, described the capabilities approach to sustainable development as

> an account of quality of life that does not use income as the primary indicator, nor
> reduces achieved quality of life to subjective states. Instead, it provides an account of

well-being in terms of a person's substantive freedom to do and be what they have reason to value (Sen 1999 in Gross, Wilson 2018: 8).

Jones (2010) echoes the work of Sen and reiterates the importance of coproduction and of a redistribution of cultural means:

> From a democratic perspective, cultural policy must focus on the equitable distribution of the capabilities by which individuals can take part in shaping the culture around them and interpret the expression of others. This will require thinking anew about what form the government agencies responsible for culture take, and how they are run. (Jones 2010: 10)

This new idea of cultural democracy implies a widening of artistic boundaries, a wider accessibility (of both spaces and practices), and a collective conception of creativity, expressed through co-production: just like Hugo's commons-like city, in which "there was nothing without its originality, its reason, its genius, its beauty, nothing which did not derive from art" (Hugo 1831: 159). This view of cultural democracy very much recalls Jacobs' view of urban democracy:

> The just city and nation is a place where anyone's creative impulses to "dicker" and improvise and reinvent themselves would be unleashed, where everyone would have the opportunity to make their own "vital little plans". (Jacobs 2016: 13)

Urban democracy and cultural democracy meet each other at the intersection of cultural opportunity and spatial justice. Cultural democracy, in facts, produces a shift in the modes and targets of regeneration, as it places a new emphasis on local processes and cultural expressions:

> What is left out of the plans and programs conceived around a notion of cultural development as a driver of economic development and urban revitalization is support for the everyday cultural lives of city neighbourhoods and residents. (Rosenstein 2011: 10)

Bailey, Miles and Stark (2004: 48) similarly call for a more "grounded" approach to culture-led urban regeneration, claiming that "above and beyond economic outputs, successful examples of culture-led regeneration do in fact engage with a preexisting collective sense of local identity".

Lim, Im and Lee (2019) offer an interesting insight into the notion, providing a "spatial" understanding of cultural democracy: in their view, if properly supported, voluntary art activities, by blurring the boundaries of everyday life and artistic participation, create "third places". Theorised by Oldenburg (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982), the third place is a place for sociability that is located outside of the conventional classifications of private and public and are to be found in a 'modest' dimension, bound to local communities and to the social and cultural significance they attribute to these spaces – in the words of Carmona (2010a: 132):

> because contemporary domestic life often takes place in isolated nuclear families, and work life, with the spread of new technologies, increasingly in a solitary manner, people need other social realms to live a fulfilled life. For him, this 'informal' public life, although seemingly more scattered than it was in the past, is in fact highly focused in a number of third place settings – cafes, bookstores, coffee shops, bars, hair salons and other small private hangouts.

According to Lim, Im and Lee, thus, the diffusion of cultural democracy in the urban space would create new forms of sociability and of cultural participation in unprecedented public spaces:

> People gather around the space to express what they want to express and enjoy the arts. In this process, they can share ideas, and artistic communication and interaction can actively occur. Compared to school education and professional artistic activities, 'Voluntary Arts Activities' focus more on the sustainable improvement of the quality of life. It is important in terms of inclusion, so that everyone can appreciate and express themselves in daily life. (Lim, Jim, Lee 2019: 5)

The connection of democracy and place not only resonates the discourse of urban democracy: it also, more specifically, relates to the discourse of cultural spaces and their accessibility. Cultural democracy, then, should focus not only on the redesign of cultural processes, but also and especially on the attribution of new cultural significance to places which were devoid of their meaning – or, conversely, on the redefinition of accessibility criteria to cultural spaces that have been historically enclosed, particularly after XIX century urbanization.

What is more, cultural democracy implies shared governance in the urban context: in order to redistribute the means of cultural production to sustainably reactivate spaces and communities, a shift is necessary which does not only concern policy, but partnerships in the urban domain. In a governmentality which has pushed cities towards an endless competition

for funds and global visibility under the aegis of the creative economy (Degen, Garcia 2012; Keating, de Frantz 2003), new forms of collaboration need to be searched for that counterbalance the pushes towards privatisation and unregulated capitalisation. As explicitly posited by Scott:

> As cities shift into cognitive-cultural modes of economic activity, the search for meaningful forms of solidarity, sociability and mutual aid in everyday work and life becomes increasingly urgent- not just because these attributes are important in their own right- but also because they enlarge the sphere of creativity, learning, in novation, social experimentation and cultural expression and are essential for the further economic and cultural flowering of contemporary cities (Scott 2007: 1478).

How is it possible, however, to combine stances of urban and cultural democracy in the evolving, complex scenario of cities? What answer can be found to the recurring claims of justice and access to cultural processes, and to urban spaces and governance?

Commoning practices and the urban commons can be considered an answer to this question. By providing spaces for collaborative cultural production, and arenas for the formation of collaborative ecosystems, the urban commons (and social practices of commoning) are able to redesign urban spaces (either temporarily or permanently), enhance accessibility and enable both urban and cultural democracy.

## 2.2 Commons from conflict to governance

The Hudson Yards case can be considered a radical example of "top-down" urban governance, in which public space is privatised and commodified, collective choice and citizenship are somehow delegated to an external, superior agent and "datafied". While the nature of this example can be considered extreme, the very mechanisms underlying this paradigm have a global reach, spanning from New York's Hudson Yards to Shanghai's speculative frenzy (Sennett 2018), to Miami's housing market, disrupted by dramatic gentrification (Rameau 2013), to Berlin, where city boosterism has distorted urban equilibria to the advantage of the wealthy (Müller 2015) to Italy, where conflict and contradiction characterise urban governance.

In summer 2019 in fact, Saskia Sassen visited Bologna for holding a seminar on "The Rise of Predatory Formations". The seminar was held in the Summer School "Planetary Urbanscapes" of the Gramsci Foundation and the Academy of Global Studies and Critical

Theory. Earlier that summer, the city had suffered from a dramatic fracture: the (en)closure of XM24, a *centro sociale* which had been active since the early 2000 in the city. XM, which owes its name to its position, located within an occupied former market (*ex mercato* in Italian, hence X-M), had become in time a vital spot for the neighbourhood and the city, to the point that the administration had come to terms with the occupants: an agreement was made to allow XM24 to remain in the building; however, the agreement was interrupted in the 2017, and the eviction came two years later (Tesori 2019).

When interviewed about the violent eviction of the communards from the occupied market, she manifested her indignation, professing her support to the protesters (Diacono 2019).

The violent eviction of the XM occupiers was not an unprecedented event in Bologna, but was anticipated in 2015 by the eviction of Atlantide, another *centro sociale* active in the field of arts and civil rights, and by that of Làbas, in 2017. The fate of Làbas was, luckily, of a different sort than that of XM and Atlantide: the impressive mobilization of people claiming its reopening forced the administration to open a dialogue with the communards, who were then granted a new space in the city (Cori, Capelli, Venturi 2017).

These places share common features: they are *centri sociali*. The translation of the term is ambiguous and complicated - according to Borchi, in facts,

> the term chosen to define these *centri sociali* is not "squats", as in English it usually defines occupation for social housing purposes only. Italy's *centri sociali*, like squats, are spaces that offer shelter to the occupiers, but they are aimed at the organisation of political activities and are themselves a form of protest against governmental powers. (Borchi 2017: 68)

*Centri sociali* can be considered the most eminent form of urban commons. The tradition of *centri sociali* is particularly strong in Emilia Romagna and in Bologna specifically – it is not by chance that the first regulation on the use of the commons was promulgated by a local administration precisely in Bologna (Pais, De Nictolis, Bolis 2017). It is appalling that such clairvoyant legislation and the historically rooted tradition of urban commons was not able to prevent evictions from the part of a supposedly left-wing administration.

Before defining urban commons it is necessary to define the commons in the first place. The commons were first intended as natural resources, governed, accessed, and appropriated collectively. Collective arrangements for the use of natural resources have a global reach and

a centuries-long history – from the legal notion of *res communes* in the Roman law (which separated common from public goods) to Medieval commons and *usi civici* which granted common access and shared management to collective resources such as forestry and the city itself (Wall 2014; Mattei 2012).

The first time that the commons have come to the fore in modern research has been in 1968 with Garret Hardin's well-known critique to their governance failure. According to Hardin, commons pasture could not be sustainable because human drive towards the maximisation of self-interest would soon overthrow collective arrangements:

> Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit-- in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all (Hardin 1968: 1245)

After decades of silence, the commons have regained dignity thanks to Elinor Ostrom's work. Ostrom has been the most eminent representative of neoinstitutionalism, which, as said by Mattei (2012), has the merit of

> obviating to the diminished interdisciplinary prestige of economics, "queen" of social sciences caused by the excesses of formal mathematical representation. (Mattei 2012: xi)

Her research has been amply appreciated, before and after she obtained the Nobel prize for her research on the commons, precisely because of the renewed *elan* she gave to economics as a social science, bound to social rules and human behaviours rather than (solely) relegated to the domain of macroeconomics and finance, which dominate the academic discourse and regulate the global economy (and the life of cities) today.

Her response to Hardin was indeed delayed, but meaningful. She objected his thesis with a threefold argument: first, that he was discussing open access resources, rather than common ones, second, that he was assuming self-interest as the only driver; that he, in addition, was ignoring communication between the herders. Third, she was critical upon the fact that Hardin's approach was reductionist in proposing only two possible solutions: privatisation or government intervention.

Ostrom's solution lied in between, and proposed the commons as a "third way" (a way 'beyond state and market', as it has been epitomized by Dellenbaugh et al. in 2015). By

observing cases across the world, she identified eight founding institutional design principles for long-enduring commons, which were:

1. clearly defined boundaries
2. Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions
3. Collective-choice arrangements
4. Monitoring
5. Graduated sanctions
6. Conflict-resolution mechanisms
7. Minimal recognition of rights to organize
8. Nested enterprises

Ostrom 1990: 100

Her research was foundational, and yet limited to management systems of natural resources: after Ostrom came the awareness that "so many goods are shared" (Klamer 2002: 456) – and that, therefore, many of the resources that are produced, accessed, managed by humans were actually in common – or had been in common before enclosures interrupted the collective use and production of such resources. Charlotte Hess, in a remarkable effort to bring methodological clarity to the emerging literature on the commons, identified through bibliographical research some distinct branches of commons research: cultural, neighbourhood, infrastructure, knowledge, health, markets, and global (Hess 2008).

While this awareness has contributed to subtracting economic reasoning from the dualism of private and public, De Angelis has warned about "a danger of conceptual meaninglessness when types of common goods are listed ad infinitum" (De Angelis 2017: 55). This warning has to be born in mind when setting up new taxonomies of common goods. And yet, two categories of common goods are relevant to the present research that are worth observing: cultural commons and urban commons.

Cultural commons were first observed by Bertacchini et al. (2012). Cultural goods are "special" resources because they embed not only use and exchange values, but also symbolic ones (Throsby 2001); in addition, they are not necessarily tangible goods, and as such, needed a reconceptualization of the institutional design principles which determine the production and governance of physical natural resources. Therefore, the main dimensions that Bertacchini et al. identified in the cultural commons are "culture", "community" and "space". Culture refers to the resource itself, whether material or immaterial, produced at a local,

clustered level or at a global one; community refers to the density of those who partake to the resource production and appropriation, while "space" can either be virtual or physical, a single location or a global infrastructure.

Just like Ostrom's commons, the cultural commons could be subject to free riding without the proper identification of community boundaries and monitoring mechanisms, and to the uncertainty of transmission, deriving from a failure to coordinate. The cultural commons are relevant to the present research in that they may converge with stances of cultural democracy: understanding culture as a commons resource, co-produced and co-owned, contributes to the debate on cultural accessibility and cultural capabilities, and calls for a redesign of spaces and processes in the city to allow for a more commons-like production of culture.

Urban commons have achieved paramount importance in urban studies because they embody, more than any other movement, claims for the right to the city, and entail a crucial political dimension. By reappropriating urban resources, occupying public spaces and squatting houses, citizens have enacted political acts of resistance against the neoliberal turn of urban governance, against the privatization of public spaces and the gentrification of housing; they have appropriated spaces in the city, regained governance tools and political weight against the backdrop of the towering presence of top-down regulation. The occupation of Gezi Park in Turkey (Trimarchi, Randazzo, Lenna 2020), the Bin-Zib movement against privatized housing in South Korea (Han 2018), the aforementioned occupations in Bologna are but examples of how the commons are, in the urban dimension, catalysers of urban struggles. It is not by chance that Bianchi, when discussing the Bologna regulation on the use of the urban commons, contests the institutionalization of the commons from the part of the administration, which results in a de-politicization of the term and in the loss of relevance of the commons in the struggle for urban alternatives. She points out the main downsides of such institutionalisation as:

> (i) it is selective and includes only the more moderate participatory claims, excluding the more antagonistic ones; (ii) it seems to select and include some social groups – those with sufficient economic and social capital and with sufficient free time – while excluding the most disadvantaged groups; (iii) it does not seem to guarantee an equal redistribution of resources within the city, instead facilitating saving on services through outsourcing, since it does not value the cost of labour; (iv) it does not aim to effectively redistribute decision-making power, since this is retained within the public administration (Bianchi 2018: 12)

When speaking of cultural commons and the city, a crucial spatial dimension is implied, so that the category of "space" cannot acquire a fully virtual dimension (as it could be the case with other cultural commons resources, such as academic knowledge, listed by Bertacchini et al. 2012): it is rather situated in the urban space, and is politically connoted. This has been particularly true for urban commons which were born from the occupation of former cultural venues, or which serve a cultural purpose: famous Italian example include TVO, Teatro Valle Occupato in Rome (Borchi 2018, 2017), the former Slaughterhouse Exchange Building (SEB) in Milan (Delsante, Bertolino 2017), and the Asilo Filangieri in Naples (Ciancio 2018).

Whether successful or doomed, these experiments share some common features: first, they re-territorialise the struggle for the urban sphere, claiming the right to the city as well as the right for recognition and political participation at a time; second, they embed a crucial cultural dimension: be it the perpetuation of the activities of an old theatre through self-management; or the culture-driven activities led by a collective running an occupied space, the right to space and the right to culture form a single dimension in the commoning experience. As noted by Borchi, such occupations represent 'a peculiar case of progressive stratification of meaning that includes culture, social justice, economics and politics' (Borchi 2018: 41). Third, their political resonance is considerable, as they have been able to influence urban policy in either direct or indirect ways.

The influence of commons on urban policy and planning has equally been noted in Naples, where after the occupation of the ex Asilo Filangieri, the City charter introduced the notion of common goods and a city counsellor dedicated to the commons was introduced (Ciancio 2018: 287). A similar influence on planning was remarked by Delsante and Bertolino when looking at the occupation of SEB in Milan: consultations with the Municipality were opened, academia was mobilized. Yet, issues of sustainability arose, and, like in Teatro Valle, the communards were evicted (Delsante, Bertolino 2017: 54).

What matters about these examples, however, is the liveliness and timeliness of the commons as either symbols and fortresses of contestation or as the labs for emerging forms of collaborative governance, which also push for cultural change and for the accessibility of cultural practices. The commons, especially in their urban dimension, represent an alternative paradigm to the one initiated in the XIX century in the modern city. Born as acts of resistance, they are demonstrating significant power in reshaping governance tools, power hierarchies and network systems in the city; specifically, they are able to catalyse both urban

and cultural democracy, and to enhance the accessibility to both spaces and formats of culture.

With specific reference to the urban domain, the design principles which lay the ground for and regulate the commons have been reconceptualised in the light of urban complexity. Common theorists have redesigned the core characteristics of the commons to adapt them to the complexity of the contemporary modalities; De Angelis, in particular, has established a threefold articulation of the commons:

> First, all commons involve some sort of common pool of resources, understood as non-commodified means of fulfilling people's needs. Second, the commons are necessarily created and sustained by communities. […] the third and most important element in terms of conceptualizing the commons is the verb "to common" – the social process that creates and reproduces the commons (De Angelis in Dellenbaugh et al. 2015: 9).

This definition was echoed by Silke Helfrich and Jörg Haas have, which epitomised the commons articulation in 'things', 'community' and 'systems and practices' (in Dellenbaugh et al. 2015: 8).

Of the institutional design principles initially conceived by Ostrom, three in particular are those which have required a greater level of transformation to cope with the diversity and complexity of the city. The first is that of 'community'. This notion, in itself, subtends to the clear definition of boundaries identified by Ostrom; the urban context, however, is characterised by super-diversity (Vertovec 2007), instability and the fluidity of interactions, resulting in a constant need 'to negotiate and rearticulate the "we"' (Dellenbaugh et al. 2015: 13). Huron goes as far as to say that

> the urban commons is enacted in saturated space, by which I mean space that is already densely packed with people, competing uses, and capitalist investment; and the urban commons is constituted by the coming together of strangers." (Huron 2015: 963)

At the same time, however, the loosening of community boundaries has severe implications in terms of commons sustainability: if it is true that mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of the commons are hard to define sharply in an urban context, what is also true is that the threshold between public and common good risks to be trespassed and, therefore, the notion of commons itself would lose ontological clarity and political efficacy. De Angelis, quoting Anderson's understanding of Nations as "imaginary communities", recalls in this respect that

> Commons are not the place for imaginary communities (Anderson 2006), for those who feel they belong to the same nation, race, or football club, without even leaving their private living rooms. Commons are instead made of real communities, in the sense that their practices reproduce not only a network of relations, but also a web of recognisable faces, names and characters and dispositions (De Angelis 2017: 125).

The second dimension is that of ownership. Urban assets, such as a square, or an abandoned building, cannot be comprised in terms of property because categories of ownership would define them as either private or public, whereas the set of values and of meanings that these places embody, and the flow of resources that they generate for people who benefit from them (and contribute to their maintenance) are impossible to grasp in terms of ownership. Roggero's five theses on the commons have exemplified well this conceptual shift, advocating the need to relocate the question of the commons 'from one centred on property to one focused on relations of production' (Roggero, 2010: 6), while Williams has argued, even more incisively, that

> Urban commons can exist on private land as producer cooperatives, or on public land as community gardens that occupy government property, or in other property arrangements such as those created by community land trusts that refigure the nature of property ownership (Williams 2018: 18)

A third dimension was present in Ostrom's theorization which requires reelaboration; this dimension was not inscribed in commons design principles, but rather in commons conceptualization. The shifting emphasis from "property" to "relations" in the commons, on the one hand; on the other, the features of the new observed types of common goods, from the cultural, to the knowledge, to the urban, has placed a renewed emphasis on commons as systems rather than as types of goods. Ostrom, when defining commons, had identified them as types of resources whose common nature depended, as with the distinction of private and public goods, from their subtractability and the difficulty of excluding potential beneficiaries. This definition was also recently proposed by Bollier and Helfrich, 2012, who have identified four characteristics of common goods: depletability, excludability, rivalrous use, type of regulation used to access it.

| | high subtractability of use | low subtractability of use |
|---|---|---|
| High difficulty of excluding potential beneficiaries | Common goods | Public goods |
| Low difficulty of excluding potential beneficiaries | Private goods | Toll/club goods |

Figure 1. Classification of common goods according to the work of Ostrom and the reelaboration of Bollier and Helfrich, 2012. Table by the author.

In more recent times, however, De Angelis noted that

> a thing can be a private or a common good depending on the ways of seeing and relating
> of a plurality of frames of social actions and relations [...] the interplay between 'goods'
> and 'plurality' may give rise to commons systems (De Angelis 2017:49).

Ostrom did by no means underestimate the importance of collective choice arrangements in giving rise to commons, as she underlined that commons were resource *systems*: as such, they implied choices, agreements, and collective rules. Even so, contemporary research on the commons placed an even greater emphasis on commoning as a practice and a social work. In particular, De Angelis has noted that the benefits and the value produced by commoning extend beyond the rationality of economic reasoning:

> It is a value that cannot be captured by the models of rational choice theory. For some
> of these theories, especially those influenced by Ostrom, commons are justified just in
> terms of their greater efficiency and payoffs, and there is little or no study of the value
> created by commoning (De Angelis 2017: 132).

Bianchi, similarly, pointed out that in the 'institutionalisation' of the commons from the part of the capitalistic regime stripped the commons of the relational dimension 'to become the new fix for capitalism' (Bianchi 2018: 5). About the relational value of the commons she further elaborates:

> The crucial nature of the social relationship between the group and the resource
> qualifies the Commons with a collective need closely linked to the group's demand for
> a decent life, reclaiming the means of production and reproduction, their fundamental
> rights and the production and distribution of wealth and value (Bianchi 2018: 3).

The value creation of commoning as a social work recalls Arendt's theories on "the human condition", in which she made a distinction between work and action, the former pertaining

to the livelihood and survival, and the second to public life and immaterial values. She, not differently from De Angelis, remarked how the preciousness of such acts of commoning (or, as she would have said, of "being together") could not be comprised by the dry pragmatism of pure economic reasoning:

> The modern age, in its early concern with tangible products and demonstrable profits or its later obsession with smooth functioning and sociability, was not the first to denounce the idle uselessness of action and speech in particular and of politics in general. (Arendt 1958: 220).

Understanding commoning as an activity helps unfold the overtly political nature of the commons as social work, as collective actions which aim at providing alternatives in the distortions of urban inequalities. Lamarca hax pointed out how

> conceptualizing the commons instead as an activity – as relational, not static – is fundamental to unpack the dynamic relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to our environment (Lamarca 2015: 167)

Euler (2018), following Acksel et al. (2015) has described commoning as a social activity, producing

> opportunities for individual growth and self-development combined with the search of shared solutions, meaningful activities with extended and deepened relationships, and the creation of material abundance with the care for others and for nature (Euler, 2018: 12).

This notion in particular makes clear the existing linkage between commoning as a social work that creates meaningful relationships and opportunities, and cultural democracy, intended as cultural opportunities and capabilities.

The fourth conceptualisation which requires reelaboration from Ostrom concerns the minimal recognition of the rights to organize, that is, Ostrom's seventh principle. Recognition is, perhaps, the most fragile dimension of urban commons. Never have the commons been so visible to the eye of external control and authority than in the city, where they are subject to constant negotiations and, in many cases, to violent evictions from the part of municipal institutions, military authority, and the like. In some cases, like that of Làbas in Bologna, such commons have been fully recognised by the administration; in some others, they have been erased from the urban grid in ways which have caused further conflict

and contestation. Going beyond this frailty and finding spaces for common struggles will be of crucial importance if more democratic cities are to be built in the future.

The implications of such theoretical reframing are threefold: first, that the commons (and not just urban ones) in the contemporary scenario need to acknowledge their embeddedness in non-commons environments (this is evident especially when it comes to recognition):

> Commons (and commoning) can only be commons (and commoning) in a commons society. In the current, structurally hostile environment [...], the different circumstances can allow different aspects of commons to come to the surface. (Euler 2018: 12)

De Angelis does not simply recognise that the commons are 'embedded' in capitalist contexts: he goes as far as to say that capitalism is embedded in the commons themselves and that, especially in the complexity of urban contexts, they cannot be "pure" commons structures:

> In commons environments we also find hybrid forms: social systems that are a bit of all three types, commons, state and capital. In reality most social systems are hybrid, with a dominant factor (De Angelis 2017: 100)

Second, and related to the first, is that the great complexity of the urban scenario, in which multiple institutions, communities and individuals operate at different levels, and the articulated concatenation of actors orbiting around the commons calls for a better integration of the micro-level (the organisational structure of the resource) with the broader one, related to policy and politics at the urban scale. Some commons have obtained not just tolerance, but formal recognition from the part of institutions; ultimately, yet, what will probably be desirable to achieve is the rise of alternative and hybrid forms of governance, which involve commons endeavours and formal urban (and cultural) governance, for the purposes of sustainable urban change.

This change has been variedly advocated by the literature. Harvey himself has stressed the need to "acknowledge the limits of horizontality as an organizational principle between commons" (Harvey 2012), while Opazo-Ortiz (2015: 117), has pointed out the "need to reconsider Ostrom's level of analysis (in which external authority cannot interfere)", asking the challenging question of

how can we foster the idea of the commons as a collective endeavour and a culture of collaboration in the process of rethinking institutions and processes of production of public space? (Opazo Ortiz 2015: 128)

A similar challenge was posited by Iaione (2015: 171), who asked

Can urban assets and resources or the city as a whole be transformed into collaborative ecosystems that enable collective action for the commons?

The urban commons dimension, therefore, though essential in revitalizing spaces and in empowering local communities, needs to go beyond Ostrom's minimal recognition, nesting not in commons enterprises, as her eighth design principle posited, but rather in multi-scalar partnership.

The third concerns the renewed emphasis on commoning as a social practice, and the blurring of the boundaries of commons resources: the social work of commoning, of "being together, rather than having together" (Mattei 2012: 27), applies to intangible as well as tangible resources – to continued acts of care towards a territory or a claimed urban space, as well as to moments of togetherness that are contingent in time and space – and which, nonetheless, enact the commons. This is particularly true for cultural practices: as in the case of a theatrical performance, they can be temporary and fleeting – and yet, create moments of commoning, of togetherness which enable cultural democracy through access and opportunity.

After years of Leviathan-like top-down forms of urban management (as said by Iaione 2015), on the one hand, and conflictual occupations, on the other, can urban commons as collaborative ecosystem present a solution for the collective, multi-scalar management of urban spaces?

The same question applies to cultural democracy: long-term, structural change of cultural urban infrastructure passes through the recognition of different forms of cultural expression as worthy and legitimate, but also through a radical rethinking of the access conditions, and the production mechanisms, of public institutions: cultural democracy should, therefore, become a multi-faceted concept, embracing both dimensions of the debate.

## Chapter 3: Methods, questions, objectives

### 3.1 Research questions and aims

The research aims at exploring the extent to which participative theatrical practices in the urban space are able to produce urban regeneration; in other words, how a theatrical commons, shared by different stakeholders, enables urban and cultural democracy in urban voids. It does so by exploring how an operatic theatrical project was developed in three different cities in Italy; the different contexts produced different degrees of citizen involvement, different levels of commoning and co-production and, consequently, different outcomes.

The question the research addresses are: who produces the city? Who produces culture in the city, and where? These questions are addressed by chapters 1 and 2. The third question, addressed in the empirical section, is how can commoning processes with a strong cultural component reactivate urban voids?

With particular respect to the empirical part, the cases will help identify practical actions of urban and cultural democracy in urban governance; define the features of a "collaborative ecosystem" and observe the commoning of cultural practices; advance commons theory in identifying a particular type of commons, a "theatrical commons" combining urban and cultural characteristics.

### 3.2 The theatrical commons

As has been pointed out, the case that has been selected for the purposes of the research is a theatrical one - and, specifically, an operatic project. Especially after the second half of the XX century, theatre has had a pivotal role in community arts and community engagement. As such, due to its irreducible social and political dimension, it has been instrumentalised for producing cohesion and empowerment, for reinforcing identity, or for improving wellbeing in education and health projects.

Before (and beyond) such instrumental use, theatre had (and still has) a broader significance, which has always reflected the social and political infrastructure in which it was embedded, either contesting it or adhering to it. This research, therefore, looks at this operatic project beyond the instrumental views of 'community arts' and community theatre, but rather as an enactment of a theatrical commons, i.e. of a resource which has been historically shared by

communities of users, producers, audiences, and which, after a period of enclosure, is being reappropriated by its community.

Awareness on theatre as a co-produced resource has a long history: already in a letter in 1775, the French urbanist and architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux wrote:

> let us return to the principle [...] Let us take as a model humanity's simple actions, those that occur before our eyes every day. How, for example, does one assemble around a charlatan on a public square in order to hear him? People bunch together and form a circle around him. (Ledoux in Schwarte 2012: 161).

This reflection contains two dimensions worth observing: the first is the preëminence attributed to the spatial dimension in theatre; the second is the co-production of space from the part of the audience - which Ledoux identifies as the sole necessary premise for the creation of a theatrical space: before the architectural dimension, human relations and interactions are the primary source of space in theatre.

Ledoux was contributing to a lively and abundant debate within the Enlightenment movement, whose repercussions will be evident until decades after the French Revolution, concerning the role of theatre in society. This theatre querelle, in its turn, is all but a circumstantiated moment in time, but rather one of the endless reformative efforts which constellate the history of Western theatre – reforms which testify for the social, cultural and political relevance of theatre in different societies.

### The production of space in the theatrical infrastructure

Almost two hundred years after Ledoux, Max Hermann wrote that performing arts are spatial arts (Roselt 2012: 302). He alluded to the impossibility of thinking about performance as separate from the space of performance; but also, and more specifically, he was referring to the co-presence of actors and audience in the space and time of the performance, and the subsequent co-production of the performance by both parties. It is possible, therefore, to identify two distinct dimensions of theatrical spatiality: the physical and the relational.

**Theatrical spatiality.** The first dimension, the physical and architectural, pertains to the building, or better, to the space in which both the audience and the stage are located. Adapting theatrical buildings and structures has never just been a matter of taste of the time: in many cases, reforming theatre has been mostly about exiting the conventional spaces of theatre architecture. A mutual influence has occurred in different times between performance and the stage; the former has been subject to the constraints and the structure

of the latter; reversely, as performance evolved in its expressive forms, the stage was transformed in its shape, size, and position with respect to the audience.

Examples of how theatrical architecture and spaces have been altered according to the specific meaning that was attributed to theatre constellate the millennial history of theatre. XVIII century Germany experienced an epistemic revolution through the Enlightenment, which produced the aspiration at a National, morally reforming theatre practice; such reform, in the intentions of its supporters, was to be pursued by displacing performances from the small halls where they were performed, an inheritance of the supposedly loose courtly morals, and holding them in large open spaces.

XX century Arab theatre was sternly pivoted on the rejection of Western theatrical practices and their respective space; therefore, artists would perform in the open air and have the audience gather around them in a circle called *halqa*, thus forming a human amphitheatre which opposed the frontal fruition of Western theatrical architecture.

As an example, the contemporary New-York based theatre project "Shakespeare in the Park", taking place in different Manhattan public parks, stretches to the limits the notion of "performance space", as it stages Shakespeare plays in varying locations changing from one act to the other; the audience is invited to follow the performers around the impromptu stages. The director Graham Vick also subverted the conventional stage-audience dynamics in space in his *Stiffelio*, where audience and the choir where located in the same space, while the stage consisted of modules changing during the performance in response to the dramaturgy (Folletto 2017).

**Theatre as relational infrastructure.** Spatial reforms have always been concerned with the political transformation of the architectural space, whether it was the institution of private tribunalia in the Hellenistic era, marking the first class distinction in classical theatre, or Voltaire's aspiration of a perceptive apartheid between the audience and the performance. As has been noted, however, reforms of the architectural space were not always effectivd:

> a circular theatre does not necessarily produce a democratic disposition, and a semicircular terraced structure does not necessarily evoke a feeling of equality. The actual effect of these and other constructions […] lies in the various encounters between the monumental and the ephemeral, processes of building and the uses of architectural space, performances and intrigues. (Schwarte, 2012: 162).

This latter articulation refers to uses and relations, therefore bringing to the fore the notion of relational space. Following David Harvey's economy of public space, it could be said that the stage-audience space mostly carries a relational value: in Harvey's words, it is 'a space where there is no such thing as space outside of the processes that define it' (Harvey 2004: 4). In theatre, the space of performance only exists because of the performance itself, and of the human relations being formed around it. The space-creating nature of theatrical relations has also been described by Primavesi (2012: 509), who pointed out that theatrical situations between audience and actors can potentially occur anywhere outside the theatrical space (he was, somehow, anticipated by Ledoux).

In such case, space and time are strictly interrelated, since time, interactions and relations are the actual conditions under which the separation between stage and audience comes into being. The grammar of this relationship does not just articulate the stage-audience spatiality: it is a necessary precondition for the artistic creation itself. As simple as it may seem, without an audience there is no performance, and without this relational moment there is no theatre.

Theatrical spatiality, then, is not only about the way the theatrical space is built and structured, and the way dramaturgic dynamics relate to it; it also describes the way the theatrical space is used by the audience as a social space – a usage which has varied largely in time. Francesco Reggiani, who in 2018 was the head of the Historical Archive of Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, came up with a thrilling hypotyposis to describe this restless equilibrium:

> Imagine you're in a pub. People are sitting on bar stools drinking and talking loudly to each other; at their backs, a tv screen is hanged on a wall displaying some sports match. All of a sudden the speaker from the tv raises his voice in an outburst of enthusiasm, announcing the scoring of a point, and it is only now that the gentlemen, who had not paid attention to the tv until that time, turn to the screen and follow the action. This is more or less what an opera theatre looked like in the XVIII century: people talked, gambled, ate, and only when they recognised the beginning of a popular opera aria they would turn to the stage and listen to it in delight.[7]

The blatantly informal atmosphere described by Reggiani's vivid example in the past rings more than a bell: it is but one of the innumerable historical testimonies of how attitudes within theatres and towards theatrical practices have varied in time. Above all, it illustrates how the contemporary fruition of theatre, framed in a rigid behavioural grid, has remained anchored to a paradigm enforced in a late theatrical era: the audience-performance relational

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[7] Francesco Reggiani, interview by the author on July 31st, 2018.

dimension, as well as the system of social relations occurring within the theatrical space, used to be appallingly different from what they are today. Fluid and informal, they have allowed theatre to be a space of interactions and encounter.

The political and social significance of theatres is so explicit as to have required, in modern times, the use of a specific police force to regulate mores and behaviours within it: in 1797, the theatre police in Austria would try and suppress clapping and eating within theatres in order to 'enforce a new contemplative approach to aesthetic perception among the audience' (Wihstutz 2012: 21). It was more than an extemporaneous decision by a particularly stern authority, as it would change the modalities of theatrical experience, and, consequently, its format and its very function within the social fabric, shifting from social rite embedded in urban routines to isolated temple of beauty.

These examples rather raise questions over formats and experiences, and over how biased and static our perception of relations and interactions is with respect to theatrical practices.

### *Dramaturgy as a cultural commons*
The dimensions of theatre spatiality illustrated above are characterised by a significantly coherent grammar – more precisely, a syntax of the theatrical space. In language, the syntax is a common set of rules by which different syntagms can be articulated in many different fashions, and still respond to the same reference framework. Similarly, the dramaturgic and social relationships, and the space which contains such relationships, have been articulated into an innumerable set of variables by different societies in different times, without losing the structure with which they can be identified as theatrical.

A second dimension can be identified in this grammar: the metro-linguistic component. The formulaic aspects of dramaturgy can in facts be considered a cultural commons, as Bertacchini et al. (2012) have codified them: a commons constituted by 'ideas, creativity and styles of a community, knowledge, beliefs, rites and customs, shared and participated productive techniques' (Bertacchini et al. 2012: 2).

In theatre, this commons consists of the high codification of signs, semantics and languages which generate the specificity of every theatrical form of expression, from opera dramaturgy to singing in kabuki theatre. The stratification of theatrical dramaturgy in both content and form is the result of centennial processes involving playwrights, stage directors, actors, composers, and the innumerable different declinations that these roles have assumed in different societies. 'Community', always a crucial dimension in the commons, is again at the

core of the articulation of the cultural commons; the specificity of the community of cultural commoners is that it can be considered a "longitudinal" community, comprising not just the present one, but also the past, adding layers to the knowledge resource. Languages, formats, dramaturgic conventions, idiomatic expressions, formulaic gestures have all been codified and absorbed into different theatre forms. The syntax metaphor will once more serve its purpose: regardless of the specific codified languages and gestures, every theatrical form has developed a shared code.

Signs, symbols, archetypes and tropes serve as the shared knowledge basis for the production and reproduction of artistic forms, and for the shared recognition of a conventional language from the part of both the audience and the performers: the articulated gestural lexicon of Nō Japanese theatre, the melodic and metrical articulation of Greek classical plays and the sophisticated codified syllabus of love of the 1700s marivaudage represented a shared common ground for theatrical production and communication within the society which generated (and benefitted from) a specific theatrical practice.

While being at the core of the theatre commons, the dramaturgic dimension is but one aspect of what seems to be a much more complex commons, characterized by relational, spatial and dramaturgic resources. As a complex commons, theatre requires multiple analytical frameworks in order to be fully comprised: it is a physical, or better a spatial resource in which inclusion and exclusion are, today, determined by behavioural norms and spatial boundaries, and which has historically been bound to specific communities. But theatre is not only a common-pool resource, physically and theatrically construed by the copresence of audience and actors, dramaturgically constituted by the archetypes and codes of a stratified common language; it is also a relational resource, an act of commoning where value is created by the act of being together, and which enact a manifestation of the participants' public life.

These three resources (the relational, the spatial and the dramaturgic) are not equivalent, but rather stand in a precise relation to each other: the relational can be said to inscribe both the spatial and the dramaturgic, because theatre as a set of relations shapes the space in which theatre is performed, and its expressive features. Theatre is a set of relations: relations among the audience and between the audience and the stage determine the space outside of which it would be impossible to conceive the theatrical moment. While it is true that relations among people shape the theatrical space (as in the *halqa*), what is also true is that once this space is formed, it reflects social bounds, and determines behavioural rules that might include or exclude certain audiences. Relations shape the space, and the theatrical space shapes

relations and behaviours. The dramaturgic resource is inscribed in both these circles, reflecting both the influence of human relationships and the constraints (or liberties) provided by space. The figure below illustrates the characteristics of the theatrical commons as a complex set of resources, and the relationships between these types of resource.
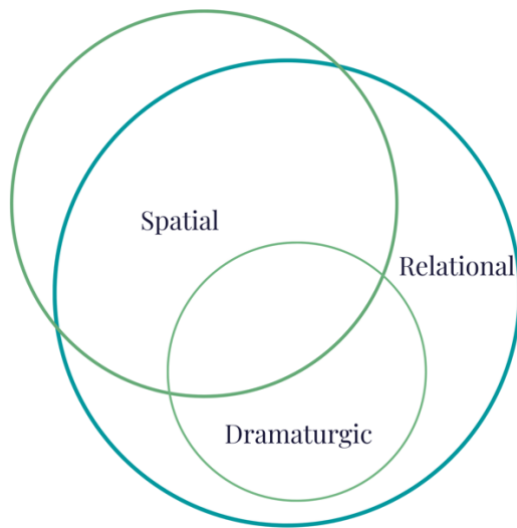


Figure 2. A representation of the relationship between the three resources that constitute the theatrical commons. Figure by the author.

This notion will be tested against the literature on the commons in the following section.

### Theatre in the commons framework

Theatre is not a natural resource, but a cultural one; as such, even though it is characterised by a spatial dimension, irreducible and pivotal, it does not share some attributes of natural, physical resources that are usually featured in a commons (such as depletability) Similarly, some of the institutional design principles pointed out by Ostrom cannot be applied to the case of theatres (for example, providing "accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution" – Ostrom 1990: 100). The emphasis placed by recent advancements in commons theory on relational resources and on systems and practices is more suitable to identify the features of a theatrical commons.

On the other hand, theatre cannot be reduced to a cultural resource tout court: in the case of cultural commons as identified by Bertacchini et al. (2012), cultural commons are characterised by space, culture and community. The spatial dimension of cultural commons, as it has been originally theorized, is used mostly to refer to the degrees of cohesion and spatial density of communities producing the cultural commons; in this respect, "space" can either refer to a physical dimension (a region in which a cultural good is produced with shared

techniques, and symbolic meanings are communally attributed to it) or to a virtual one (the Academic community is sparse throughout the globe and still shares bound rules and mutual recognition).

Quite the reverse, in the case of the theatrical commons, space accounts for the irreducible physical, social and political dimension of theatrical practices: they not only necessarily happen in a built environment, but they happen in space, and create a space, which is at a time relational and relative to the performance[8].

For what concerns the other dimension of the cultural commons, "community", another distinction must be made. In the cultural commons analytical framework drafted by Santagata, the community dimension identifies those that produce and benefit from the commons; outside of this category, the cultural commons framework makes a distinction between free riders (those who take advantage of the cultural resource without actively contributing to its maintenance and to the production of new knowledge) and users, who, without contributing directly to the resource, have access rights to it.

The relationship between the dramaturgic commons onstage and the audience is too complex to be comprised in this dichotomy, as the audience does not directly produce the performance (not always), but cannot be considered a user who merely benefits from the resource. The audience rather fits right in between the category of users and that of community, as the audience needs not to produce the resource through explicit participative modalities (as has been said, their co-presence is the necessary precondition for the production of the performance); moreover, the codification of the dramaturgic commons resource, with its tropes, its topic features and its recurring verbal and gestural language, is tacitly accepted and shared by the whole of the theatre community. It is therefore necessary to move across the multi-disciplinary analytical framework of the commons (the physical, the cultural and the urban) in order to comprise the nature of the theatre commons.

**Clearly defined boundaries.** The first institutional design principle identified by Ostrom in her analysis of common-pool resources is that of clearly defined boundaries, meaning the community that have access to the resource and maintains it. Historically, this has meant determining the exclusion or inclusion of certain social groups in the fruition of theatre; for

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[8] The virtual shift imposed by the pandemic has undoubtedly caused a rethinking of the value of space and co-presence of cultural experiences, all the more so with theatre. While the author believes the preëminence of the physical dimension can't be denied, new paradigms for the production and fruition of the performing arts are emerging which it will be useful to consider in a further stage of the research.

instance, metics were excluded from representations in Greece, while the belonging to specific social classes determined the inclusion in courtly theatrical practices throughout the XVII century (Craveri 2001).

In contemporary society, the way theatre is managed can hardly be said to have commons-like features, since the management of theatres and of theatrical practices is delegated to institutions, which regulate access with pricing and with more subtle relational and behavioural norms (an exhaustive account of which is provided by Sedgman, 2018). However, if we look not at theatrical institutions but at theatrical practices *per se*, that is at the simple act of performing and attending theatre, inclusion and exclusion can be said to depend on participation. Participation, in this context, is intended in a broad sense: the audience coproduces the performance by attending to it, sharing its dramaturgic code, complying with the performance space and participating emotionally.

**Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions.** This dimension is frequently missing from the contemporary picture, as has been seen especially in the contemporary culture-led experiments of urban regeneration involving theatre: yet the genius loci of theatrical practices, that is the adaptability with which spatial and semantic criteria of theatrical organisation adapts to different contexts (from the circular *halqa* to the flexible mobility of Shakespeare in the Park) has always been a constitutive element of the theatrical commons. In the case of theatrical practices, the common rules can also refer to the common semantics that underlie the different theatrical expressions, from linguistic conventions to shared codes. As McAuley (2012: 110), quoting Clifford Geertz, put it, 'What enables us to talk about them [different forms of artistic expression] usefully together is that they all inscribe a communal sensibility, present locally to locals a local turn of mind'.

**Collective choice arrangements.** The third institutional principle would imply that collective-choice arrangements contribute to modifying the rules in use of the theatrical commons. This, however, is today largely made impossible by the top-down management modalities of theatre: behavioural norms within the theatrical space have been somehow institutionalised and imposed (the theatre police in Vienna is but a punctual example of a long history of "behavioural enclosure"). Only more inclusive and participative theatrical practices allow for the flexible adaptation according to the actions of communities, but they remain isolated examples (be them performances which are enriched by the audience's unpredictable reactions or inclusive theatrical projects such as the Mahogany Opera Group's, which co-produces opera with and for students and amateurs in unexpected locations).

**Monitoring, sanctions and conflict resolution.** These principles refer to how to comply with free riding. The problem of free riding in theatre can be seen from a twofold perspective: the first is the strictly cultural dimension (the artistic production), the second is free riding associated with participation. The first dimension relates to the notion of free riding as it pertains to the cultural commons; in the theatrical case this coincides with the theatrical stock of dramaturgy, with plots, language, archetypes. Bertacchini et al. (2012: 8) make a distinction between "core" and "peripheral" communities in the commons, the former contributing to the increase of value of the collective good, the latter observing opportunistic behaviour and replicating, without increasing, the production of the resource - a theatrical example could be the performances of Vivaldi in Venice, of Verdi in Rome and of Mozart in Vienna by musical ensembles that specifically target tourists.

On the other hand, free riding with respect to the theatre commons can refer to participation on behalf of the audience; since the boundaries of the commons are defined by participation, it could be said that free riding is associated with a lack of audience involvement in the performance. Nevertheless, participation in the case of theatre can (and, perhaps, should) be intended in a broad sense, because otherwise simply attending the performance without directly contributing to what is happening onstage might be considered an act of free riding, thus giving pre-eminence to those theatrical forms that are oriented towards societal goals. Sedgman (2018: 14), following Frieze (2016), illustrates it clearly: "the discourse of participatory-means-active-means-good actually creates its own opposite: traditional-means-passive-means-bad. This position leaves no room for nuance". Participation to theatre should rather be intended as the act of "being an audience member" - which in the words of Sedgman (2018: 13), "does not always mean watching, listening, being quiet, sitting down. Attention is increasingly being paid to different kinds of spectatorship". One of these different kinds is what Walmsley calls the enactive *audiency* (Walmsley 2018a): the emotional or imaginative participation of the audience, by no means less relevant than acts of coproduction. In this respect Borchi (2018: 37), following Hughes (2017: 80) identifies the figure of the passionate amateur, 'who makes and attends theatre as an act of love', implicitly equating the labour of making and attending (and, thus, participating to) theatre in the commoning process. For this reason, keeping the notion of participation broad and identifying opportunistic behaviour on the sole production side seems to be an appropriate framework for inspecting participation and free riding in theatrical practices.

Investigating the notion of free riding and of participation in the previous section brings up the core characteristics of the theatre commons: that of being together, of "being in

common" – that is, of commoning. This has somehow been overshadowed in the past by the goods-based definition of the commons analysis. As seen in Chapter 2.2, new emphasis has been given to the social and relational aspects of the commons by Euler (2018: 12), for whom 'commons is the social form of (tangible and/or intangible) matter that is determined by commoning. Hence, a matter only becomes a commons if people predominantly relate to it by commoning and if, therewith, the social form is determined by these very practices'.

Theatrical practices present a strong relational component, and it seems to aptly relate to this definition: the audience-performance relation is a constitutive dimension of both the theatrical performance *per se* and the performance space. The fact that theatre cannot happen without a community attending it, and the fact that the community which attends the performance participates directly (though with different degrees of involvement) to the production and the increase of the theatrical resource, testify for the commons-like nature of theatrical practices, and for the relational nature of the theatrical commons.

Participation to the theatre commons recalls Mattei's view of the commons as a 'condition of being together, rather than having together' (Mattei 2012: 27). The fact that the theatrical commons consists of a system of relations rather than merely being a matter of resource ownership is aligned with Roggero's view, according to which it is necessary to 'relocate the question of the commons from one centred on property to one focused on relations of production' (Roggero, 2010: 6).

In addition to the dimension of togetherness that is subtended to the theatrical commons and its modes of production and fruition, Arendt has pointed out another crucial characteristic of the theatrical commons, that is its eminently public dimension. In her work "The Human Condition" (1958) she asserts that the public sphere is the condition 'where people are with others and neither for nor against them— that is, in sheer human togetherness' (Arendt, 1958: 180). What is more, she associates the condition of publicity to theatre, as she recalls the affinity between action (the aspect of human condition which articulates the public sphere) and theatre:

> theatre is the political art par excellence; only there is the political sphere of human life
> transposed into art. By the same token, it is the only art whose sole subject is man in
> his relationship to others. (Arendt 1998: 188).

Rather than merely being a taxonomical cavil, understanding the commons nature of theatre matters. It matters first because it helps understand how it generates value and how the

theatrical resource is sustained over time (i.e. through knowledge and through relations); second (and consequently) because understanding *who* shapes the resource and *what* the resource actually consists of contributes to crafting new policies and new actions for ensuring its accessibility and for enabling cultural democracy.

Understanding theatre as a commons resource where people co-produce relations and share a common language further advances theory on community theatre by deepening knowledge on the resource itself. Looking at theatre through the lens of the commons represents not only an advancement in the literature of community theatre, but also a conceptual shift: it de-romanticises the notion of community, and it demonstrates that even Huron's 'community of strangers' (2015) can become a community of theatrical commoners, by temporarily sharing and co-creating emotions, relations, and spaces around the act of the performance.

Understanding the relational value of theatre ultimately implies to rethink participation and accessibility, and to elaborate funding criteria that are more aligned with the value-generating potential of theatre, disentangle the relationship between theatrical space and theatrical architecture, and eventually rethink the modes of cultural fruition in the urban space.

| Urban commons (Helfrich, Haas 2009) | Cultural commons (Bertacchini et al. 2012) | Theatrical commons (Sabatini 2020) |
|---|---|---|
| "Things" | Culture | Dramaturgy |
| Community | Community | Relations |
| Systems and practices | Space | Space |

Figure 3. A table summarising the main definitions of commons stemming from recent elaborations, sided by the authors' own elaborations on the theatrical commons.

### 3.3 Choice of the case study
*Do we fight for the right to a night at the opera now? On the choice of an opera case*

'It is time for our souls to decide who we are/

do we fight for the right to a night at the opera now?

In Schönberg's and Boublil's musical adaptation of *Les Misérables*, the fierce Enjolras, head of the revolutionary group *Les amis de l'ABC*, harangues his comrade Marius with contemptuous tone by using the verses above. The scene is set in 1832, at the time of an anti-monarchic insurrection in Paris which, quite sadly though predictably, ended in blood. In modern terms, we would say that the young communard discards cultural accessibility to an elitist form of art, labelling it as futile and irrelevant if compared to the immense political *enjeu* of their struggle: the republican rule.

Similar considerations are still made today regarding opera: sustained almost solely by wealthy patrons and public funding, opera theatre appears as a resource-draining monster which fulfils the aesthetic pleasures of a well-off niche. Moreover, as has been seen in Chapter 2.1, a recent trend inversion in cultural democracy sees democracy in the cultural domain not much as a matter of 'delivering great art' (seen as a paternalistic and obsolete approach), but rather as an expansion of cultural canons to comprise new forms of expression in the pantheon of cultural legitimacy.

From the point of view of cultural policy, this approach to cultural democracy proves necessary in a contemporary urban scenario, characterised by the heterogeneity of cultural expressions and by the diversity of identities. Nonetheless, it would be reductionist to relegate opera to the corner of elitist niche entertainment only because it has been *enclosed* as such: as the historical account on theatre illustrates, the versatile and open nature of theatrical and operatic archetypes (as well as the section on theatre and the city in Chapter 1.4) have generated value in a stratified way and for a complex community, but has been forcefully and drastically reduced in time in a deliberate attempt to enclose it. Even more importantly, it would not just be reductionist to do so, but it will be crucial to prove that the opposite is true, and that under conditions of publicity and togetherness, and when the formats and spaces of such supposedly elitist entertainment are challenged, opera theatre is all but elitist.

From the point of view of urban governance and regeneration, the selected case study is but one paradigmatic example of a large array of operations which now involve opera in audience development and urban regeneration operations. What is more, as the present thesis aims at demonstrating, it represents a commons, co-created by the 'community of strangers' (Huron 2015) represented by the urban plurality, involved in an act of audiency and of co-creation of the theatrical space and the dramaturgic resource. This act of co-creation has the potential

to enhance social cohesion and to produce value for urban communities, thus combining participative governance and cultural democracy within the same collaborative ecosystem.

Therefore, in the realm of cultural democracy, both propositions should be welcomed, i.e. the possibility of including new forms of arts in the conventional taxonomy of public support and the need to preserve and, above all, to transmit heritage in a way which makes it accessible to a wide array of citizens. This latter elaboration reflects the view proposed by Su Braden on cultural democracy, for which 'It is far less challenging, but easier to place the search for "cultural democracy" firmly to one side of the main stream of "high culture"' (Braden 1978 in Gross and Wilson 2018: 7). Even more polemically, following Allan Bloom in Ventura, it could be said that the dystrophic inclusion of any form of cultural expression in the public realm to the expense of heritage forms is

> 'a form of indifference to truth and false: the collateral effect of the politics of recognition is the 'allotment' of cultural life […] a system which fails in its core mission: that of providing knowledge tools'.

> Ventura 2019: 269

Therefore, to Enjolras' provocative question, on whether we fight for the right to a night at the opera now, the answer this thesis spouses is: absolutely yes.

### *Motivations for the choice of OperaCamion as a case study*

The present work uses case study research for observing an operatic project developing in three cities. Case study research is concerned with studying the phenomenon in context, so that the findings generate insight into how the phenomenon occurs within a given situation (Farquhar 2012: 5). In this sense, it is not "a sample of one" (Farquhar 2012: 11), or of a few cases, but rather an in-depth exploration of situated phenomena, and they should be regarded as such, rather than as a diminished version of quantitative research: while generalizability is a matter of primary concern for producing impact research and expanding knowledge, Duff (2006: 70) suggests that qualitative research (and case studies within it) has "great potential for rich contextualization, accounting for complexity of social/linguistic phenomena" and for a "focus on multiple meanings and interpretations" among other benefits.

The case study selected to carry out the analysis is OperaCamion, a project originally developed by Opera di Roma and Teatro Massimo di Palermo, which has later toured different Italian regions and public squares; a significant declination of the project was performed in COVID times at the Teatri di Reggio Emilia. The analysis of the project will

inspect its potential to be understood as a peculiar type of urban commons with specific theatrical features, a collaborative ecosystem which allows for the temporary reactivation of urban voids through cultural democracy and, in the case of Danisinni, of urban regeneration through multi-scalar partnerships.

## 3.4 Methodology of analysis

Regarding the empirical methodology of analysis, a series of qualitative methods have been drawn from the field of ethnographic research. When providing a literature review on qualitative methodologies, Srivastava and Thomson (2009) have argued that ethnographic research, being grounded in the natural environment of the observed phenomena, answer more effectively to the question on why and how processes occur. Moreover, following Yin (2003), they have advocated the use of multi-methods and triangulation for observing complex phenomena as it "not only provides a more in-depth data set but also allows the researcher to validate findings and thus increase the reliability of the findings". A similar theoretical proposition, concerning the need to grasp complexity through a set of combined methodologies, has been advanced in Velikova, Boxenbaum, and Meyer's multi-modal research on public libraries (2021).

The set of methodologies adopted to investigate the cases were, therefore, the following.

### *Participant observation and deep hanging out*

Kawulich (2005), following DeWalt & DeWalt (2002), defines participant observation as "the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities".

In the summer of 2018, before starting my PhD programme, I was an intern at Opera di Roma – specifically, at the Young Artist Programme, whose members were casted as the main OperaCamion roles. I got to witness two OperaCamion performances in Rome, one in Laurentina, on June 26th, and the other in Làbaro, on July 9th, at the closing of the OperaCamion summer tour. At the time of my internship, a reduction of Verdi's *Rigoletto* was staged on the truck.

On both dates, I would be travelling from the theatre and back on a bus that was rented for the artists, I would go to the selected public square and witness the assembling of the theatrical space: from a bare van, the truck would turn into a carnivalesque, farcical stage, with inflatable crocodiles and colorful backdrops painted by Gianluigi Toccafondo – who,

besides being the scenographer of OperaCamion, is also the longstanding author of the visual brand of Opera di Roma.

In the meantime, under the sun drowning Roman suburbia, people would pass curiously by, lingering for a while on the unusual view of the parade which had just been set up on a stage in the middle of nowhere. Half perplexed and half fascinated, some would ask for information to me ore one of the other staff members about what was happening. Most of them would get back a few hours later, bringing their own seat, their children, some friends.

I would take care of the venue management and help the singers adjust themselves in the *impromptu* setting of their dressing rooms – in most cases, they would get changed and get their make up on in the empty halls of a public library. The head of production would take care of last-minute problems with cables and electricity, while the protagonists would light-heartedly joke about one's sumptuous wig and the other's piggy-like skin-tight suit – which, in the exaggerated dramaturgy of OperaCamion, was the allegory of the Duke of Mantua's exuberant sexuality.

Unlike most theatrical productions, Fabio Cherstich, the director, would supervise all the performances – indirectly stating a crucial dimension of OperaCamion: while it is true that every live performance is different from the other, a free performance on a public square is somehow more unpredictable and more unique than an average theatre staging.

Even though this participant observation was unsystematic, and cannot be elaborated in a theoretical construct after such a long time, it was authentic, and not yet biased by the expectations of research; it has allowed to collect first-hand perceptions, atmospheric colours, human dynamics. In this sense, being a participant was more than being present to the event and collecting people's perceptions: it meant actively partaking to the production, supervising it, finally seeing it onstage at the end of a month-long period of rehearsals.

The interviews, which on the contrary were conducted within an academic framework at the end of my second year, have allowed for a progressive distancing from this direct involvement, ensuring a more objective collection of data and their testing against the reference literature. Thanks to the longstanding mutual acquaintance, the subjects involved in the study felt at ease while being interviewed – Borchi (2017), following Viditch (1955), speaks in this respect of being accepted as a "benign presence".

From July 5th to July 15th, 2021, a phase of participant observation occurred, as I was able to spend a week in the Danisinni neighbourhood. By the time I travelled to Danisinni, I had become aware that the operatic performance was the tip of the iceberg of a much broader project, that Danisinni was an actual urban commons which fulfilled Ostrom's design principles of long enduring commons, and went perhaps beyond that.

Once there, I took part to the activities of the dwellers/commoners: I slept in the "Borgo Sociale", the structure they were about to inaugurate to welcome hosts, artists and destitute families; I spent time and had long conversations with the volunteers of the community service, the friars, a group of mediators only consisting of women, the children, the single mothers, the amateur actors that were rehearsing in the circus tent near the Farm, the members of the associations which orbit around the Danisinni commons; I had dinner with a confraternity, pushed kids on the swings, attended a football match broadcasted with a projector on the same square where I would take dance classes with teenagers in the afternoon, and where worshippers attended the Mass at 6pm (a fitting example of architects' beloved *mixité* of uses and functions for a square).

The week-long period of stay, spent with the community, allowed for using ethnographic approaches while investigating the Danisinni commons: in particular, interviews were substituted here by deep hanging out, a methodology which Walsmley (2018b: 276), following Ingold (2007) and Geertz (1998), defined "a practice of observation grounded in participatory dialogue". Deep hanging out is not simply an in-depth investigation: it is an operation of co-research, a "fieldwork method of immersing oneself in a cultural, group or social experience on an informal level" (Walmsley 2018b: 277). The week in Danisinni allowed to develop the research within such methodological framework, spending time with the Danisinni people, attending their meetings, having one-to-one conversations with the dwellers and contributing to their activities.

The participant observation of those days helped unravel the collaborative dynamics of the neigbourhood, understand the array of actors contributing to the Danisinni commons (dwellers, artists, friars, volunteers), to understand their motivations, their vision and their goals, to observe the actions that have been put in place, the uses people make of the spaces that have been created, and to eventually study Danisinni within the commons framework from a privileged viewpoint.

In order to validate the participant observation I had accumulated prior to research, a period of onsite observation was forecasted also in the public squares touched by OperaCamion. This period had the aim of analysing the dynamics that occurred before and during the performance, the articulation of the theatrical/relational space, people's use of the public space and their ways of appropriating and contributing to the theatrical resource.

This observation phase, which was supposed to occur in the summer of 2020, was prevented by the outburst of the COVID crisis in March 2020, which halted most human activities in which people gather together – including, of course, theatrical performances. OperaCamion did not take place, and this phase of observation might constitute a next step of the thesis.

*Collection of primary and secondary data*
A series of semi-structured interviews has been conducted with many of the agents who took part to the Project from 2016 to 2019 in three different local manifestations: Palermo, Rome and Reggio Emilia. The interviewees ranged from the institutional representatives of the Theatres, who enabled the production of OperaCamion by providing resources and their infrastructure, to the direct producers of the project, in charge for coordination and monitoring, to the performers themselves, which enacted OperaCamion onstage.

All interviews were conducted with single interviewees, except for a group interview conducted with four singers from the OperaCamion production, who took part to different performances. The selection of the interviewees drew from the methodology of snowball sampling (Goodman 1961), which was, however, adapted to the necessities of the research: whereas in snowball sampling the sample is finite yet random with respect to the overall population, the sample created for selecting interviewees consisted of the people involved in the OperaCamion production that were known from prior experience. The Administrative director of Opera di Roma was the first to be contacted, followed by the Superintendent of Teatro Massimo di Palermo and a singer. These three initial contacts later provided several suggestions of other stakeholders to contact. While most of the respondents proved available for the interviews, four of the eight singers contacted did not respond or eventually did not show up for the interview.

In addition, the Press offices of the two theatres provided a conspicuous amount of secondary data, namely photos and videos, which partly compensated for the absence of onsite observation due to the COVID crisis, and the press release concerning OperaCamion (this was the case with Opera di Roma). Teatro Massimo di Palermo sent 342 photos and 4 videos from both rehearsals and live performances, both pertaining to the OperaCamion

Tour and the Danisinni Experience. The singers also sent their own photographic material, while the scenographer Gianluigi Toccafondo sent 215 photos from the Roman rehearsals in the Quarticciolo neighbourhood, where the project was initially bed-tested and developed.

The interviews have been conducted from December 2020 to February 2021; 13 interviewees were contacted throughout 10 interviews, for a total amount of 7 hours. The transcript of the interviews can be found in the appendix of the present research, where they have been classified according to the institution the stakeholders belong to, or have interacted with, except for the creative team and the artists who have equally participated to the three manifestations of OperaCamion.

### *Elaboration of primary data*

Once all the interviews have been collected, they have been analysed in order to elaborate a qualitative dataset. For what concerns the methodology of analysis, the research follows the one adopted by Christiane Schmidt (2004), who has indicated a sequence of steps to be followed:

> first – in response to the material – categories for the analysis are set up. As a second stage, these are brought together in an analytical guide, tested and revised. Thirdly, using this analytical and coding guide, all the interviews are coded according to the analytical categories. Fourthly, on the basis of this coding, case overviews can be produced. (Schmidt 2004: 253)

As said by Schmidt herself, at the core of this method is the interplay between prior theoretical knowledge and the primary data collected, which are tested against one another.

The tool through which this methodology has been applied is Atlas.ti, a software for qualitative data analysis, which allows for the creation of codes and code groups. Once the transcript of the interviews was uploaded on the software, codes have been created that emerged from the text, and various strings of text referring to those codes have been grouped under the codes themselves: 44 codes were identified and applied to 504 text strings that constituted the themes around which the interviews orbited.

Codes have then, in turn, been grouped in 6 code groups, representing broader themes. As indicated in Schmidt's analysis, the codes were then used to reorganize and reassess the material in the light of this classification.

Once all the information from the transcript was classified and all the codes and group codes had been systematized, they were tested against the literature of the selected theoretical framework, finding connections between cultural democracy, urban commons and urban governance in regeneration with the themes that had emerged.

What follows is an analysis of the emerged themes, and their correlation with the chapters of the thesis:

1. **OperaCamion as a urban commons**: this group gets into detail about OperaCamion and the urban dimension, and in particular it collects all the codes, extracted from the interviews, bearing reference to possible commons-like characteristics of OperaCamion – as both a urban commons and a theatrical one. As figure 4.1 shows, the relational dimension of the commons is particularly present in the interviews, followed by socialization practices which can be regarded as 'commoning'. A different code in the group has been attributed to the Danisinni commons, as it manifested the features of a proper commons, rather than simply representing an act of commoning. The code dedicated to the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion illustrated the altered behavioural codes of OperaCamion, as did the codes of participation and the involvement of children. Other elements of commons theory emerged in the codes, such as the interplay between external authority and the commoners ('interinstitutional cooperation'), the dimension of learning and of trial-and-error (an expression Ostrom used to identify the necessary adjustments in commons governance – Ostrom 1990: 115). The 'general features and format' of OperaCamion, illustrated in section 4.3, were elaborated from this code group.

2. **The equilibrium between artistic and societal goals:** whether the interviewees perceived them as polarized or convergent, the topics of societal objectives and artistic quality occurred intensely in the interviews. Some interviewees perceived artistic quality as a dominant dimension, explaining that social innovation comes as a consequence of a reflection on artistic canons; for others, this innovation could only come as the result of a *renversement* of the social and spatial conditions in which opera was performed. In the literature on culture-led urban regeneration this aspect is crucial, and it appeared relevant to all the participants to OperaCamion. This code group is fully elaborated in section 4.4, 'Accessibility and artistic innovation'.

3. **Willingness to contribute:** this group addresses the visions and motivations subtended to OperaCamion. Understanding motivations and visions is crucial when analysing the commons because it helps understand the characteristics of the community, its

boundaries, its inclusion/exclusion dynamics and the necessities subtended to the process of commoning. The motivations, in most cases, were twofold, and pertained to both socially oriented goals and artistic needs. Whatever the nature of these motivations, they were presented by all the interviewees as a strong driver for their involvement: this led to a greater willingness to contribute to the project. The vision was uniform and coherent across the different levels (from the Superintendency to the actors): all perceived the need to connect opera theatre to a broader audience, to challenge the spaces and formats of theatre, and to establish a new relationship between theatre and the urban fabric. This implied that those who did not share the vision, but were somehow involved in the project (such as orchestra musicians) fell out of the 'core' community of OperaCamion, thus generating conflict. Together with the following, this group built the elaborations in section 4.5, 'Visions and motivations'.

4. **The emotional dimension of the project:** during the interviews, it was impossible not to acknowledge that there was a strong emotional component for the participants, related both to the relational and social component of the project and to the perceived artistic freedom the singers had in performing in the open air for an unconventional audience. The terms used by the interviewees were grouped into codes which account for this emotional component.

5. **OperaCamion as a project able to reactivate the relationship between theatre and cities**: this group collects the codes concerning the urban dimension of OperaCamion. During the interviews, the perception was shared among the participants that the project addressed directly urban issues of social inequality and of disadvantaged peripheries – by displacing theatre out of theatrical spaces and out of the city centre, it generated a renewed relationship between the urban infrastructure, the people who inhabit it, and theatre. The perceived impacts of the project in terms of urban regeneration were also collected in this group, and are explained in section 4.7, dedicated to 'Participation and impacts', while part of this code groups further contributes to section 4.4, dedicated to the general features.

6. **Resistance of the institution / ecological problems:** the OperaCamion process was not always smooth. The orchestra musicians in Palermo went on strike, the Danisinni commoners had to struggle for years against the Municipality's enclosures, and theatres had to wage the costs of production all by themselves, since public funding does not account for similar projects in the urban space. These and other conflicts emerged during the interviews, which have been collected in this group. The session 4.6, 'Systemic issues and conflict', elaborates on this code group.
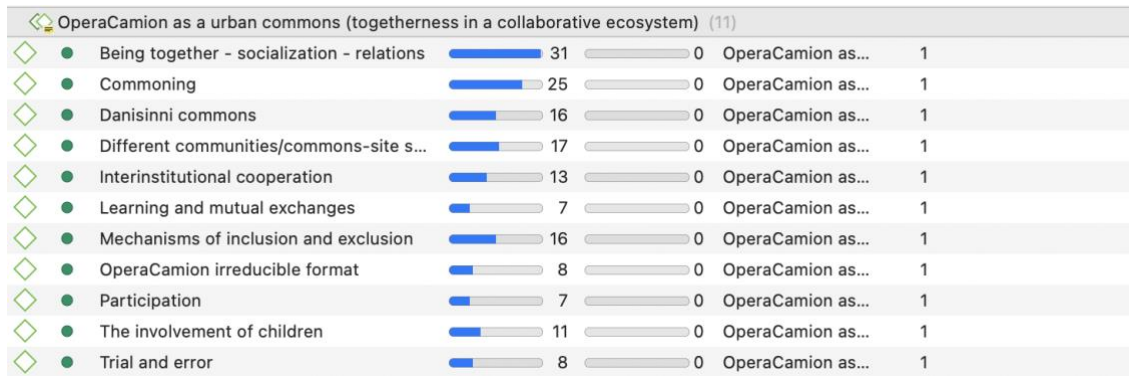
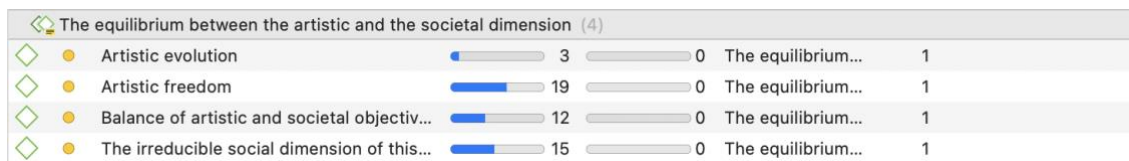| | | OperaCamion as a urban commons (togetherness in a collaborative ecosystem) (11) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ◇ | ● | Being together - socialization - relations | ▬▬ 31 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Commoning | ▬▬ 25 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Danisinni commons | ▬ 16 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Different communities/commons-site s... | ▬ 17 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Interinstitutional cooperation | ▬ 13 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Learning and mutual exchanges | ▬ 7 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion | ▬ 16 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | OperaCamion irreducible format | ▬ 8 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Participation | ▬ 7 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | The involvement of children | ▬ 11 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Trial and error | ▬ 8 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |

Figure 4.1. Group code "OperaCamion as a urban commons"

| | | The equilibrium between the artistic and the societal dimension (4) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ◇ | ● | Artistic evolution | ▬ 3 | ▭ 0 | The equilibrium... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Artistic freedom | ▬ 19 | ▭ 0 | The equilibrium... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Balance of artistic and societal objectiv... | ▬ 12 | ▭ 0 | The equilibrium... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | The irreducible social dimension of this... | ▬ 15 | ▭ 0 | The equilibrium... | 1 |

Figure 4.2. Group code about the artistic and societal dimensions

| | | Willingness to contribute (6) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ◇ | ● | Belief in OperaCamion beyond remuner... | ▬ 14 | ▭ 0 | Willingness to c... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | passionate amateur | ▬ 2 | ▭ 0 | Willingness to c... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | The project was necessary, it addresse... | ▬ 6 | ▭ 0 | Willingness to c... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Vision: a theatre able to penetrate the... | ▬▬ 32 | ▭ 0 | Willingness to c... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Willingness to contribute | ▬ 15 | ▭ 0 | Willingness to c... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Working with "the right people" | ▬ 20 | ▭ 0 | Willingness to c... | 1 |
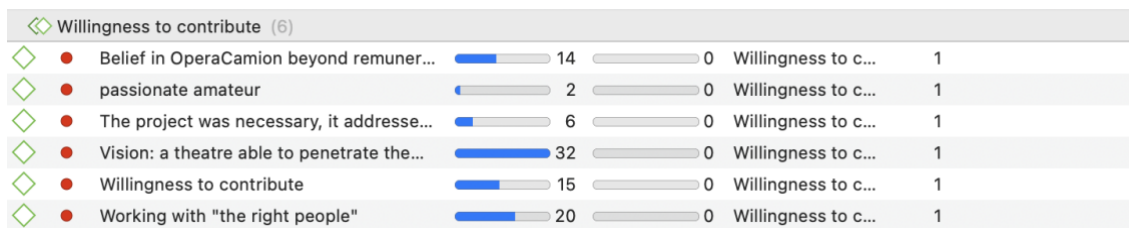
Figure 4.3. Group code "Willingness to contribute"

| | | The emotional dimension of the project (7) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ◇ | ● | Beauty | ▬ 4 | ▭ 0 | The emotional d... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Care | ▬ 3 | ▭ 0 | The emotional d... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Faith and trust | ▬ 2 | ▭ 0 | The emotional d... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Gipsy atmosphere | ▬ 8 | ▭ 0 | The emotional d... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Happiness, wonder, fun | ▬ 12 | ▭ 0 | The emotional d... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Simplicity, spontaneity | ▬ 10 | ▭ 0 | The emotional d... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Welcoming and being welcome | ▬ 10 | ▭ 0 | The emotional d... | 1 |
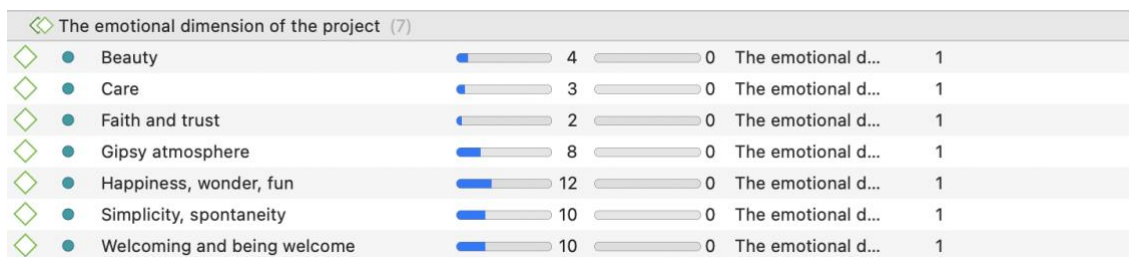
Figure 4.4. Group code about the emotional dimension

| | | OperaCamion as a project able to reactivate the relationship between theatre and cities (8) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ◇ | ● | Addressing peripheries | ▬ 10 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Beyond architecture: theatre as a relati... | ▬ 16 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Bonding, safety, regenerating: the tang... | ▬▬ 22 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Opening theatre, accessibility | ▬ 16 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Perceiving oneself as a resource - givin... | ▬ 8 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Relationship between theatre and city | ▬ 11 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Theatre-made vs site-specific | ▬ 7 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |
| ◇ | ● | Urban reactivation - impacts | ▬ 14 | ▭ 0 | OperaCamion as... | 1 |

Figure 4.5. Group code about the relationship between theatre and cities

| Resistance of the institution / ecological problems (7) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Challenge | 6 | 0 | Resistance of th... | 1 |
| Conflict | 21 | 0 | Resistance of th... | 1 |
| Conflicting interests: OC is not a comm... | 2 | 0 | Resistance of th... | 1 |
| Ecological / institutional problems | 20 | 0 | Resistance of th... | 1 |
| Funding | 11 | 0 | Resistance of th... | 1 |
| Musical education - Opera as heritage | 10 | 0 | Resistance of th... | 1 |
| Need for regularity | 6 | 0 | Resistance of th... | 1 |

Figure 4.6. Group code about resistance and conflictt

## 3.5 Originality

The research aspires at making a series of original contributions to the research domains it touches upon. Primarily, it contributes to commons theory in a twofold manner: first, by identifying the characteristics of a theatrical commons, which meet at the convergence of the cultural and the urban commons, because they share the necessary symbolic and spatial dimensions that are subtended to these categories. This advancement is rooted in the recent literature on the commons, which shifts the attention from commons as goods to commoning as a social practice, but at the same time it reasserts the meaningfulness of the spatial and physical dimension in shaping commoning practices. What is more, by looking at theatrical practices as practices of commoning, it overcomes the instrumental view of community arts in revitalizing communities, and recognizes the importance of "audiency" (Walmsley 2018a) as an act of commoning and as a vital determinant of the theatrical performance.

Second, it contributes to the debate on urban commons and urban governance: drawing from Iaione's conception of collaborative ecosystems, it identifies with the cases a set of potential multi-scalar collaborations which involve various degrees of commoning. It therefore overcomes the traditional isolation of commons governance in the urban domain to observe the possibility of commoning in cross sectoral contexts of collaboration, where municipal institutions, artistic organisations and commoners cooperate to enact cultural and urban democracy, and to produce urban regeneration.

What is more, the research identifies a research gap in commons literature which it aims at filling: while most literature has focused extensively on the role of commons in shaping policies indirectly, somehow an externality of the commons, the inspected research body did not show any example of the active and successful involvement of urban commons systems in multi-scalar collaborations: this was, instead, the Danisinni case, which did not inspire policy, but cooperated with artistic institutions and the municipality in creating a collaborative ecosystem.

Danisinni is a powerful and paradigmatic stance of commoning and a best practice for urban governance which provides a precious contribution to the framework of the commons, urban governance and regeneration: after having claimed their territory for themselves, the Danisinni commoners progressively opened up to the city and to cultural institutions; the choice, dictated by the need to get new resource inputs that they, alone, could not produce, allowed them to 'outsource' these services and create a collaborative ecosystem while monitoring the other actors, and providing them with the necessary rules of access to their resource (i.e., the Danisinni commons itself).

The research additionally contributes to the debate on cultural democracy: the discourse has been polarised between "providing high arts for everyone" and broadening the notion of culture itself to include everyday creativity into the debate. The choice of an operatic case and its success in involving "uncultivated audiences" in the actual co-production testifies for the need to go beyond conventional dichotomies, and to understand the categories of highbrow and lowbrows as social constructs, that are related to formats and infrastructures, rather than to content. A greater integration of the two approaches of cultural democracy, therefore, is needed to design new cultural policies.

Finally, from the viewpoint of methodology, a unique research design has been used for the empirical analysis: it adopts multi-modality as a method for observing the commons and the urban interactions which produce them, using ethnographic methods that were unprecedented in commons research, such as deep hanging out, and combining it with participant observation, interviews and indirect sources and materials (videos, press releases, photos). The research makes the case for an intensified use of ethnographic and grounded methodologies in commons analysis, which are necessary to grasp the complexity of social phenomena.

## 3.6 Ethics

The fieldwork observations that occurred in the Danisinni context call for some ethical considerations that are related to social embeddedness (as both a human and a researcher) while conducting the research, and to the biases that derive from both the researcher's background and knowledge of the people involved in the research.

The first ethical concern is that of the researcher's background, and the subsequent potential biases I have developed; the second, somehow a corollary of the first, concerns my position

within the research context; the third concerns informed consent of the interviewed subjects and the people involved in my participant observation.

**Personal background.** In a foundational text of 1987, LeCompte established an unprecedented solid framework for identifying biases in ethnographic research. Among the biases she identified were the researcher's biography, the personalities surrounding her (ranging from mentors to friends and colleagues), her geographic and social environment. Most research (and not only ethnographic research) can be said to be affected by these factors: one's path towards the chosen discipline, and *a fortiori* towards a preferred topic of study, is constellated by individual choices affected, in turn, by context and environment. In the specific case of my research, two biases emerge as the ones which have affected the research: the first is my participation to OperaCamion in 2018, which has inferred on the choice of this project as a case study and has impacted my overall judgment upon it. My involvement has also influenced the interview process: on the one hand, it made it easier for me to reach the creative team and the singers, while on the other it implied that my relationship with the interviewees was not only professional, but also personal – thus contributing not only to causing a bias in my approach, but also potential biases in the participants' answers. The second comes from my personal background, and particularly from my fondness for opera as an expressive medium, which I have developed during my university years in Bologna: I am not only an opera goer, but I have worked in an opera theatre and have written my master's thesis on Italian Lyric-Symphonic Foundations. Therefore, I am not only predisposed to appreciate opera as a form of art, but also prone to investigate all those innovations which make it more accessible towards new audiences and less bound to strict social norms. This made me look at OperaCamion in an anticipatedly positive (and thus biased) way.

**Positionality.** I had known Fra' Mauro, the Franciscan friar of Danisinni, for quite a few months before I was able to eventually go to Danisinni. I came there not only as a researcher, but also a volunteer, asking to be involved in the daily activities that were organised by local volunteers for children: painting and fashion labs, dancing classes, and board games competitions. While the people in Danisinni were well aware of my role as a researcher, it was impossible (and, to be fair, undesirable) to prevent the "dual role" naturally involved in ethnographic research from manifesting itself – what Bell (2019: 13) following Good (1994) has defined "the duality of the anthropologist's role as critic and participant". During that time, in facts, not only was dialogue activated and participant observation developed: relations were formed, and time was spent with the inhabitants which did not just pertain to

the research work, but to a broader sphere of sociability and human bounds, which have indeed affected the way questions were posited, answers elaborated, and conclusions drawn.

**Informed consent.** The risk, when dealing with this dual role, is always that of instrumentalising relationships to the purposes of obtaining dependable data. While it is true that to the purposes of researching the ultimate scope was that of data collection, it is also true that "in this approach [ethnography], there is a profound acknowledgement of the relationality of the human subject. Furthermore, to talk of the "field" is to talk of an entity which is itself relational and not merely spatial"' (Bell 2019: 9), and that a dimension of trust, curiosity and reciprocity were involved in the fieldwork that go beyond the mere quest for data. Therefore, having recognised the "relational nature of knowledge", as Bell (2019: 13) suggests, the ethical conundrum could be at least partially overcome by welcoming reciprocity and, as O' Connell Davidson (2008 in Bell 2019: 20) posits, by "the possibility of informed consent" and by discussing with the interlocutors of the research over "consent to their own objectification and appropriation". This ethical issue was addressed by making the interviewees and the people in Danisinni fully aware of my position as a researcher. The context in which I operated made it difficult to collect signed forms regarding privacy, consent, and authorization, but consent was obtained verbally during both onsite 'deep hanging out' and the interviews.

## 3.7 Limits and next steps

The primary limitation of the study concerns the limited number of inspected cases. While they represent a diverse array of actions in very different contexts, the research only explores three cities, having experimented different versions of the same project, and this raises problems over the generalizability of the cases themselves, and of the research. Future steps of the research might include an expansion of the cases, to be analysed with the same matrix created for the present three cases (see section 4.2), and might expand to other types of actions in public spaces which involve both architectural interventions and cultural practices co-produced in space. Another limit was posited by data collection, made through ethnographic methodologies: these limits can be considered intrinsic to ethnography: in recent anthropological research, awareness has risen about the fact that "fieldwork is not simply about collecting information", and that data is "*made* more than found" (Bell 2019: 15): the previous knowledge of the literature, as well as the framework in which both the research and the researcher are embedded, make it impossible to separate qualitative data from the intersubjective context in which they were collected. In time, "concern with

interpretation and hermeneutics made us [ethnographers and anthropologists] aware of positive naiveté regarding the relations between research and writing in the production of ethnographic knowledge" (Fabian 2007: 13). The limit was partly overcome with the triangulation of data, which was gathered through multimodal analysis of primary (interviews, fieldwork) and secondary (photos, videos) material. Interviews to a wide array of stakeholders (creatives, commoners, institutions) has provided a complex picture which accounts for a multi-faceted reality, and has avoided the narrowness (and biases) of a single viewpoint. Yet, the biases coming from the researchers' personal background, ascribing to education, geography, and the context of one's livelihood (Lecompte 1987), cannot be removed, and are inevitably reflected in the data.

# Chapter four: OperaCamion and the reactivation of urban voids

## 4.1 Timeline and geography of the OperaCamion project



Figure 5. C'è una foto in cui ci siamo io e Fabio, di spalle, e c'era un camion parcheggiato al Quarticciolo col montacarichi, che guardavamo, e non c'era niente. C'era anche una sorta di… era qualcosa di metafisico, "e ora che cosa facciamo?" [9] (Gianluigi Toccafondo, scenographer, interviewed by the author). © Gianluigi Toccafondo

The name OperaCamion means "Opera truck", and is a project first staged in the summer 2016 as a co-production of Teatro dell'Opera di Roma (TOR) and Teatro Massimo in Palermo. The format is simple: a well-known work from the operatic repertoire is adapted – that is, shortened and simplified; this new version of the performance is rehearsed; a truck tours urban peripheries during the summer, stops in public squares where it is transformed into a stage in the afternoon; in the meantime, people bring their own seat from home, and form the parterre; in the evening, the opera is performed for free.

In Rome, the theatre gave the creative teams and the performers the possibility to freely use the Quarticciolo – which, technically, is the name of a Roman neighbourhood within the fifth *Municipio* (borough) in Rome, but in the words of the interviewees, the name stands

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[9] There's a photo in which there's Fabio and me, pictured from the back, and there was a truck parked in Quarticciolo [the open space provided by the theatre for the rehearsals in Rome], which we looked at, and there was nothing. It was also a sort of… it was somehow metaphysical, "what do we do now?".

metonymically for an area populated by semi-abandoned warehouses, formerly owned by the Municipality, then given to the theatre for rehearsals and for the stockage of materials.

The first OperaCamion performance occurred in Rome in July 2016; it began touring in the Lazio Region already in that summer and was followed by performances in Palermo in September of the same year.

Ever since the first performance, OperaCamion has been brought onstage 40 times. Since its genesis, there have been five OperaCamion productions, three of which have sticked to the original 2016 format while touring within in Rome and to other cities: *Figaro! OperaCamion* (2016)*, Don Giovanni OperaCamion* (2017)*, Rigoletto OperaCamion* (2018). A reduction of Tosca was supposed to be staged in 2020, the opera was being adapted in 2019, but the COVID crisis prevented the 2020 OperaCamion tour to happen; the sole exception was *Figaro! OperaCamion* performed in September 2020 in Reggio Emilia. The event was somewhat exceptional, as it was one of the few theatrical happenings of the year, occurring in accordance with COVID safety measures. Two others, which will be dealt with later, pertain to the "Danisinni model", and present a high level of site-specificity which made it structurally impossible (and undesirable) to bring the production elsewhere. These performances were *Elisir di Danisinni* (2018) and *La Cenerentola di Danisinni* (2019).

The project, then, is unitary from an artistic point of view, because in all its manifestations it has been staged by the artistic duo Fabio Cherstich and Gianluigi Toccafondo. And yet it has evolved into three independent modalities as early as in 2017, which were autonomously produced by three different theatres – Rome, Palermo and Reggio Emilia, which can be considered as three separate cases.

*Urban geography*
From its early development onward, the project was conceived as an inextricable mixture of artistic and societal vocation. OperaCamion was, therefore, performed in and for peripheries; more specifically, it was performed in neglected public squares in these peripheries – in other words, in urban voids, spaces of the city

> that remain empty of function and of meaning, but that if properly outfitted by identity and functional traits can return fully to be considered spaces that are inside, belonging to, and useful for the city. (Punziano, Terracciano 2017)

During the four years of its existence, OperaCamion was able to touch many public squares at the outskirts of the urban perimeters all around Italy. It eventually reached the 15 *Municipi* of Rome, and three of the most critical suburbia in Palermo – Danisinni, Albergheria and Zen. The Danisinni case is, on the contrary, a peculiar case in which the peripheral dimension is not given by its distance from the city centre, but rather from its being what the interviewed Palermitans called a "urban depression" – a geographical pit which, despite its proximity to the Theatre itself, is cut off from traffic and from the economic, social and cultural life of the city.

Even when OperaCamion was rented by other municipalities and began touring in other cities, from Bologna to Milan, it was performed out of the historical centre, with the specific aim of reaching a different audience – which Fabio Cherstich, the director, defines a non-elite audience, in direct contrast with the usual operatic audience. In 2018, the Roman staging of *Rigoletto OperaCamion* additionally toured the towns which had been struck by the earthquake (2016-2017) in the Lazio region.

The following figures provide a mapping of the geographical diffusion of the OperaCamion project from 2016 to 2019, with a focus on the two specific case studies of Rome and Palermo: the position of the selected public squares, with respect to the historical city centre, can be seen from the maps.
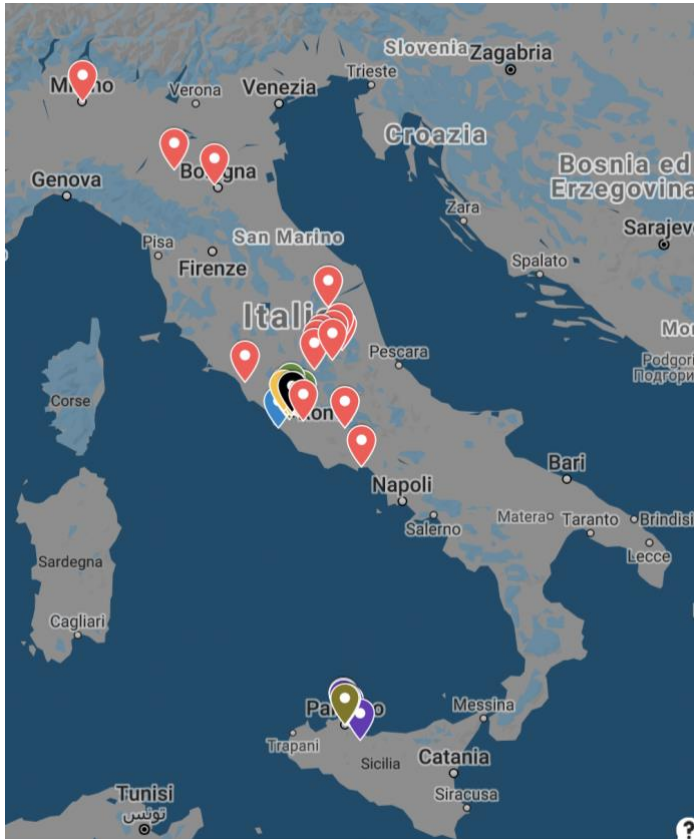
Figure 6.1. OperaCamion performances in Italy. The tour in central Italy has reached the towns struck by the earthquake 2016: Borbona, Poggio Bustone, Accumoli, Amatrice, Cittareale.
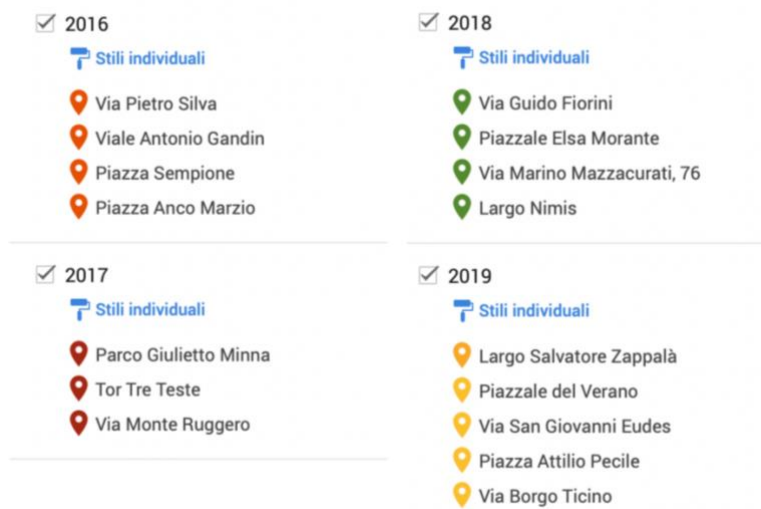


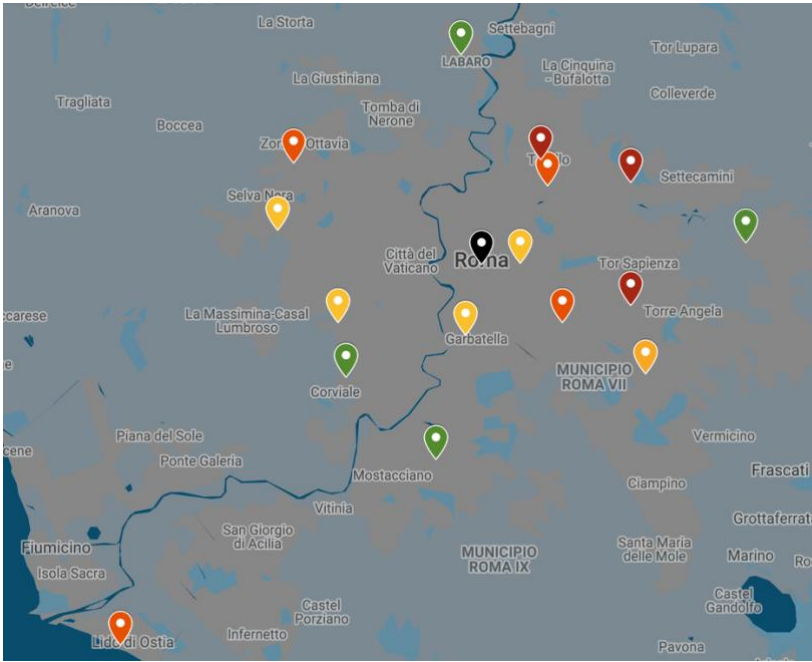Figure 6.2. The name of the squares where OperaCamion was performed in Rome, broken down by year.

Figure 6.3. The map of the squares enumerated in Figure 6.2. The Opera Theatre is marked in black.



Figure 6.4. Square names of OperaCamion in Palermo. The map only shows the tour of 2016 and 2017 because already in 2017 the parallel project in Danisinni was being developed, which culminated in the collaborative operas of 2018 and 2019. Both the Cathedral and the Theatre are marked in the map to illustrate the substantial centrality of Danisinni, which contrasts with its decay.

Figure 6.5. The map of the squares enumerated in Figure 6.4. Acqua dei Corsari is located South with respect of the rest of the city and has been added to the map.

*Human geography*

The main actors of the project, whose interactions will be disentangled in the following paragraphs, can be clustered in five broad categories:

1. Institutional actors: the representatives of the theatres which placed human, financial and tangible resources at the service of the project; they oversaw the decision making and the material organisation of the project. Among the interviewed institutional actors were Massimo Giambrone, Superintendent of Teatro Massimo di Palermo; Alessandro Ricci, the Administrative Director of Teatro dell'Opera di Roma; Paolo Cantù, the Artistic Director of Teatri di Reggio Emilia, and Oscar Pizzo, the former Artistic Director of Teatro Massimo di Palermo.

2. Creative team: it conceived the project in its artistic dimension, and ideated the dramaturgic adaptation, the musical cuts, costumes and scenography. The project was born from an input of the stage director: it responded to an artistic and societal need rather than a purely strategic one from the part of the involved theatres. The creative team is, in facts, a creative duo, consisting of Fabio Cherstich, director, and Gianluigi Toccafondo, painter (the distinctive brand of Opera di Roma has carried for years now his quite unmistakable artistic mark).

3. Cast: in the case of Opera di Roma, most of the casted singers belonged to the theatre's Young Artist Program (YAP hereon), a two-year course aimed at facilitating the entrance of emerging artists in the professional world of opera. Besides singers, the YAP's aspiring directors, scenographers, costume designers and light designers were involved in the realisation of the project. Some of the YAP's singers were casted also for other performances of OperaCamion at the time of the coproduction between TOR and Teatro Massimo di Palermo, for tournées, and for the staging in Reggio Emilia. Among the interviewed singers, three out of four had partaken to different and geographically displaced OperaCamion production: Reut Ventorero and Sara Rocchi, mezzo-sopranos, Abraham Garcia, baritone, and Rafaela Albuquerque Faria, soprano. Valeria Almerighi, actress, took part to all the productions in the three cities.

4. External agents and mediators: be them brokers between the municipality and the theatre, or the protagonists of local processes of reactivation, these personalities did not pertain to the conventional theatrical professional profiles, but acted as coordinators and mediators between the local level and the institutional one. Among the interviewees one of them, Anna Cremonini, was the production manager in Rome, in charge of organising the production in its operational details and in supervising its development in the chosen public squares; the other, Fra' Mauro, is a Franciscan friar based in Danisinni; he is the pivot of the process of human reactivation in the neighbourhood. During the period of fieldwork research, other agents were met, especially from the NPO "Insieme per Danisinni" (Together for Danisinni) who were interlocutors of the theatre during the project.

5. Audience: as it was specified in the Methodology section, it was not possible to meet – and, consequently, gather information from – the audience which took part to the different OperaCamion productions, because no performance was staged during the time of this research due to COVID. Yet, audiences can be fully acknowledged as active participants to the OperaCamion project, which refer to their co-presence in the theatrical space and in their participation to the performance, either direct or indirect.

6. Commoners: as will be seen, the Danisinni case can be considered a commons, in which the community has taken active part in the regeneration of their neighbourhood, in the maintenance and upkeep of the structures they have created and in the development of participative activities, including the theatrical performances that occurred in 2018 and 2019.

*OperaCamion models: the three cities*

Ever since the first Roman performance, there three distinct OperaCamion models have developed. According to its creators and to the institutions which supported it, all three models underlie a same vision of theatre and of city (see section 4.5); however, the three models have been produced in different modalities and have distinct ways of interacting with both the audience and public space. These modalities developed almost spontaneously from the context in which they were being produced, so that a mix of artistic inputs from the creative team and local specificities and needs generated different modes of bringing OperaCamion onstage in public spaces.

The combination of these two factors, i.e. of a strong core idea of theatre-making and of flexible degrees of adaptation to the local context, might be indicative of the potential scalability of the OperaCamion project, and its paradigmatic nature in inspiring both urban governance and cultural policy. Below are the features of each model, summarised:

1. OperaCamion/Rome: OperaCamion is produced mostly with internal resources from the theatre, featuring the Youth Orchestra of Opera di Roma, singers from the theatre's YAP and the theatre's technicians. The truck stops in peripheries, the theatre does not bring seats to the square: people themselves bring their own from home, or just sit on the ground (as most children do during the performance); people display their seats as they will and therefore build the theatrical space;

2. OperaCamion/Reggio Emilia: the Teatri di Reggio Emilia "rented" the OperaCamion production, hiring the creative team and casting singers as in regular productions. While this is not uncommon for many other theatres which have equally rented the production, the specificity of Reggio Emilia was that it staged OperaCamion in September 2020, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus shifting dramatically from the other productions: access was still free, but seats were provided by the theatre and made accessible via online reservation, the audience would be far-distant from the stage and the staging was adapted so that the performers would not be able to make physical contact with each other;

3. OperaCamion/Danisinni: Danisinni is a neighbourhood in Palermo; although it cannot be considered a periphery from a geographical perspective, the interviewees unanimously defined it a "urban depression" (*depressione urbana*), a periphery "of the soul", in the evocative words of the Superintendent. Characterised by a high centrality and a high isolation with respect to the rest of the urban fabric, it hosted two OperaCamion productions, one in 2018 and the other in 2019. The two productions were co-produced with the people of Danisinni,

who set up an amateur choir with the help of the theatre and rehearsed in the neighbourhood for the six months preceding the performance.

## 4.2 Degrees of commoning in the OperaCamion project

The present section will analyse in detail the three models of OperaCamion (Rome, Reggio Emilia, Danisinni) to observe how different urban environments, different institutional arrangements and different commoning processes have produced different outcomes in the three cities. The following section will illustrate the general features of the OperaCamion project as a "spirit", a new way of doing opera, and a way of reconnecting cultural institutions with the urban fabric while addressing the problems of urban crises and social cohesion.

The parameters that can be used for the analysis of the three cities, illustrated in the matrix below, are drawn from different literatures, which intertwine in the OperaCamion cases that are taken into account. Specifically, they are:

1. Type of intervention in space: from the setting up of a temporary theatre stage in a public square to actions of micro urbanization, OperaCamion involves spatial transformation: this transformation has spanned from the temporary 'occupation' of neglected squares to micro operations of upkeeping and restoration, implying different degrees of durability. At the same time, the informality and somewhat radical nature of such operations, which through co-production enact a political discourse, can all be inscribed in different forms of DIY urbanism (from tactical urbanism to micro-design); according to Volont, (2019: 258) "DIY interventions, directly or indirectly, produce urban *commons*" – and are, therefore, the junction between the urban and the cultural dimension in the observed theatrical practices.

2. Project governance: this parameter takes into account the different forms taken by collaboration and cooperation, the degree of participation of the different communities involved or addressed, and the multi-level partnerships that were created during the project, identifying the governance form that the project has adopted in the different cities.

3. Stakeholders involved in the co-creation process: different theatres, different local administrations, communities and audiences have taken part to the project; the parameter distinguishes between audiences and communities to identify different forms and different aspects of co-creation: audiences, in facts, produce the theatrical space and their enactive audiency in the time of the performance, while in Danisinni the community took part to the actual co-creation process.

4. Type of co-produced resource: to say that the output of the project was an opera tournée would be reductive, and would not account for the intense system of relations and impacts generated by the project. In the light of the elaboration of the theatrical commons framework in 3.2, the parameter accounts for the different types of resources (spatial, dramaturgic, relational) that are shared and collectively generated. In the case of Danisinni, the parameter shifts towards a more "orthodox" understanding of commons resources, because the theatrical project was embedded in a greater process of commoning the urban space – in other words, a proper urban commons.

5. Type of commoning: the parameter assesses whether it consisted of being together as a social work of commoning during the theatrical performance, as in Rome, or in the actual "ongoing praxis and (re) production" (De Angelis 2017: 98) and in the "creation of material abundance with the care for others and for nature" (Euler, 2018: 12) which are at the core of enduring commons (this latter case being represented by the Danisinni case).

*Rome: DIY urbanism for the revitalization of urban voids*

Of all the OperaCamion modules and models, only the Danisinni project can be considered of a lasting sort – at least from the perspective of (somehow) measurable outcomes and impacts. When OperaCamion entered Danisinni, the institution was soon 'forced' by local dynamics and transformed into a participatory project which involved the community for two subsequent years (it was only interrupted due to COVID). In other cases, and specifically in the observed cities of Rome and Reggio Emilia, OperaCamion animated public squares in peripheral neighbourhoods and cities occasionally.

While it is true that OperaCamion in Rome cannot produce immediate outcomes nor increase tangibly the quality of life of Roman citizens, it is true that it is inscribed in a strategy which goes towards this direction in the long term: both the musical milieu of the city and the theatre itself are engaging in an attempt to reach the city as a whole. For what concerns the theatre, venues are being largely diversified, ranging from the sumptuous Palazzo Farnese to the suburbia, to flash mobs at the Fiumicino Airport. The theatre's YAP is at the core of most of these activities: differently from affirmed singers, who in the Italian operatic system are only engaged for single productions and do not work regularly for the theatre, they are engaged in a two-year program which allows them to gain experience through ancillary roles in the theatre's productions, concerts around the city, and complementary events which expand the theatre's activities and its presence in the urban grid.

The Roman musical milieu, similarly, contributes to the broadening of musical audiences in the city, and to cultural democracy as accessibility. Pizzo, for instance, thought of OperaCamion as a first step, and at the time of the interview was in facts programming other activities whose aim was that of disrupting the conventional fruition patterns of the "classical" repertoire, such as the "*Progetto Condomini*", in which music is performed in neighbourhood courtyards (*cortili*) with a twofold aim: on the one hand, that of transforming people's perception of their own living environment, which especially in peripheries is an in-between, often devoid of meaning and of function, and which the project transforms into an *impromptu* cultural venue. On the other, it aimed at increasing cultural accessibility to 'high' repertoires, and to mix these 'high' forms with new musical influences.

Figure 7. Two pictures from the *Condomini* project developed in Rome by Oscar Pizzo, who was the artistic director of Teatro Massimo di Palermo at the time of the coproduction.

Similarly, Almerighi has been working intensively with peripheries in the past years, as a volunteer of Sandro Pertini Isonomia, founded by lawyers and artists; the project they have been developed, *Bimbo Italia*, has been brought as a performance in 11 municipalities characterised by educational poverty and isolation from the cultural offer, and has been running as an educational project for more than two years in Bastogi, a particularly critical Roman periphery. There, the actors work with the children of prisoners and of illegal occupants in abandoned houses to develop micro-performances centred on the Italian Constitution.

These projects, which have emerged during the interviews, show that OperaCamion is far from an isolated stance, but it is rather inscribed in a broader trend which uses temporary events and micro interventions in space to involve local inhabitants of disadvantaged areas, as if it was a cultural guerrilla taking place in the city. This guerrilla is done by an "underground" cultural ecosystem, which Opera di Roma has reached to. Therefore, OperaCamion was the juncture between a highbrow and a lowbrow cultural system from an aesthetic as well as an infrastructural viewpoint, which from a network perspective might deserve more attention in the future.

The World Cities Culture Forum, one of the very few para-academic sources which observes OperaCamion (other than newspapers and Twitter), mentions a 2016 Eurobarometer survey showing that '50% of the population of Rome do not trust their own neighbours' (World Cities Culture Forum, 2018). According to the study, therefore, OperaCamion was inscribed in a strategy, intending to strengthen social cohesion through temporary events.

As the map shows in section 4.1, in the four years of its city tours OperaCamion covered all of Rome's *Municipia*, the municipalities which articulate the complex urban conglomerates of the capital, and some were visited more than once. The unconditional accessibility to the performances has made it impossible (or inconvenient) for the theatre to count the number of people who have enjoyed the performances; yet, an estimate was made that, in Rome only, and only in 2017, more than 10.000 citizens benefitted from opera for free. While it is true that figures are approximate, OperaCamion activated processes and produced results. The process which it activates can be looked at from a twofold perspective, one pertaining to urban governance and the other to cultural economics.

**Type of intervention in space:** For what concerns urban governance, the modalities with which the project operated in public squares can be inscribed in the framework of 'tactical

urbanism' and DIY urbanism. Mould (2014: 529) describes tactical urbanism as a process which allows

> people to intervene in the urban arena without going through the traditional channels of planning procedure and as such shifted the power balance of the urbanisation process, if even for a brief impermanent, temporary moment.

Tactical urbanism was born with an activist ethos and as a stance of active citizenship. In some cases, it has maintained this subversive potential; even when it does play a subversive role, it is still Mould who, following Douglas (2013), notes that such form of activism is "qualitatively different from… reactionary interventions (such as graffiti or political demonstration)" (Mould 2014: 530).

In others, it has been appropriated by urban governance institutions, thus losing, to some, its bottom-up *élan*. This re-framing is aptly caught by the group "Street Plan Collaborative", which redefines tactical urbanism as

> a city, organizational, and/or citizen-led approach to neighborhood building using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions intended to catalyze long-term change (Street Plan Collaborative, nd: 28)

OperaCamion might fit in between these two extremes: in Rome, it indeed was an operation conceived to strengthen the theatre's position within the urban sphere and to consolidate its role in the governance network; as noted by the Administrative Director of the Theatre, Ricci, it also allowed the Theatre to gain unprecedented visibility, testified by the number of articles dedicated to OperaCamion in the international press.

The New York Times

ROME JOURNAL

*Putting 'Don Giovanni' on a Truck,
and Returning Opera to Its Roots*

LA STAMPA                                    13-MAR-2019

A BIRMINGHAM E A MILANO location insolite e regie innovative per trovare un pubblico nuovo

Metti l'opera in periferia
Sostakovic nell'ex balera
Verdi sale sul camion
c'è tanta vita fuori dai teatri

Sociedad

"El Barbero de Sevilla" llega sobre ruedas a la periferia romana

La Ópera de Roma se trasladó hoy a la periferia de la capital para representar una versión abreviada de "El Barbero de Sevilla" de Gioachino Rossini, escenificada sobre un camión ambulante e impregnada de una comicidad caricaturesca.

Figure 8. Some statements from the international press regarding OperaCamion: the "New York Times", on July 2017, the Italian "La Stampa", March 2019, and the Spanish "W Radio" on July 2016.

At the same time OperaCamion holds a disruptive potential for what concerns the operatic system from at least two viewpoints: first, because it allowed for considerable artistic freedom, and second, because it allowed for the redesign of the rules of access to the operatic resource, both spatially and behaviourally.

Tactical urbanism is about placemaking. Especially in urban voids, tactical urbanism operations posit themselves between urban regeneration practices and prefigurative politics: on the one hand, therefore, it revitalizes (though briefly) neglected spaces, and on the other it contributes by this temporary action to an alternative imagery of the common and public spaces in urban voids. As posited by Maeckelberg (2011: 16), prefigurative politics

> challenge and confront hierarchical and centralized power at every turn and they patiently and diligently construct political processes and structures that limit the negative externalities of the inevitable power inequalities.

Similarly, as posited by Kratzwald,

> These temporarily occurring forms of self-organization are important spaces for learning and experiencing, in which we can overcome the barriers that we have acquired through the socialization in a liberal legal system organised around private property, wage labour, competition, and representative democracy, and that prevent us from thinking about alternatives. (Kratzwald in Dellenbaugh et al. 2015: 39).

This alternative pertains both to urban governance and to cultural management: redesigning access to urban spaces, reconciling practices of building and dwelling (in the words of Sennett, 2018), widening cultural access and opportunity (Gross, Wilson 2018) can progressively be achieved starting from such operations. Urban voids, then, etymologically devoid of meaning, within these temporary interventions become meaningful places – in the words of Manzini:

> A place is a space endowed with meaning. On the other hand, since the meaning is a result of human conversations, we can also say that a place is a space where there are people who have reasons for talking about it (Manzini 2019: 24).



Figure 9. A family looks at the setting up of the stage in Làbaro, Rome, in the summer of 2018, when Rigoletto OperaCamion was being staged: the stage backdrop by Gianluigi Toccafondo depicted the Duke of Mantua as a pork, playing with an animal metaphor on the character's machismo. Photo by the author.

**Governance model.** Just like in most tactical urbanism operations, in facts, OperaCamion happens in public space for "a brief impermanent, temporary moment". The production of OperaCamion as an opera was the result of collaborative governance, where most of the actual

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governance of the project was administered by the theatre and the municipality, in terms of resource allocation and decision making processes; yet, the role of the creative team in reshaping the format and the operatic work, and the contribution of the audience by means of emotional engagement and spatial co-creation, cannot be understated in the light of their loose involvement in the previous steps of the project. Quite the reverse, the interviews helped unravel how much value these two stakeholders have produced within the OperaCamion experience, which could not be grasped by looking at the project's organigram.

**Stakeholders involved in the co-production**. The process is enacted by stakeholders operating at different scales and which contribute to the resource in different moments:

1. the Municipality chooses the squares in accordance with the Theatre, monitors the production process and provides human resources for the management of the project

2. the Theatre as an institutional body provides material, human and cultural resources, ranging from the stage itself, the props, costumes, lighting, to the creative team and the cast.

3. the cast and the creative team are the main producers of the cultural resource. They are in charge of the adaptation of the operatic work and of its development onstage. Such development, as has been seen, owes much to the sharing and informal environment: during the rehearsals, it allowed for greater contributions than in a theatre, while during the performance, the spatial setting and the audience's response both contributed to a greater creative freedom onstage, testified by all the performers, and by a greater willingness to contribute.

4. the audience, in the Roman case, did not partake to the production of the work until it was put onstage. In facts, the moment in which the audience contributes to the actual co-production and enact the theatrical commons is the performance, where they, with both tangible and intangible resources, produce relations among themselves and between themselves and the stage, further generating the theatrical space on the public square. Though temporary, therefore, participation and co-production during the performance are strong, even though the audience does not directly contribute to the material staging of the operatic work. The concept of enactive *audiency* elaborated by Walmsley (2018a) aptly fits this case: the emotional response of the audience was made livelier by a simple spatial factor (the diminished distance from the stage) and a broader informality overall. Sometimes even direct interaction with the creative team occurred, creating an atmosphere of sharing and the possibility, for the performers, to give way to greater artistic freedom.

**Type of co-produced resource.** Therefore, all the three types of resources (relational, dramaturgic, spatial) that compose the theatrical commons analysed in section 3.2 are shared by the theatrical community (audience and performers).

1.  Dramaturgy: The performing canons are redesigned by the creative team and become more informal, more clear and more mimic, and some operatic rules are broken (singers and actors interact directly with the audience, *recitativi* are sung directly to the audience, improvisation is allowed).

2.  Relations: in OperaCamion the stage-audience dynamics in the unbuilt (or partly built) environment contribute to creating what David Harvey has called a relational space (2004:4), where 'there is no such thing as space outside of the processes that define it'. The feeling of being welcome, the atmosphere of sharing between audience members and between performance and attendees can be looked at as "being together, rather than having together" (Mattei 2012: 27) and brings to the fore the act of commoning as a social practice (Euler 2018), enabled by the theatrical experience. This dimension is explained in section 4.5 with direct reference to the interviews.

3.  Space: the relational space is not the only one that is produced in common by the audience: by bringing their own seat to the square, they are the main agents of the tactical urbanism operation (enabled by the theatrical production). By providing both tangible (seats) and intangible (relations, audiency) resources, the audience does the social work which is at the core of the theatrical experience: it *produces* the theatrical space.

Figure 10. Two women carrying their seat from home before a performance of Don Giovanni OperaCamion, 2017. Shot taken from a video made by Maxim Derevianko for Opera di Roma.

**Type of commoning.** OperaCamion, then, does not shift the ownership of the means of production in a strict sense, but rather entails a social practice of commoning, implying "meaningful activities with extended and deepened relationships" (Euler 2018: 12). This practice occurs immediately before and during the performance: that is, when people gather to form the square, and when they partake, as a theatrical community of audience and performers, to the theatrical experience. The commoning practice enables the performance through a sharing of relations, spaces and new practices of inclusion, which all together contribute to the actual making of OperaCamion the way it is. As said by Cherstich, "it was all about the square": this statement not only embeds the societal objectives of the project, but also highlights that the ultimate value of the project lied in that moment of commoning the square, of *doing* in common (De Angelis 2017: 121, following Holloway 2002), of *being* together, rather than *having* together (Mattei 2012: 27) – the aspects of doing and being together, as constituents of commoning practices, recall Arendt's definition of action in public life, where "people are *with* others and neither for nor against them—that is, in sheer human togetherness" (Arendt 1958: 180).

*Reggio Emilia: symbols and spaces for theatre and the city in the post-COVID era*
Reggio Emilia is a mid-sized town in North-central Italy, located in the Emilia-Romagna region. The context of Reggio Emilia differs much from that of the other two cities for two reasons. The first is a structural factor: an influential study of Il Sole 24 ore (2021), assessing

the quality of life of 107 Italian cities, places Reggio Emilia in the 17[10] position[10]. Palermo is ranked 89th out of 107[11], while Rome stands between the two, at the 32nd position[12]. It is worth noting that the indicator assessing per capita expenditures for the performing arts partly subverts this ranking, with Rome on top (10th position), followed by Reggio-Emilia (25th) and Palermo, for which this indicator (59th) is above the city's average.

And still, the quality of life of the Region in general, and of the city specifically, has historically been above the National average, and the 2020 study confirmed this trend: 5 of the 9 provinces of the Emilia-Romagna Region, to which Reggio Emilia belongs, are among the top twenty Italian cities for the quality of life.

In addition, a structural factor distinguishes the Region from the other two contexts: it is an operatic cluster, being the birthplace of many composers and home to a lively scenario of theatres (Gambini 2005).

The other distinction with the two other case is the temporal factor: OperaCamion was staged in Reggio Emilia during exceptional times, that is, in September 2020, in the midst of the COVID pandemic; back then, Teatri di Reggio Emilia was among the few institutions to stage a performance after the dramatic halt imposed to live performing arts by the sanitary crisis.

Both these factors implied a radical transformation of the project: first, because it was not performed in peripheries, and second, the format was changed in order to comply with safety regulations imposed by COVID.

The choice not to perform in peripheries was consciously made by the artistic director of the Theatre, and was tied to the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic – in other words, OperaCamion had to convey a broader symbolic meaning for the city as a whole: "Had we entered the realm of peripheries, we would have activated the mechanisms associated with societal operations, and it would not have been *a hug to the whole city* [emphasis added], but a societal project[13]". Rather than denying the societal nature of OperaCamion's objectives, the Reggio Emilia experience shifts it towards another dimension, with the broader scope of

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[10] https://lab24.ilsole24ore.com/qualita-della-vita/Reggio-Emilia
[11] https://lab24.ilsole24ore.com/qualita-della-vita/Palermo/Tutti-gli-indicatori
[12] https://lab24.ilsole24ore.com/qualita-della-vita/Roma/Tutti-gli-indicatori
[13] Se fossimo andati nel quartiere periferico ci sarebbero stati tutti i meccanismi legati al sociale, e non sarebbe sembrato un abbraccio a tutta la città, ma un progetto sociale (Cantù, interview by the author).

revitalising squares, after social distancing had imposed such harsh rules on human relations in public space.

**Type of intervention in space.** The dimension of space co-production, which characterised the Roman tactical action, in Reggio Emilia was made impossible by necessary safety measures: seats were positioned in orderly rows by the theatre, thus preventing people from using the space freely as in the "classical" OperaCamion mode. Yet, like its Roman counterpart, OperaCamion in Reggio Emilia can be considered an example of tactical urbanism: a theatrical stage pops up in a public square, after a long period of fear, paralysis and closure, "hugging" the city: first, by revitalising common spaces which had remained void of function and meaning; second, by providing a catalyser for social life in those spaces, i.e., a theatrical performance. The artistic and the societal, therefore, are again entangled. In COVID circumstances, therefore, even a common urban happening, such as the "festivalisation" of a public square, became a symbol and an exceptional deed, a tactical operation with which the theatre allowed cultural access outside of its walls, redesigning the uses of the square for two nights. This festivalisation recalled the theatrical 'heterotopia' described by Primavesi (2012: 509): 'Theatre occurs in spaces by enabling them to be experienced in a particular way or by creating them as such'. Theatre, then, has allowed to experience the square in a particular way, creating the conditions for socialisation.



Figure 11. The stage, populated by Toccafondo's animations and by the singers on the second night of the performance in Reggio Emilia

**Governance model: institutional multi-level governance.** The creative team, with the modalities described above, and the theatre were the main contributors to the project, and no degree of participatory governance was involved. Gratuity, a core element of

OperaCamion, was maintained, thus allowing for total economic accessibility whereas the physical one was made impossible by safety restrictions. Even in such extraordinary circumstances, the tactical urbanism operation offered the possibility to citizens to finally inhabit the square, to *perform* it and attend an opera, sharing emotions, relations, spaces. What is interesting to note, moreover, is that participation was somehow impossible to prevent in spite of COVID rules. The spatial articulation of the square reproduced the conventional theatrical space and was enclosed by crush barriers; yet, as the artistic director noted, "it was beautiful that some people took their chair from home anyways, there were couples, both old and young, who took their chairs from home because they couldn't book a seat[14]". Spatial co-creation, therefore, was not looked for by the theatre, but was rather an externality of the project itself – a manifestation of how the project inspired sociability and attracted people in the square.

**Stakeholders involved in the co-production: audience engagement as an externality.**
The theatre and the creative team were the only active agents involved in the production in Reggio-Emilia. The timeframe of the project did not allow for a co-design of spatial and urban strategies between the municipality and the theatre; COVID regulations prevented people from bringing their seat and co-creating the theatrical space; co-production was not sought for by the theatre. For what concerns spatial co-production, the theatre could not allow people to bring their seat to the square, because it was necessary to make sure that social distance was respected. Therefore, seats were placed in orderly rows, the theatrical space was trenched and ushers were placed at these barriers to prevent gatherings. It could be said that participation could not be avoided, and people were eventually allowed to contribute to creation of a theatrical space anyways.

For what concerns the absence of community involvement in the production process, Cantù explains clearly why this happened: as said earlier, the community in Reggio Emilia is strongly tied to their operatic heritage, and the conservative melomaniacs would have criticised OperaCamion (not to mention a participative opera), had it not been for the extreme circumstances of post-COVID times. Here again it is possible to bear reference to commons theory and to Ostrom's design principles (1990:100), specifically to the one pertaining the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Accessibility to the theatrical resource has been hindered by several spatial, behavioural and economic factors which have contributed to enclosing it in time (see section 3.2). As theatre became a club good, categories of users such

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[14] quindi la cosa bella è che qualcuno si è portato la seggiolina comunque, abbiamo avuto un po' di coppiette, anche di una certa età, che si sono portate le seggioline perché non avevano trovato posto (Cantù, interview by the author).

as critics and *loggionisti* have progressively created rules (ranging from silence to dress codes, empowered by sumptuous architecture) which have excluded other potential beneficiaries. Here in OperaCamion a powerful *renversement* of this rule has occurred: the theatrical resource has been reappropriated by new communities of actors, creatives and audiences which have determined new rules of production and fruition of opera theatre. This created new mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, based on motivation and willingness to contribute (and innovate), from the part of the creative team), and on informal spatial settings and behaviours, from the part of the audience.
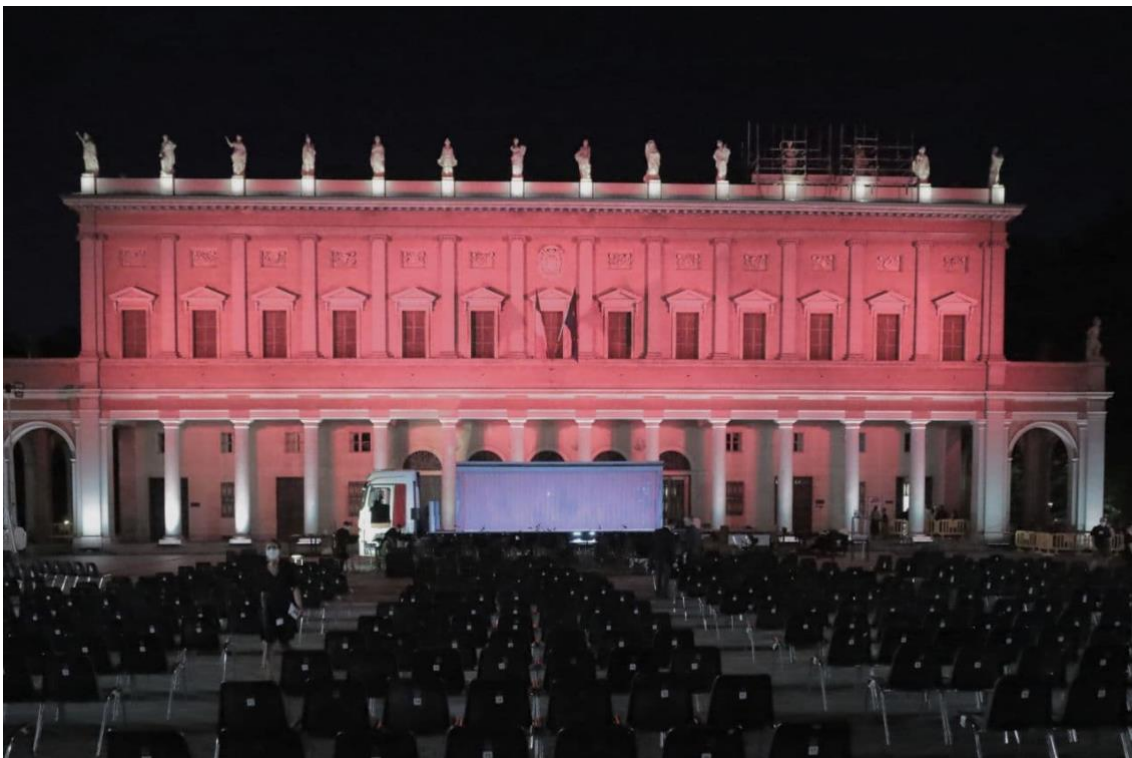


Figure 12. Piazza Martiri del 7 Luglio 1960, the central square in Reggio Emilia, overlooked by the theatre, during the performance. The organization of the space during the performance: seats were placed in rows by the theatre, due to COVID constraints. Yet, it was impossible for the ushers to prevent people from gathering around the crush barriers with their own seats.

**Type of co-produced resource: relations, space.** The primary resource that was shared by the people of Reggio Emilia during OperaCamion was relations: free of the stringent mechanisms of opera as a club good, relieved of the paranoia and suspicion that had characterised social life during the first stage of the pandemic, the audience was able to collectively participate to an emotional endeavour through theatre, re-establishing shared rules of behaviour in public squares. The loosening of the behavioural barriers around the theatrical resource did not produce straightforward exclusion of the opera *aficionados*, but rather a widening of the audience, consisting of first-time goers as well as melomaniacs,

gathered together not by artistic standards but by a need to share a cultural experience and restore sociability.

**Degree of commoning: relational commons.** Cultural actions in public space after COVID have the ability to mend the broken relations between humans and the urban environment and among humans themselves. "*Si riaprono le città*", "cities open again", Cantù said, burdening the OperaCamion project with a deep purpose: that of catalysing social life in public space after social distancing and isolation. The other OperaCamion operations address directly the societal issues related to peripheries, from the material decay of public squares to cultural democracy intended as opportunity and access (Gross, Wilson 2018). In Reggio Emilia, the matter of social cohesion in post-COVID times, and of the reappropriation from the part of city dwellers of public and common spaces, lied at the core of the project. The power of art to produce relationships and interactions in public space has already been explored (Morea 2020), enabling the rise of a relational commons; in the particular case of theatre, however, the *togetherness* subtended to the performance turns art into a social practice (without diminishing the creative dimension), and stresses the role of theatre as a precious commoning practice for turbulent times of social disruption.

*Danisinni: city acupuncture and collaborative governance in a urban commons*
OperaCamion in Palermo was performed in eight public squares from 2016 to 2017. It reached peripheries characterised by decay, poor housing condition, economic and educational poverty such as Albergheria and Zen (Zona Espansione Nord) - the latter being the most critical periphery of the city, characterised by spatial and social segregation and a dramatically high crime rate (Picone 2016).it reached the suburbia near Mondello and the town of Ventimiglia di Sicilia.

When the Municipality, in accordance with the theatre, selected piazza Danisinni as an additional location for the tour, however, an unexpected twist occurred, and OperaCamion had to change radically to meet the requirements posited by a fierce community of commoners.

Topology
Danisinni is, it has been said, a urban depression, located in a riverbed: the waters of Papireto, which still run underground, were buried in the XVI century, but the neighbourhood is still located at a lower level with respect to the rest of Palermo.

The peculiar topology of Danisinni is full of contradictions: it is located in the city centre, a few steps away from Piazza Indipendenza and the ancient Norman Palace, and yet it is structurally cut off from the urban fabric: only one road is viable with vehicles, and it represents the only access to Danisinni and its square. Other walkable accesses connect Danisinni to the Zisa neighbourhood: small streets, labyrinthic alleys and perilous staircases, the in-betweens of an area made of abusive housing, characterised by diffused unemployment, a paradoxically high school dropout rate, and densely inhabited by drug smugglers (suffice it to say that these pathways are not signalled by Google maps, as they formally do not exist, even though representing the factual street network of the neighbourhood).

Despite the proximity to the city centre, Danisinni is a semi-rural context. A green belt, partly invisible yet traceable from the maps, connects the lower-West area to the upper-East of the neighbourhood: the underground river is a resource the city is unaware of, but its presence is evident in this green oasis.

### Demographics
Segregation came as a natural result of the area's topology: the absence of connections with the rest of the city, combined to the endemic frailty of social infrastructures in the urban South of Italy, caused material and educational poverty and the decay of the built environment. Danisinni, however, is far from being abandoned: it is densely populated and infants are 290 out of 2000 people.

Data are in line with Palermo as a whole, having one of the highest birth rates of the Country – paralleled with a dramatically poor performances in terms of childcare facilities: in Danisinni, the *coup de grace* came in 2008, when the kindergarten and elementary school of the neighbourhood was closed. Located in the middle of the square, at the very heart of Danisinni, it was the only cultural and social service of the area, not only providing education, but also family counselling. Since then, drug dealing on the street seems to have intensified, and children were left without a proper infrastructure for their development: today, social workers monitor the situation of many families in the neighbourhood.

Even today, and in spite of the efforts of the Danisinni commoners, the neighbourhood is struggling to emerge from this isolation: the volunteers of the community service, coming from other areas of Palermo to run the children's laboratories in the summer, admitted that they did not even know Danisinni existed. In parallel, the Danisinni people find it hard to leave the neighbourhood: unemployment is widespread and reaches dramatic peaks, as high

as 90% (Pierro, Scarpinato 2020). Most dwellers have surrendered to the dramatic lack of opportunities by simply relying on the Government's basic income fund.
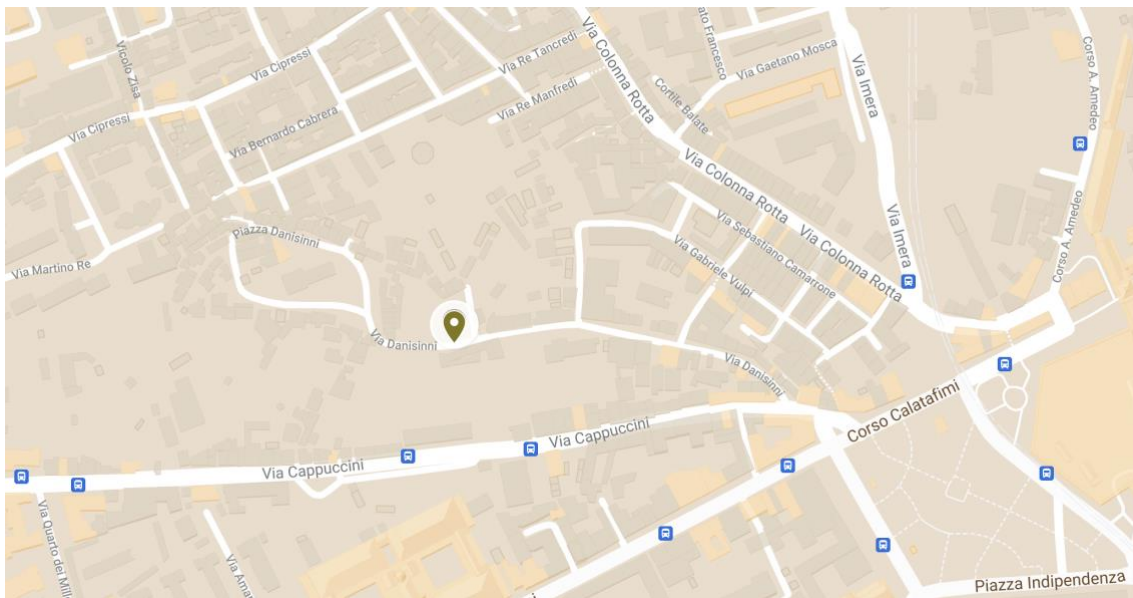


Figure 13. The urban topology of the area: via Danisinni, leading to the homonymous piazza, is the only access to the neighbourhood from the central Piazza Indipendenza, 600 metres away from the Norman Cathedral.

## Commons

Since 2013, Danisinni is experiencing a project of renovation. The terms "bottom-up" and "grassroot" do not appeal much to an initial context which recalls Dostoevsky's nightmarish underground; but the process indeed falls in the category of actions which involve a local active community of citizens, who started intervening in their own neighbourhood to contrast abandonment, decay, unsafeness and the lack of cultural infrastructures – actions which can be rightfully inscribed in the framework of commoning.

Three phases can be recognised in the story of the Danisinni commons, which describe the commoning dimensions subtended to the regeneration process.

**Phase one: claiming ownership.** The sequence of events that gave rise to the Danisinni commons is hard to simplify, and no primacy can be attributed among the many of the stakeholders/commoners that have initially claimed back their resource. This complexity still make it hard, today, to establish hierarchies among those who contribute to its governance. It can be said, however, that the first steps of the Danisinni community were moved under the guidance of Fra' Mauro, a Franciscan friar originating from Monreale, near Palermo, and pastor of the Danisinni Parish (*S. Agnese*) since 2008. In 2013, the Municipality was preparing to build a parking lot in the upper-East area of the neighbourhood, in an attempt to put an end to the isolation of the neighbourhood; in that moment, he and a group of dwellers

opposed the decision of the municipality and activated a dialogue with the City Council. The project was abandoned, and those 8 hectares of land, privately owned, were granted in loan for use to the parish.

According to De Angelis, a commons is "use value to a plurality" but cannot be reduced to this: in order to produce value for the plurality, people need to "come alive as a plurality of commoners, by claiming ownership of that good" (De Angelis 2017: 29-30). This first clash with the Municipality marks the "coming alive as a plurality" of the Danisinni community, the moment in which they claimed the neighbourhood land for themselves. On that land, the commoners erected the Farm, *la Fattoria*, which will be described later.

In the meantime, the Danisinni community began growing, and the NPO *Insieme per Danisinni* was born in 2016, formally gathering the volunteers and local activists of Danisinni, under the belligerent guidance of two commoners, Giuseppe and Pippo. It was at that time that a second, important negotiation began with the Municipality, which intended to tear down the closed kindergarten. The negotiation lasted for more than four years, is recalled as harsh and problematic by the commoners, and marked another victory for Danisinni: the project for the restoration of the kindergarten has been developed, and the tender for the works will be soon launched. The event carries an immense symbolic power and material significance, as it will imply the reactivation of a crucial node in the neighbourhood, reinforce educational infrastructures in the area and, potentially, stem school dropout.

In 2017 the active commoners grew in number: some Danisinni women were trained as mediators by the Municipality and started working with the other women of the neighbourhood. The process is at an advanced stage, as now some women which were involved in the mediation traineeship have become, in turn, mediators.

In the light of the living conditions of the neighbourhood, a first line must be drawn between the commoning processes illustrated in previous chapters and Danisinni: commoning in Danisinni is not simply about the sharing of meaning and of relationships. Commoning in Danisinni is the product of sheer necessity, the quest for an alternative to unemployment, isolation and poverty. Euler (2018: 13) already noted the difference between natural common-pool resources and commons in which sharing is mostly related to an intangible dimension of existence, noting that 'back in the days' commoning meant

> expressing […] a form of life in which autonomy and the ability to meet basic
> subsistence needs was something that was in the grasp of the commoners themselves,

not something that had to be given to them by a superior authority. […] self-determination with respect to the co-production and co-management resources includes […] that people directly participate in the decisions about their means of subsistence and their well-being.

In commons literature, in facts, commoning, as a social process, is a way of 'collectively managing the resources needed to sustain life' (Linebaugh 2008: 232). This definition is echoed by Donolo (in Iaione 2018: 4) who defines the commons as "a group of goods *necessarily* shared" (emphasis added). More recently, this matter has come again to the fore, with Bryant emphasizing "the vast gap between commons as immediate necessity and commoning as a choice (although as a necessity for justice and humanity as a whole)" (Bryant 2020, np). In the urban commons literature, this element has been particularly stressed: the urban commons is produced by the collective practice of commoning, to "govern the resources necessary for life'" (Feinberg, Ghorbani, Herder 2021: 2, following Huron 2018). Euler (2018: 13), when identifying the core characteristics of the commons, indicates precisely need (and willingness to cooperate) as the driver of people's aggregation into commons resource systems. Following Helfrich (2012), he stresses that "the first question, when it comes to commons, is 'what do I/do we need to live?', instead of the question 'what can be bought and sold'?".

The sheer necessity of finding alternatives to abandonment and isolation underlies the motivations of local commoners, and it is probably what makes it particularly powerful with respect not only to the other theatrical experiences analysed in this research, but to many other commoning experiences. Here, matters of urban democracy and the right to the city resonate, amplified by the discourse on sustainable development intended, as Amartya Sen did, as a matter of capabilities (which has been described in Chapter 2.1).

**Phase two: "letting in".** It was only after the Danisinni community had "come alive as a plurality", after they had firmly claimed their authority over the neighbourhood's spaces and resources, that they started entangling relations with other actors beyond the neighbourhood, in the territory of Palermo. In this phase, art institutions are let into the neighbourhood, but at the neighbourhood's conditions: the plurality of commoners acted as a supervisor over the actions of such institutions, limiting those operations that, in their perspective, would not have been apt for the neighbourhood.

In 2017, street art begins covering the walls of Danisinni with the support of the Academy of Fine Arts; local, Italian and international artists leave their mark on the Fattoria and in

dismal streets. A year later, Rambla Papireto, a social museum, is created by a group of Danisinni dwellers, who manage participative artistic projects in collaboration with the Academy.



Figure 14. The artwork by Guido Palmadessa, decorates the walls surrounding the Farm. Palmadessa, a Brazilian artist, has spontaneously travelled to Danisinni, of which it had heard, and left the mural as a gift to the community.

In 2018 the Teatro Biondo, a performing arts institution of Palermo, begins to develop an amateur theatre lab led by Gigi Borruso, which produced three performances and a short film (during the pandemic); the last performance, an adaptation of Brecht's "The exception

and the rule", took place in the summer of 2021 during the fieldwork. 2018 also marks the arrival of Teatro Massimo in Danisinni, more on which will be said later.

In 2019, a project is co-signed between the Danisinni community and the *Centro Tau*, an important centre for education which has been active for 33 years between Danisinni and the adjacent neighbourhood, Zisa. The project, centred on the notion of "educating community", involves more than 700 children and teenager, 250 families and 60 teachers and researchers[15]. The project has allowed to activate traineeships for community work: in the past years, young volunteers have been spending twelve months in Danisinni to develop artistic activities with the kids and to follow a project devoted to women and their children.

The ideal place where to "let in" is the Farm: articulated in a variety of open spaces, allowing for an informal and internally regulated functional mix, it has been the preferred place of encounter, a theatrical stage, a playground, a meeting room. La Fattoria is, in facts, at the heart of the Danisinni commons; entirely run by volunteers, it is articulated into different spaces and services:

- A playground, where volunteers of the community service run the artistic labs for children, were women meet, charity dinners are organised – at the time of the fieldwork, a charity dinner was hosted by a religious congregation to sustain the activities of the Parish.
- Reading gazebos, wooden structures for eating, studying and for kids to play, located amidst the garden.
- A bar, where food and beverages are sold on special dinners – for instance, at the end of the Brecht performance, sandwiches were assembled by the volunteers and sold to collect money for the fodder.
- Farm: the community takes care of some animals which are not eaten but simply raised. Some of them were abandoned and adopted by the community, some others were found starving (like Oscar, the horse) or saved from slaughter (like Tobia, the donkey, and his two comrades). Some others were donated or bought: goats, sheeps, turkeys, chickens, gooses. Since there is no proper "function" for the animals, they can be said to inhabit Danisinni as much as their human counterparts, thus contributing to a balanced human-natural interface in the neighbourhood's

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[15] https://percorsiconibambini.it/ceezisadanisinni/scheda-progetto/

ecosystem. Such ecological drift should be highly valued, and serve as a model to both urban studies and commons theory.

- The esplanade: a concrete esplanade, elevated with respect to the factory, is variously used by different people during the day. A gazebo and a magnolia tree protect it from the sun in the summer: it is used for salsa dance classes during the day, and to celebrate the mass at 6 pm. During the fieldwork, the esplanade was also used for broadcasting the European Championship's semi-final.

- Vegetable garden: the volunteers who feed the animals also take care of the garden, where vegetables are grown and sold to support the Farm's activities; taking care of the garden is also an alternative to detention: volunteers are helped by people who were deemed guilty of crimes and who, instead of being imprisoned, do their social work in the Farm.

- The circus: Chapitô, the circus tent located in the middle of the Farm, is shared by a circus company, an amateur theatre group and the Danisinni choir. When rehearsals take place during the day, anyone can attend, from the volunteers working with the animals to children, who go back and forth during the artistic labs.



Former kindergarten
Circus tent "Chapitô"
Danisinni farm
Informal housing conglomerates
Rambla Papireto Social Museum

Figure 15. A close-up of the neighbourhood's structure. In the exact centre of the square stands the abandoned kindergarten, in the process of being reopened. The upper-West side of the square is populated by abusive and

informal housing and is run by walkable streets unknown to the maps. The wide space in upper-East (right) corner of the picture is the Farm, *la Fattoria*, at the heart of the Danisinni commons: clockwise from Chapitô, it is articulated into cultivated land, the playground, and the shelters for the animals.



Figure 16. kids dancing in front of the altar during a salsa class in the esplanade. Photo by the author.

Figure 17. Carla and Fabio, two amateurs putting their make up on before a performance of Brecht's "The exception and the rule", directed by Gigi Borruso. The performance took place on July 10th, 2021, in *Chapitô*, the circus tent in Fattoria. Photo by the author.



Figure 18. The Chapitô tent, where a circus company, the amateur prose theatre and the choir all rehearse and perform. Photo by the author.

**Phase three: "going out".** The Danisinni commons has come to an escalation phase, which has attracted not only local actors, but national and international ones. The aspiration to finally address the dramatic issue of unemployment, and to transform the neighbourhood not only in a driver of sustainable tourism, but also of job creation, is at an initial yet tenacious stage. On July 16th, 2021, a "borgo sociale" was inaugurated near the Farm which will be dedicated to artists' residencies, social housing and childcare, whose construction was funded with the support of a Milanese Foundation, Azimut.

In 2018 the Municipality of Palermo created an online portal for collecting the tourist tax revenues, 10% of such revenues was devolved to urban regeneration projects in Ballarò and Danisinni. In the Danisinni case, funds were allocated for the purchase of a small vehicle, an *Apecar*, that would become a food truck for delivering catering services in the city.

In 2021, after decades of invisibility and of segregation, Danisinni was mentioned in the Lonely Planet guide of Palermo, which praised its natural fertility and the magmatic creativity of its regeneration (Bruni 2021).

## Characteristics and limits of the Danisinni commons

It has been seen in the literature review that the urban commons had to find new theoretical foundations for recollecting urban stances under the conceptual framework of the commons, going beyond common-pool resource systems and blurring the boundaries of the communities of commoners: the complexity of the urban domain, some scholars argue, make it impossible to clearly determine exclusion and inclusion in the case of urban resources: this viewpoint is precious for advancing knowledge on the urban commons, because, as Huron posited, cities are indeed populated by a community of strangers in a saturated space. As such, the notion of community itself is constantly renegotiated, and determining inclusion and exclusion is a process, rather than a fixed norm. However, it is also necessary to note that a risk is subtended to such approach: that of loosening the methodological rigour of commons research.

The commons, in fact, consist of complex social systems, characterised by a resource (be it a natural resource, a urban asset, or even intangible knowledge), specific relations of production (arrangements and systems for maintaining that resource), necessary community boundaries (whose absence would imply the resource is a public good, rather than a common good).

To say that everything, from the air to aesthetics, is a commons, indeed carries a strong political message (Massimo De Angelis' powerful title-statement, *Omnia sunt communia*, 2017, goes in such direction), as it stresses the crucial notion of the Earth being shared by all living beings and of values and meanings being shared by humans. Yet it is important to notice that, especially face to the neoliberal governmentality of cities and in a capitalist world, boundaries, though flexible, are needed in defining what commons are to provide operational margins for action and intervention in specific urban areas.

Danisinni respects all the seven design principles for the governance of long-enduring commons identified by Ostrom. This makes it a particularly precious example for observing urban commons in the Western world, since its natural features and relational components are hard to find in other urban commons; the presence of a urban-rural interface, and the coexistence of the commoners with the natural element and with animals, is far from being a marginal characteristic: the Danisinni commons encompasses the non-human, and represents a radical reappropriation of a more sustainable urban dimension, in which the buried river was recuperated to give rise to a space shared by humans, animals, and plants. This marks a first, considerable contribution to the evolution of commons theory, overcoming the urban dimension to embrace the human-natural interface and a more sustainable understanding of urban development.

In the second place, what the literature has increasingly aspired to illustrate is the contribution of the commons to urban policies. This has been particularly true in the case of Italian commons: a lively debate at the National level originated around the referendum of water as a commons and, in general, around civic uses and other historically rooted jurisdictional principles regulating common goods in Europe (Mattei 2012). In some cases, these battles have led to successful results: water was declared a common good in 2011 (though the referendum was never transformed into law), and Bologna was the first of many Italian cities to approve a regulation of the commons in 2014.

As Chapter 2 illustrates, the literature has attempted to manifest the role of urban commons in factually changing urban regulations on common goods: Asilo Filangieri in Naples has been engaged in negotiations with the municipality which have led to the 'Declaration of the Urban and Civic and Collective Use' (Ciancio 2018); M^C^O is said to have contributed to a more participative shift in urban planning in Milan (Delsante, Bertolino 2018).

The case of Palermo and Danisinni is yet of another sort for two reasons. The first is its ambitious scale: a whole neighbourhood, though small, and the 8 hectares of land where commoning is catalysed, make it a particularly large urban commons. The second is its position within urban governance: not a policy initiator, but a co-producer of urban governance, and the political infrastructure for enabling a collaborative ecosystem – the commons is the mediating platform between commoners, municipal authorities and cultural institutions.

What is possibly unprecedented in the Danisinni experience is the empirical manifestation of a collaborative ecosystem, where different actors cooperate for the shared management of projects and shared urban governance at different levels. As it has been said,

> Within the urban commons, collaboration is more focused: urban commons could be more adequate partners than the 'general public'... [they] have already developed common visions and requirements and could be able to bring the necessary collective power along to take an active political role (Müller 2015: 151)

While it has not yet influenced policies at a general level, it has stood in front of external decisions and the enforced authority of the municipality for enough time now to be considered a respectable interlocutor and an unavoidable urban stakeholder, able to significantly disrupt a system, such as the touristic one, and to convey a part of Airbnb's economic resources towards the neighbourhood. What is more, it has been able to partner with other cultural institutions to create complex projects which have endured for years and resisted COVID.

The involvement of a growing number of citizens, and above all the broad cultural programming centred on children, on their socialization and on cultural development, demonstrates a long-term commitment towards community development and a crucial element for the survival of the Danisinni commons. In this respect, the involvement of citizens as commoners "gives awareness to people and produces active citizenship, and therefore overcomes the passive consumerist model. It has a civilising function" (Mattei in De Angelis 2017), because "the commons help "social life to develop," meaning that they feed and regenerate the community" (Manzini 2019: 14); as said by Ostrom herself, "The commons elevate individuals to a role above mere consumers in the marketplace, shifting the focus to their rights, needs and responsibilities as citizens". (Kranich 2007: 94).

Below are the seven design principles of Ostrom's commons (1990: 100), and the way Danisinni can be inscribed in such framework:

- **Clearly defined boundaries**: boundaries, in Ostrom commons, are defined in a twofold sense – that of the resource, and that of the community. The resource is the Danisinni neighbourhood, and what has been created within it after years of commoning: the Farm, with its open public spaces, partly inhabited by plants and animals, and partly by humans and their social and relational activities. The boundaries of this resource are firmly defined by its urban structure. This structure was, at a time, a source of dramatic segregation and a source of community cohesion of a somewhat distorted sort, based on a common fate of poverty and criminality. In spite of its wickedness, this cohesion helped the most active members of the community to involve other Danisinni dwellers in the process of commoning around the core resource, the Farm.

  What is to be noted, however, is that the Danisinni community is not a gated community, an unlikely gathering of peasants that firmly prevent everyone from entering in order to preserve the authenticity of their struggle: while the local community is indeed at the core of the commoning process that takes place in Danisinni, in time the commons attracted travellers from afar, occasional contributors, social workers from local associations, and volunteers of the civil service. These actors contribute to the wellbeing of the commons, ensure its survival, and guarantee that the goals of the community are preserved beyond the individual charisma of some personalities of the commons. These actors are commoners, even though to a lesser extent than the core community who make a living *with* Danisinni. In this respect Danisinni is a community of *transformative social innovation*, as Manzini calls them: communities originating from fluid relationships (for instance, the relationships between the Danisinni dwellers, its active commoners and the 'external commoners'), which are not the result of centennial tradition, but of a deliberate choice to be part of a community. As such, they are 'a mesh of interweaving conversations in which people take part in different ways, choosing where, how, and for how long to allocate their resources (attention, skills, and relational availability' (Manzini 2019: 21). This configuration of the Danisinni community helps unpack the dynamic mechanisms that are subtended to the commons in contemporary cities.

- **Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions**: the space of the Farm is wide (8 hectares of land), and can be simultaneously used in

different ways, allowing for a well-balanced functional mix; the activities that are held in Danisinni and that orbit around the Farm is collectively defined and arranged in a semi-formal way. The existence of small groups using the Farm for different purposes has a twofold consequence: that the Farm is transformed into a producer of complex values, from the material production of food to the production of intangible values, fundamental for the well-being of the dwellers, such as the cultural and theatrical activities; and that the different groups are able to coordinate themselves easily, avoiding overcrowding and the overexploitation of the Farm (a single group of commoners doing the same thing would have, probably, made it harder to establish appropriation and provision rules). For what concerns the use of natural resources, people doing their community service are allowed to subtract some of the food units; the remaining (and more abundant) part is for the commoners to sell to sustain the activities of the Farm and the Parish.

- **Collective-choice arrangements**: the plurality of Danisinni is numerous and stratified, and arrangements are reached through meetings that mostly take place in the Parish and in the Farm; they are not held on a regular basis, and yet communication appears smooth and is mediated by Fra' Mauro and the religious community (consisting of two to three nuns). Conversazioni di quartiere, neighbourhood conversations, are held in order to discuss with the broader community about the projects that are being developed around the Farm. Both the Parish and the NPO act as nodes where meetings happen, problematic points are raised, and conflicts are solved.

- **Monitoring**: as Ostrom has illustrated, internal and reciprocal monitoring seems more sustainable and less costly than having an external enforcer. In the case of the Danisinni neighbourhood, the community is small (people know each other) and life in commons is dense and tight (people spend much time with each other in their daily activities in the Farm): unduly appropriating the resource, disrespecting other members of the community or not contributing to the common life of the neighbourhood would result in a demise in prestige and the expulsion from the core community of commoners. Volunteers, both old and young, who have contributed in time to the building of the resource, put a great effort in instilling responsibility into other commoners – from the 17-year-old handyman who arranges the spaces for daily activities, to the dance teacher, to the old man who takes care of the charity soup kitchen, these monitors cover different roles in the community and all ensure that activities are done in full respect of others and of the ecosystem.

- **Graduated sanctions**: sanctions were not mentioned by the interviewed dwellers – probably also because a religious mentality also pervades the commons, so that punishment is often exchanged with listening and discussing. In the Danisinni commons, sanctions such as detention are transformed into social work: not only are sanctions avoided in the first place, but even those imposed from an external authority are changed into more just forms of rehabilitation.

- **Easy conflict resolution mechanisms:** the "low cost arenas to resolve conflict" indicated by Ostrom (1990: 101) are represented by the Parish and the NPO, whose spaces serve as meeting venues and whose representatives mediate between conflicting interests and diverging views. The neighbourhood conversation and the group of women-mediators further reinforces this infrastructure centred on dialogue, thus avoiding that conflict is brought at a problematic threshold.

- **Minimal recognition of the rights to organise**: the recognition of Danisinni goes beyond "minimal". Recognition came in the first phase, at the time of "coming alive as a plurality of commoners", as said by De Angelis: opposing the municipality for the demolition of the kindergarten and for the construction of the parking lot were two fundamental steps that turned the neighbourhood into an autonomous decisional body against municipal authority. After this phase, the neighbourhood (represented by the NPO and the Parish) was able to become the interlocutor of different actors, including the Municipality itself, external funding bodies, cultural institutions (from the Academy of Fine Arts to Teatro Massimo).



| 1. Clearly defined boundaries | • Boundaries of CPR: The neighbourhood perimeter clearly determines the boundaries of the Danisinni commons, materially consisting of its buildings and its natural resources (the river, the cattle).<br>• Individuals who can use the resource: the Danisinni dwellers |
|---|---|
| 2. Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions | Regarding the use of physical resources, schedules are established for cultivating the land and taking care of the animals, while an informal "office" run by Danisinni people distributes the cultivated products. |
| 3. Collective-choice arrangements | The Parish first constituted a meeting platform for collective decision-making; since 2017, the 'Local Conversations' became an established meeting point for making arrangements, discussing project proposals and tailoring the commons rules |
| 4. Monitoring | The Danisinni community monitors itself upon the use of collective physical resources (with the help of appointed mediators and the Friars) also monitoring external institutions which enter the Danisinni to develop projects |
| 5. Graduated sanctions | Sanctions are not technically imposed over non-compliant appropriators – strong mutual monitoring prevents rule-breaking; most interestingly, common sanctions such as detention are substituted (whenever possible) by community service. |
| 6. Easy conflict-resolution mechanisms | the 'low-cost local arenas to resolve conflict' in Danisinni is the Parish, around which the community still gathers to reduce tensions, coupled with the weekly 'Local conversations' meetings |
| 7. Minimal recognition of the rights to organize | The recognition of the Danisinni community goes beyond 'minimal', and is recognized as an interlocutor and a stakeholder by the municipality and local institutions: the latter need to adapt when faced with the Danisinni environment |

Figure 19. The table illustrates the design principles identified by Elinor Ostrom as they appeared in the Danisinni environment.

At the final observed stage, the Danisinni commons had shifted from one based on sheer necessity to the sharing of a vision, of meanings and values for the neighbourhood. Once a strong local agency was established, it was able to open up to the city and beyond, without distorting its internal logics but also without further enclosing or segregating themselves and the neighbourhood. Whereas the initial steps were marked by the strong leadership of Fra' Mauro, and of the NPO, the project became more detached from individual leadership and started relying on polycentric governance granted by mutual aid, strong volunteerism and the commitment of a growing number of commoners.

Sustainability for the future therefore has solid bases; this does not mean, however, that external pressures or internal tensions do not exist. The political instability of Palermo (which is now close to elections) will deserve attention in the future, and require future observation from the part of researchers. At the same time, internal conflict must not be underestimated: while the commoners are numerous, not all of Danisinni is aligned, and a great empowerment effort must still be done. In addition, and in spite of the common vision underlying the Danisinni ecosystem, groups have different needs and aspirations: while the Parish is, quite understandably, oriented towards charity, the NPO aspires at a shift for the people, from the dependency on charity support to self-determination. Threats exist, and will have to be monitored by the commoners and their external allies to prevent this fragile, yet tenacious collaborative ecosystem from collapsing.

### OperaCamion in Danisinni

OperaCamion arrived in Danisinni in the middle of phase two of their commoning path, "letting in": at the time, the community was introducing new actors in their ecosystem, conscious of their authority over their own spaces and processes, and therefore able to construct partnerships with these actors, rather than waiting for them to simply pour cultural resources in the neighbourhood.

The same happened with Teatro Massimo. The tour of OperaCamion was supposed to stop in Danisinni as it had done in Albergheria and Zen, but the commoners asked that the project be transformed into something that would benefit the community, *produce value* for them, in the words of the commoners, rather than simply being *una vetrina*, a shopping window for the theatre.

**Intervention in space.** The place chosen for the performance was, quite predictably, the Farm, because of its strong symbolic power but also because it offered a wide space. In particular, the terrain in front of the Chapitô tent appeared as the most suitable. Yet, it could

not be left as it was, for reasons that were both theatre- and safety-related. Thus, the theatre did not only wage the costs of the normal OperaCamion production: it spent money to put the facilities up to standard, and to make sure that spaces were safe for those who performed and those who attended. Therefore, the theatre intervened in space in a more decisive way than it had done in Roma and Reggio Emilia, leaving its marks on the Farm: some embankments were levelled in the terrain, gravels were put on the walkway to signal the way from the garden to the theatre, the electrical system was put up to standards. In the end, the painted scenery created by Toccafondo was left in the circus tent as a request of the Commoners, and it now decorates the backstage.

The intervention of the theatre, though minimal, was tangible and permanent, and has transformed the terrain into a fungible space. The Superintendent speaks of "micro-urbanization", and in facts this intervention can be inscribed in the domain of public space acupuncture, in which urban design substitutes strategic planning, preferring form over calculation, satisfying local needs through adhocracy and coproduction (Casanova, Hernàndez 2015: 7); these types of interventions are centred on mending and humanization, and with minimal changes they able to make space more usable, more inviting, and to elicit new spontaneous uses from the part of people.

The whole Farm has been progressively produced in a similar orientation: the gazebo, the terrain, the playground, all "suggest" to potential users new ways of appropriating that space, and have contributed to making it a safer place. In the case of the terrain, today it is easily accessible through the gravelled pathway created by the theatre, which also represent the only way to access the circus tent, in front of which amateur artists get some rest from rehearsals while children play around, constantly switching their attention from the actors to the surrounding animals.

**Project governance: collaborative ecosystem.** In Danisinni more than in any other OperaCamion experimentation the range of stakeholders was broad, covering the different levels of participation. The theatre was responsive to the transformations imposed by the cooperation with the other unprecedented stakeholders – in this respect, it can be said that a process of institutional adaptation has taken place, defined as "the ability of individuals and groups to respond to and shape change through learning and flexibility to maintain or improve a desirable state" (Emerson, Gerlak 2014: 770). Possibly the greatest contribution of the Danisinni experience to urban governance theory lies precisely in this process, which has caused all the actors involved to rethink flexibly how the performance was to be held,

and eventually transformed it into a participative project of urban reactivation. This has resulted in long-term cooperation, which would have been impossible in the absence of these two premises, i.e. the presence of a strong community of commoners and of institutional adaptation from the part of the theatre. Danisinni, with the OperaCamion project, was what Iaione would call a collaborative ecosystem, where "Civic uses represent a reflective tool also for the administration, that is pushed to act not as a mediator, but more as an enabler of the capacity of the community to act as an institution" (Iaione 2017: 111), thus recalling Opazo-Ortiz's aspiration to "foster the idea of the commons as a collective endeavour and a culture of collaboration in the process of rethinking institutions and processes of production of public space" (Opazo Ortiz 2015: 128): going beyond the recognition of the rights to organise, the commons is regarded as an interlocutor and becomes an active agent of urban governance and culture making.

**Stakeholders involved in the co-production.** A huge part of the Danisinni community was involved in the making of the performance – those who weren't, attended it, participating emotionally to the process of enactive audiency (Walmsley 2018a).

1. The municipality, as in Rome, agreed with the theatre upon the squares that were to be touched by the OperaCamion tour, but it was also responsive to the changes of the project when it reached Danisinni, and did not only provide its immaterial support, but also funding which, as has been said, pertained to social activities.

2. The theatre provided material, immaterial and human resources, and provided the choirmaster so that the people in Danisinni could rehearse. It transformed the project adaptively to make it fit to local needs, developed the project there consequently for two years; it held a concert with the amateur choir in its spaces; after COVID, it is again present in the Danisinni environment: the amateur choir has performed in September 2021 a new concert of *bossa nova* music, with lyrics written by the inhabitants, rehearsed in the past months.

3. The commoners were active interlocutors and were a determinant component of the decision making process, as they, in accordance with the theatre, transformed the OperaCamion tour into the co-produced work with the people of Danisinni. An amateur choir was created, learning and rehearsing with the choirmaster Manlio Messina. Those who were not directly engaged in the performance still contributed to the artistic endeavour by cooking, providing props, organising facilities; those who could made available their technical skills collaborated with the technicians.

4. The creative team and the artists engaged in deep and long relations with the commoners; Cherstich recalls spending time with the children of the neighbourhood who attended rehearsals every night and with their families, Almerighi speaks of playing with the kids, joining the choir for fun during the rehearsals, and Toccafondo mentions the "great group" that was created there; the choirmaster rehearsed with the singers up to twice a week for six months. According to Valeria Almerighi, "he does it because he likes it", *lo fa perché gli piace.*

**Type of co-produced resource: the Danisinni commons.** The performance can be said to have been co-produced with the commoners: they were part of the artistic product and of the artistic process; however, it must be noted that OperaCamion was embedded in the Danisinni commons, and as such the co-produced resource was, to some extent, the Danisinni commons itself, enriched with creative inputs and with an artistic endeavour which left its mark on the community from a variety of perspectives. The theatrical space was not co-produced with seats, as they were provided by the theatre, and yet it was produced by the joint efforts of the theatre and of the people taking care of that space. The work of art benefitted from the relational commons and vice-versa – the relational commons in Danisinni was intensified and catalysed by theatre as a moment of collective creative expression. Fabio Cherstich recalls "living with them for twenty days, meeting their children[16]". When speaking of the "natural mechanism" created by OperaCamion, he reflects on how relations created a continuum between the audience and the stage:

> there were 30 people singing the Barber [of Seville], this implied that they invited many people who would have never thought they would have fun going to the opera, as they were watching someone they'd met at the bakery or the mass sing Donizetti. *Relations did it all* [emphasis added].[17]

**Degree of commoning:** being a commoning experience in a urban commons, a great deal of the social work involved in the Danisinni experience happened in common and was configured as a commoning practice. The togetherness of the theatrical project, shared by the creative team, the choir, the actors and the other commoners allowed them to fully enable the theatrical commons. It catalysed relationships, as the interviewed commoners recalled memories of strengthened socialization and emotional participation during the six months;

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[16] vivendo con loro venti giorni, ho conosciuto i loro figli, i bambini del quartiere venivano a vedere tutte le prove (Cherstich, interview by the author).
[17] il fatto che ci fossero 30 persone che cantavano il Barbiere implicava che invitassero moltissime persone, che non avrebbero mai pensato di divertirsi all'opera, per vedere qualcuno che avevano visto dal panettiere o a messa cantare Donizetti. Quindi hanno fatto tutto le relazioni (*ibid.*).

it produced a lasting cultural process, embodied by the amateur choir which is alive and performing up to the present day; what is more, it produced an alternative and a perspective for future local development through culture: it produced cultural opportunity in common.

| | intervention in space | project governance | stakeholders involved in the actual co-production | type of co-produced resource | type of commoning |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Rome** | "tactical urbanism" | temporary co-production | the municipality, the theatre, the creative team, the audience | the performance (enactive audiency), the theatrical space | commoning as a social practice **(relational commons)** commoning the square/the theatrical space/the audiency **(theatrical commons)** |
| **Danisinni** | "public space acupuncture" and urban micro-design | collaborative ecosystem | the municipality, the theatre, the creative team, the neighbourhood, the audience | the urban commons of Danisinni | **urban commons** |
| **Reggio-Emilia** | "tactical urbanism" for the post-COVID era | top down governance with elements of co-production | the theatre, the creative team (externality: the audience) | the performance (enactive audiency) | **relational commons** |

Figure 20. The table illustrates the different parameters which have been used to analyze the projects, and the way they have varied across the three cities.

## 4.3 General features and format specificity
### *The irreducible OperaCamion format*
In spite of the different modalities in which it was performed, OperaCamion is characterized by a distinct format with specific characteristics, which can be categorised as follows.

**Economic accessibility**: OperaCamion is always performed for free. Even in Reggio Emilia, where due to COVID safety measures most of the OperaCamion mechanisms were altered, this element was brought to the fore, and performances were still made accessible for free, upon the reservation of a free seat. As said by the Artistic Director of Teatri di Reggio Emilia,

> I insisted to keep it gratuitous. Even if we distanced seats and introduced the booking mechanism, we had to keep it free. Even just a symbolic donation would have immediately created a barrier [...] I had to keep this dimension of total accessibility[18].

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[18]Ho insistito per mantenerla gratuita. Anche se abbiamo fatto le sedute, distanziate, creando il meccanismo dei posti, dovevamo mantenerla gratuita. Anche solo un obolo avrebbe creato subito il meccanismo del blocco [...] dovevo creare massima facilitazione per tutti (Paolo Cantù, interview of the author).

The gratuity of OperaCamion had, in the perception of Pizzo, a somewhat religious nature: it embedded the idea of giving for free, almost in a religious, Christian sense. I give you something without you asking for it, you may like it or not, and I'm happy anyways[19].

**Behavioural and spatial accessibility**. The fact that OperaCamion eliminates the price barrier for attendants allows for a degree of accessibility which is further strengthened by behavioural and spatial accessibility. First, because all OperaCamion performances are held in public squares: a thorough reflection was carried out on the spaces of theatre by the participants, and was in facts reflected in the choice to perform in open, public spaces, where people not only attend the performance, but witness to rehearsals, to the assembling of the stage on the truck, to the making up of artists. Probably without knowing it, Cherstich evokes Ledoux's reflection on 'humanity's simple actions' in theatre-making:

> opera theatre isn't just its architecture, it is not its parterre and its boxes – simply, the theatrical building. OperaCamion means that opera theatre is not simply the building that contains an opera, it is whatever place within which singers and musicians play music and sing words written by a composer, offered to an audience[20].

The renewed relationship between opera theatre and the space where it is performed has a twofold implication: from the side of 'consumption', an element of surprise, almost relief for the audience, which is well grasped, again, by Cherstich's words: "if I go see an opera, I take for granted I'll be going to an opera theatre. Here, on the contrary, I see it in a public square, assembled on a truck…"[21]; on the side of 'production' this implied a sense of artistic freedom for the creative team (observed in 4.3).

The peripheral location of the squares, the location of the truck within the square and the mechanism by which people brought their own seat to attend the performance created a familiar atmosphere and allowed for a behavioural freedom which would not have been observed in conventional operatic contexts: OperaCamion "removes certain intellectual superstructures"[22], in the words of Toccafondo. A similar belief was expressed by Cremonini who pointed out the sensitiveness of combining practical and technical needs with the spirit

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[19] L'idea di dare gratuitamente, nel senso quasi religioso, cristiano. Io ti do una cosa senza che tu me la chiedi, ti può piacere o no, io sono contento lo stesso (Oscar Pizzo, interview of the author).

[20] Il teatro dell'opera non è solo l'architettura, non è i palchetti, la platea – insomma, l'edificio teatrale; per me è importante dire che OperaCamion significa che il teatro dell'opera non è per forza solo l'edificio che contiene un'opera, ma è qualsiasi luogo all'interno del quale dal vivo dei cantanti e un'orchestra suonano musica e cantano parole scritte da un compositore offerte al pubblico (Fabio Cherstich, interview of the author).

[21] Sono andato a vedere l'opera do per scontato di andare in un teatro dell'opera. Qui invece la vedo in piazza, montata sopra un camion… (Fabio Cherstich, interview by the author).

[22] OperaCamion ci toglie un po' di sovrastrutture intellettuali (Toccafondo, interview by the author).

of OperaCamion, this spirit of easy access for audiences – direct, immediate, without veils, without hiding[23].

**Relationship with the urban fabric**. OperaCamion was meant to be performed in peripheries. The only case in which it was performed in the city centre, in Reggio Emilia, still carried a very distinctive symbolic power, as it allowed people to reappropriate public spaces collectively after the lockdown. An element of urban reappropriation is, then, subtended to every format and every performance. This vision creates a *trait d'union* between two themes: the first is addressing inequality and accessibility to culture, the second is the addressing of this inequality through a "spatial" and "cultural" strategy – i.e. not just by reducing price barriers.

For what concerns the first theme, the accessibility to culture of a "high" sort reflects a view of cultural democracy which has somehow been associated with the top-down imposition of artistic canons – this argument, with respect to opera, has been addressed in section 3.3; its pertinence to the OperaCamion case will be discussed later.

For what concerns the spatial dimension, the stress which has been placed on peripheries throughout the project seems to propose an alternative to the centralised paradigm of cultural fruition in the urban sphere, which has been noted by many (Rosenstein 2011; Scott 2007; Sharp, Pollock, Paddison 2005; Harvey 1993) and which has impacts on cultural accessibility and cultural opportunity as 'the freedom people have, or lack, to co-create culture' (Gross, Wilson 2018: 5).

This perception is widespread among the interviewees: according to Cremonini, OperaCamion was born exactly with the purpose of exiting the conventional cultural programming and addressing the issue of peripheries – the aim and vision of OperaCamion, for her, could not be reduced to monetary indicators, as she interpreted the project as "a cultural investment for the development of a community"[24], also pointing out the ease with which OperaCamion penetrated the urban fabric[25]. Similarly, the first thing that

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[23] La sottigliezza sta nella sensibilità di combinare esigenze pratiche, tecniche con lo spirito di OperaCamion, questo spirito di facile accesso degli spettatori, diretto, immediato, senza veli, senza nascondere nulla (Anna Cremonini, interview by the author).

[24] l'investimento non si misura solo in termini di investimento economico, ma anche in termini di investimento culturale, di sviluppo di una comunità (Anna Cremonini, interview by the author).

[25] la sua facilità a inserirsi nel tessuto urbano (*ibid*).

Superintendent Giambrone stated in his interview was that OperaCamion "isn't just an operation of cultural promotion, but an intervention on the broader theme of inequalities[26]".

**Participation of the audience**: the different OperaCamion models had very different ways of interacting with the audience – and yet, a certain degree of audience participation was always embedded in the performances: in the case of OperaCamion Roma, the theatrical space simply was not given, if not by the mere presence of the truck-stage and of the orchestra – therefore, people directly contributed to the theatrical resource that was being created in the public square by bringing their own seat, forming the theatrical space. In this sense, people's presence did not just shape the theatrical space, overcoming the conventional association between the theatrical architecture and the performance, but also forming what Harvey defined a "relational space", which does not exist 'outside of the processes that define it' (Harvey 2004: 4).

The audience, in OperaCamion, is particularly free to perform their 'enactive audiency' identified by Walmsley: a "complex, multidimensional concept" embracing collective presence and emotional responses (Walmsley 2019: 199). The notion of audiency redefines audience participation by also accounting for the process of attributing meaning and of responding emotionally. Following Boorsma, on the one hand, and Caldwell, on the other, Walmsley stresses how the concept emphasizes "the sense-making qualities of co-creation rather than the production-based elements" (Walmsley 2018a: 202).

This new definition overcomes the traditional marketing-oriented approach of audience development, aiming at consumer retention, shifting the terms of the debate towards acknowledging the active role of being an audience member. Such engagement was indeed facilitated by the redefinition of behavioural boundaries implied in the OperaCamion project. To some of the interviewees, the free access to OperaCamion implied a greater willingness to participate – by subverting the standard economic postulate by which purchasing a ticket is an indicator of a person's preference, Pizzo believed that people "were not *required* to pay for a ticket – if they wish so, they come. OperaCamion bets on simple people's trust – which is us.[27]"

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[26] OperaCamion non è solo un'operazione di promozione culturale, è un intervento più ampio sul tema complessivo delle diseguaglianze (Francesco Giambrone, interview by the author)

[27] Chi mi viene a sentire non è tenuto a comprare un biglietto, se vuole viene, se vuole non viene, OperaCamion punta sulla fiducia delle persone semplici, che siamo noi (Oscar Pizzo, interview by the author).

**Artistic freedom and degrees of innovation.** The re-writing of behavioural rules did not apply solely to the audience. On the contrary, all the participants to the project (especially those who conceived or performed it), from the creative team to the singers, saw in OperaCamion an opportunity for appropriating the canon and for innovating both the operatic system and dramaturgic conventions. These two layers of innovation, i.e. of the operatic work itself and of its way of being presented to the public, cannot be disentangled and have resulted in the perception of a greater artistic freedom and willingness to improvise, within the musical boundaries that were prescribed by the work of art itself. This resulted in a more vivid interaction with the audience, perceived by both singers and actors.

This radical intervention on the canon of operatic interpretation was, in part, spontaneously generated by the setting and the atmosphere, and partly fostered by Cherstich's view of theatre – often resulting in a mixture of the two: the baritone Abraham Garcia recalled how Cherstich "insisted on us speaking out our *recitativi* [the spoken parts, often *a parte*] by addressing the audience – there [in the public square] it was much more immediate to interact that way. If you do that in a theatre it would drive some musical conductors crazy […] to some, [OperaCamion] is anti-theatrical – and, in facts, we were doing a bit of anti-theatre"[28].

According to the soprano Rafaela Albuquerque Faria, it is "the artistic freedom that we had and we usually do not have" that made the difference in the interpretation of the operatic works, while for the mezzo-soprano Sara Rocchi, "singing something out of the box was appropriate [to the square][29]".

## 4.4 Accessibility and artistic innovation
### *"OperaCamion is not an opera, it's a project": artistic and societal dimensions*
In their book on "*The social impact of the arts*" Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett provide a most exhaustive literature review on the history of these two views, often considered antipodean – and, in facts, treated as such in most of the literature. It was precisely Belfiore and Bennett who, however, invited to "move beyond the simplifications of advocacy" in order to look thoroughly at the way in which the artistic conception (the artwork) and the art world intertwine tightly (Belfiore, Bennett 2008: 18).

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[28] I recitativi sono i nostri "a parte", e Fabio spesso insisteva sul dirli al pubblico, e lì è molto più immediato questo interloquire in questo modo. Infatti se lo fai in teatro il "dire al pubblico un tuo pensiero" alcuni direttori musicali, alcuni registi potrebbero soffrire una schizofrenia – "a chi glielo dici? È una riflessione tua". Per alcuni è l'antiteatro, e infatti stavamo facendo un po' di antiteatro. (Abraham Garcia, interview by the author).
[29] Anche aver cantato per loro qualcosa "fuori dagli schemi" ci stava (Sara Rocchi, interview by the author).

The OperaCamion case might in fact be a good stance to illustrate how, in the real life of a project, these two dimensions can hardly be disentangled from one another. What emerges from the interview is that the project was born from the will of an artist. The conceptualisation of the idea was in facts developed by the stage director Fabio Cherstich, who then turned to the former Artistic Director of the Teatro Massimo, Oscar Pizzo, to see if there was any possibility of staging it. It was Pizzo who, then, introduced Cherstich to the other half of the creative duo behind the OperaCamion conception, Gianluigi Toccafondo. Theatres later found out that this also had advantages, such as a better positioning of the theatre within the city and their network (as remarked by the Administrative Director of Opera di Roma, it has brough much visibility and international appraisal).

More than as an artistic input, OperaCamion was born as an artistic *answer* to a question – or, in economic terms, to a need: how to reconcile opera theatre and citizens? This question has often been answered from a pure marketing perspective, i.e. through audience development strategies, aiming at eventually turn casual audiences (or non-audiences) into addicted "consumers" of theatre. According to Cherstich, the idea behind OperaCamion reversed this belief:

> I thought the solution was to bring theatre in a square, to give it a popular dimension,
> placing the performance on a truck that could easily tour public spaces for an audience
> not consisting of insiders and opera lovers. I wanted to claim a new role for opera: that
> of clever cultural *entertainment* [emphasis added][30].

Similarly, the mezzo-soprano Sara Rocchi stressed the difference between trying to bring audiences in and going to meet these audiences outside of the theatre[31].

The specific and insisted reference to public spaces, alongside with the will to tackle the issue of including new audiences, showed the director's explicit will to give a societal orientation to the project – and indirectly, to deal with issues of cultural democracy.

While he did not bear any direct reference to it, the artistic claim (*rivendicazione*) indicated by Cherstich is inscribed in the community theatre and community arts movement – deeply intertwining with the discourse on cultural democracy; starting in the 1970s, it aspired at challenging and subverting the economic and social order starting from cultural democracy.

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[30] ho pensato che la soluzione fosse portare il teatro in piazza, restituirgli una dimensione popolare, mettendo lo spettacolo sopra un camion che potesse girare agilmente negli spazi pubblici per un pubblico di non addetti ai lavori e di non melomani, rivendicando all'opera anche il ruolo di intrattenimento culturale e intelligente (Fabio Cherstich, interview by the author).
[31] non qualcosa che porta dentro, ma che porta fuori (Sara Rocchi, interview by the author).

As Clements (2016: 59) has pointed out, "from an artist's perspective, community arts deal with an artistic concern for society". Therefore, "The imagined betrayal of artistic standards by writers, academics and practitioners within the community arts movement also had a distinctly anti-institutional and political agenda" (Hadley, Belfiore 2018: 220).

The preëminence of the artistic value of the project with respect to the societal mission has been vivaciously claimed specifically by Cantù and Cremonini. The former has in facts stated that

> It is clearly a project with an oustanding artistic value, otherwise I would have never done it […] when we do projects of this sort we compete with [social] cooperatives, which sometimes use our artistic means improperly – people then cannot recognise the artistic value of that thing. If you invent a performance on mafia, it doesn't mean it will work. If the performance sucks, it sucks. To me, the artistic value matters more than anything else, for them it doesn't. It's a different approach[32].

This reflection resonates to Butcher's belief that 'If the poet fails to produce the proper pleasure, he fails in the specific function of his art. He may be good as a teacher, but as a poet or artist he is bad' (Belfiore, Bennett 2008: 108).

Cremonini, similarly, stated that:

> theatre must ask itself questions on how to expand towards society, but I believe the starting point ought to be artistic and cultural programming – not vice-versa. Theatre must not think "how do I 'open'", but rather "I want to achieve a goal, it's a quest, it's an evolution, the exploration of new territories, and in reason of this I can reach new audiences" […] it all depends on the idea of the social function of a cultural institution – cultural, and therefore social, and not social ergo cultural; they seem shades, but they are not.[33]

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[32] quando facciamo progetti di questo tipo entriamo in competizione con questa cosa, le cooperative, che talvolta usano i nostri mezzi artistici in maniera impropria, e la gente poi non capisce più il valore artistico della cosa. Non è che se ti inventi uno spettacolo che parla di mafia funziona. Se fa schifo lo spettacolo fa schifo. Per me il valore artistico viene prima di tutto, per loro no – è una differenza di approccio (Paolo Cantù, interview by the author).

[33] Il teatro deve porsi questi interrogativi su come allargarsi rispetto alla società etc, e secondo me lo può fare a partire da una progettazione artistico-culturale – e non il contrario. Il teatro non deve pensare "come faccio ad aprire, ma voglio fare questo perché è un obiettivo, una ricerca, una crescita, un'esplorazione di terreni nuovi, e in virtù di questo io posso accedere a una platea più ampia […] dall'idea che hai di una funzione sociale, di una istituzione culturale – culturale e di conseguenza sociale, non sociale *ergo* culturale, sembrano sfumature ma non lo sono (Anna Cremonini, , interview by the author).

In spite of her strong prioritising of artistic objectives, Cremonini as well ended up acknowledging in the interview that the social dimension and the specific setting of the project was what gave it its distinct visual mark:

> There was an adaptability which also transferred in the spirit with which OperaCamion addressed its audience. This was the great strength we were able to imprint on the project, which coincided with the visual strength it had (Toccafondo's visual mark, Cherstich's ability to organise it onstage), and that was also part of the vision, there was a magical coincidence of all these elements that contributed to making this experience special.[34]

One of the singers seemed bothered by the societal dimension of OperaCamion, at least when the project assumed the more participative shape of the Danisinni project – in which neighbours were casted as the choir. "When professionals come into a square, this is much more important than working with amateurs[35]".

Cherstich, on the contrary, was firmly convinced of the artistic value of the societal dimension of the project. He regarded the participative experiment in Danisinni it as an experience of empowerment which he considered fully professional: 'What we did was not an experience of rehabilitaton: they came to rehearsals, I gave them stage directions, I got angry, I had them rehearse until they were tired, and then sent them home.'[36]

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[34] C'è stato uno spirito di adattamento che si trasferiva anche nello spirito con cui OperaCamion si rivolgeva al pubblico. Questa è la grande forza che siamo riusciti a imprimere al progetto, che coincideva anche con la forza visiva che aveva operacamion, il segno visivo di Toccafondo, la capacità di organizzarlo nello spazio di Fabio Cherstich – anche quello faceva parte di questa visione, lì c'è stata una magica coincidenza di tutti questi elementi che hanno contribuito a rendere questa esperienza speciale (*ibid.*)

[35] quando vengono dei professionisti in piazza, che è molto più importante del processo di lavorare con gli amatori… secondo me questo è più importante (Abraham Garcia, interview by the author).

[36] Per me l'esperienza che abbiamo fatto è l'esperienza non riabilitativa: venivano alle prove, gli davo le indicazioni, mi incazzavo, li facevo provare finché erano stanchi, li mandavo a casa quando erano stanchi (Fabio Cherstich, interview by the author).

Figure 21. Fabio Cherstich giving stage directions during the rehearsals of *La Cenerentola di Danisinni* in Palermo © Rosellina Garbo 2019, courtesy of Teatro Massimo di Palermo

While the singers' point of view requires to be accounted for, this perspective remains isolated among the collected testimonies. One of the actors involved stated, on the contrary, that sometimes, the professionals' presumption to 'impose' their professionalism over the performance went to the detriment of its success: "when the institution provided the most professional musicians it took away so much more", bearing reference to the difference in attitude, motivations and willingness to contribute of seasoned musicians with respect to younger cast members and young orchestral musicians. "It put on a plate the musical *bravura* of 30 years in an orchestra, on the one hand, and beginners, on the other – yet, the spirit was entirely different"[37].

At least within the OperaCamion project, therefore, it could be said that the balance of artistic and societal is constantly shifting and depends on each actor's prioritising of one or the other; while for the artistic director and the project coordinator the societal dimension was, if not a positive externality, a derivation of the artistic validity of the project: for the stage director the two seem to run in parallel, equally contributing to the success of the project. In the case of Reggio Emilia, OperaCamion played the delicate role of mediator between the city space and its citizens after COVID-dictated restrictions. According to

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[37] era mettere sulla bilancia la bravura musicale dell'esperienza di 30 anni in orchestra e degli esordienti, però lo spirito era completamente diverso (Valeria Almerighi, interview by the author).

Cantù, such role helped melomaniacs 'tolerate' the innovativeness of the work: 'Our super-aficionados came, but they understood the purpose of it. They weren't there to listen to a perfect opera, that opera meant 'let's hug and start again'[38].

The two dimensions, therefore, are again difficult to distinguish: the artwork was adapted to the different setting, and the musical dimension, which is usually (and understandably) at the forefront of the operatic reproduction, was somehow subject to the setting in which it was performed, and to the greater goal of addressing a new audience in a new space.

Cherstich pointed out that "OperaCamion is not an opera, it's a project", and that no opera critic ever came to the peripheries to attend OperaCamion. "Critics write about OperaCamion in the *cultural* [emphasis added] sections of magazines and newspapers, not into the 'performances' section". He then adds, "because it is not a performance. To put Mozart onstage was all about the square"[39]. The utter need to innovate the relationship between theatre and the urban grid, to increase the well-being of citizens, was strongly perceived by all the participants, and most of the interviewees shared views on how OperaCamion fitted the broader necessity to intervene on inequalities. In the words of Cremonini "the topic of cohesion in cities is crucial in the Western world, and the relationship between centre and periphery is of paramount importance[40]".

As the words of Cherstich highlight, OperaCamion addressed the issue of cohesion and of redesigning the centre-periphery dynamics of the cultural offer from a spatial point of view: first, by performing in public squares, i.e. in open spaces whose historical accessibility is well recorded; second, by performing in peripheries, thus subverting the logics of the centre-periphery dichotomy, which is particularly persistent within highbrow arts. "It's about new theatre and new audiences", Cherstich reasserts.

The funding of the project from the part of the Municipality of Palermo recognized the salience of the project in tackling this issue. According to the Superintendent Giambrone,

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[38] Sono venuti i nostri super affezionati, ma hanno capito l'intenzione. Era un "abbracciamoci e ripartiamo", non erano lì per sentire l'opera perfetta.
[39] Si parla di Operacamion sulle pagine di cultura, costume, non nelle pagine di spettacoli, perché non è uno spettacolo. Mettere in scena Mozart era la piazza, l'intervista alle persone… nessuno in Italia ci è arrivato (*ibid*).
[40] Il tema delle coesioni delle città è un tema stringente in tutto l'Occidente, il rapporto fra centro e periferia è di fondamentale importanza (Cremonini, interview by the author).

the administration financed the project by drawing from specific funds which concern *social* activities, and not *cultural* ones [emphasis added]. It acknowledges the high social value of this intervention for the territory and for the community[41].

The coincidence between the public square and the performance, and the impossibility to "enclose" OperaCamion in the taxonomical grid of arts categories, has a twofold corollary: on the one hand, it speaks of the site-specificity of the project (which, in facts, has assumed different connotations in the cities in which it was performed); on the other, of the irreducibly social dimension of a project which challenges the conventional spatial distribution and the consumption patterns of opera, and bonds the theatre to the city.

According to Cremonini, the new management of TOR (marked by the arrival of the current Superintendent, Carlo Fuortes, in 2013) allowed OperaCamion to happen and "opened" the theatre to the city of Rome – "changing its cultural programming, and displaying an ability to penetrate city and society through communication and planning[42]". According to Giambrone, cooperation with the Municipality was possible because of "a common vision between the administration, the major, the theatre, its superintendent – two communities working together, which share a common vision of the city[43]".

All the interviewees perceived OperaCamion as part of an "opening up" the theatre to the city and to society. Cremonin, Pizzo and Cantù stressed the fact that the project was not aimed at ultimately disrupting opera as a form of art; nor did it presume that opera theatres as public buildings should cease being the primary place for attending performances; yet they emphasised that OperaCamion had the power to make access easier and to convey a message for the citizens, in a way which would not have been possible otherwise – according to Pizzo, the project was much needed "because entering a theatre, today, is complicated" because of the behavioural and cultural barriers to access. Cantù, specifically, indicated his motivation of staging OperaCamion right in front of the theatre in September 2020 to "hug the city" (*un abbraccio alla città*).

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[41]L'amministrazione comunale alcuni di questi progetti li ha anche finanziati attingendo a fondi di una legge, la 285, che riguarda gli interventi di attività sociali, non culturali, riconoscendo l'alto valore sociale di investimento sul territorio e sulla comunità di questi interventi di tipo culturale. (Giambrone, interview by the author)

[42]questa nuova gestione del Teatro dell'Opera ha aperto, ha aperto le porte del teatro Costanzi, ha cambiato la natura del contenuto, non ha solo aperto le porte, ha avuto una capacità di penetrazione nella città e nella società tramite la comunicazione, la progettualità(Cremonini, interview by the author)

[43] una grande coincidenza di veduta, di visione fra l'amministrazione comunale, il suo sindaco, il teatro e il suo sovrintendente, sono due comunità che lavorano insieme, che hanno una comune visione di città (Giambrone, interview by the author).

The will to reflect on the meaning of theatre for a society and to actively contribute to the mitigation of urban decay, was the motivational *fil rouge* of the involved actors. The Superintendent of Teatro Massimo di Palermo speaks of OperaCamion as "not just an operation aimed at promoting culture, but a broader intervention on the theme of inequalities" (see note 24). He went on by saying that "It was a deep, strong intervention, of great social impact, because it gives back the role, strength, meaning and significance to what a theatre can do in a community" and that it "strengthened the relationship between the theatre and the city, it built relational dynamics between people and the city"[44]. Cherstich, analogously, believes in the disruptive potential of a project such as that of OperaCamion in terms of what opera theatre can (and needs to) be: "it was a change of direction and of thought for the involved institutions which supported the project, with respect to what opera theatre can be[45]". Cremonini highlights that the participants perceived the necessity "of an opening in the relationship between society with opera, which is still perceived as an unapproachable, self-referential temple[46]". Even more incisively, Fra' Mauro believed that it eventually became

> a path which gave dignity and value not only to the place [Danisinni], but to art itself: opera is inscribed in theatre, but it can also be done in public squares, without borders, without barriers, offering itself to every social class and every culture.[47]

Also Pizzo acknowledges that "yes, it's an opera, but its significance is a lot more important than mere listening [to the opera]"[48]. There was, therefore, a profound link between the artistic output and the vision of theatre and city which generated this output. Such link made OperaCamion transcend from the dimension of operatic performance to become something distinct: a distinctiveness that is strongly perceived by all the interviewees and that was aptly epitomised by Cremonini: "OperaCamion is a *spirit* [emphasis added], a way of doing opera that belongs to that project[49]".

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[44] Questo intervento è molto profondo, molto forte, di grande impatto sociale, che restituisce ruolo, forza, senso e significato a quel che un teatro può fare in una comunità (Giambrone, interview by the author).

[45] un cambio di rotta e di pensiero per le istituzioni coinvolte, che hanno sostenuto il progetto rispetto a quello che può anche essere il teatro dell'opera. (Cherstich, interview by the author).

[46] creare un'apertura all'interno del rapporto della società con l'opera lirica, che vive ancora questa sembianza di tempio irraggiungibile, autoreferenziale (Cremonini, interview by the author)

[47] È stato quindi un percorso che ha restituito dignità e valore non soltanto al luogo, ma anche all'arte, ovvero l'opera lirica, che sì, oggi si iscrive all'interno dei teatri, ma l'arte è fatta anche nelle piazze, senza confini, barriere, proponendosi a qualsiasi ceto sociale e culture (Fra' Mauro, interview by the author).

[48] È molto più importante una politica culturale che non un progetto culturale musicale. Sì, è un'opera, ma è molto importante il significato, più che l'ascolto di quell'opera (Oscar Pizzo, interview by the author).

[49] OperaCamion è uno spirito, un modo di fare opera, che appartiene a quel progetto lì (Cremonini, interview by the author).

## 4.5 Visions and motivations

*A project driven by necessity*

OperaCamion is said to originate from a need. This need is multi-layered and stratified, as the previous sections have illustrated, embedding an artistic and societal dimension.

The societal dimension of the project, in turn, embeds two layers: on the one hand, it is, in the words of Giambrone, an intervention on the theme of inequalities, thus addressing cultural democracy by redesigning accessibility through both economic and spatial elements: the gratuity of the performance and its position within the urban grid are the tools with which this objective is achieved. On the other, it addresses the artistic need to elaborate a new theatre for new audiences, thus ensuring the survival of the operatic heritage and creating new opportunities for opera theatre to serve a more diversified audience. The need to address inequality and cultural accessibility is matched with a driver towards the artistic innovation of the operatic canon in both form (the spaces in which opera is performed and experienced, the behavioural conventions associated with that spaces) and content (the "untouchable" repertoire). Similarly, Pizzo, bearing reference to the dimension of participation in OperaCamion, noted that such projects are "much needed" and must continue; Cherstich claims that the objective of OperaCamion is stronger than philology "because it is moved by a more relevant necessity[50]"; according to Cremonini: "OperaCamion has intercepted some problems, has interpreted a sense of widespread need, tied to the necessity to create an opening in the interaction between society and opera"[51]

The fact of being necessity-driven is all but uninfluential – first, because in domains such as the operatic one, such necessity is only blandly perceived, and is only identified with the need to attract new audiences, rather than to reflect broadly on the role of theatre within society and on its position within the urban sphere. Second, because the topic of commoning as a necessity has been interestingly explored by recent literature on the commons (and has been noted in 4.2). The association between commoning and necessity is more easily and more often made with respect to commons as physical resources, but in the OperaCamion case the practice of "commoning the theatrical resource" between the audience and the participants appears as a necessary stance in opposition to conventional modes of theatre production and fruition, in that the commoning modalities of OperaCamion address some

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[50] L'obiettivo di operacamion è più forte rispetto alla filologicità dell'opera, è spinto da una necessità più importante (Cherstich, interview by the author).

[51] OperaCamion ha intercettato una serie di problematiche, ha interpretato uno spirito di necessità diffusa, legata sicuramente al fatto che occorresse creare un'apertura all'interno del rapporto della società con l'opera lirica (Cremonini, interview by the author).

fundamental issues such as cultural democracy and urban democracy, in which necessity is multi-faceted, and is both material and artistic: going beyond "buying and selling" a theatrical product, it places relations at the heart of the project.

In a time in which theatres are timidly reopening after a tragic year of closure due to COVID, where institutions have attempted to make up for absence and physical proximity via streaming services, this necessity is even more vividly perceived: the ill consequences of the COVID crisis on society, on the one hand, and the structural distance between theatres and their audiences, on the other, has made the search for alternatives even more necessary. Some of the interviewees remarked that OperaCamion could represent a feasible modality to mitigate people's isolation and to bring theatres back to their public role after a year of silence; however, interviewees also believed that this option would not even be taken into account by theatres because of its unorthodoxy – and because the digital modality would be an easier option.

### *Willingness to contribute and artistic freedom*
The analysis carried out in the previous sections has highlighted the tight interplay between artistic innovation and cultural democracy in the OperaCamion project, and the common vision about the role of theatre in the city shared by the "core community" of participants.

Willingness to contribute had a twofold dimension: one consisted of going materially beyond one's assigned tasks, in order to partake actively, willingly (and joyfully, according to most participants) to the project. They contributed to enacting the shared ecosystem that was OperaCamion; the other, of a greater possibility to contribute to the theatrical resource, which was treated as a matter in constant evolution. The adaptability of the 'core' OperaCamion community was strongly emphasised by most interviewees – by Cremonini, for whom "There was an adaptability which also transferred in the spirit with which OperaCamion addressed its audience[52]".

Sara Rocchi provides a very lively hypotyposis of the moment before the performances, describing the spontaneity and adaptability of the cast as well as their settling in the environment, interacting with the people:

> We changed clothes in the open air, I had this state-of-nature moment with the sound technician… it was the freshness of all that, it seemed a local theatre performance – it was beautiful, getting dressed in the truck, the orchestra rehearsing here and there,

[52] See note 21.

becoming friends with the barista because you got there earlier, you would take a break while chatting with them about the upcoming performance.[53]

This adaptability, combined to the involvement of OperaCamion's core community, was noted by Toccafondo as well: "we were friends, they were lovely people, the collaborators, the singers – all young people from "Fabbrica" – they were willing to pass under a trapdoor, dress up in random ways[54]". Cherstich recalls that "the orchestra was young, they were willing to contribute, we had fun[55]". This is what produced a choral work: "It was not just the work of two [of Cherstich and Toccafondo], everyone gave something, everyone did something *more* [emphasis added]"[56].

Several contributors to OperaCamion indicated that they (or others) invested their time and energies and devoted their commitment to the project without expecting a monetary return – for the beauty of the project or for their belief in the mission: it was the case of Cherstich who, according to Pizzo, "took a loss, but he did it because that thing mattered, going *to* children so that they can listen to *Il barbiere di Siviglia* matters"[57].

More generally, while also acknowledging some frictions with the theatrical administration, the cast unanimously declared that they would have been willing to do it for free. Some participants even stated the life-changing nature of OperaCamion. According to Valeria Almerighi,

> This is among the most beautiful things I did in my entire life. It was so beautiful it created some sort of addiction. Every time it ended I felt like… not like mourning, but every time I hoped it would happen again, and in facts every year it happened again[58].

Rocchi:

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[53]questo cambiarsi all'aria aperta, a Labaro avevo costume e reggiseno cuciti insieme, ho avuto questo momento-natura io, il microfonista e la costumista… Era la freschezza di tutte queste cose, che manco in parrocchia farei una cosa del genere, era una cosa bella, cambiarsi dentro il camion che porta il camion… L'orchestra che prova a destra e sinistra, diventare amico del barista perché sei lì in anticipo, fai merenda, chiacchieri con loro sullo spettacolo della sera (Sara Rocchi, interview by the author).

[54] eravamo degli amici, persone piacevoli, collaboratori, i cantanti erano fantastici, tutti i giovani di Fabbrica, disponibili a passare sotto una botola, stare sbracciati.... (Toccafondo, interview by the author).

[55] L'orchestra era giovane, i cantanti erano giovani, avevano voglia di fare, ci siam divertiti (Cherstich, interview by the author).

[56] Penso che non è solo una cosa a due, è una cosa in cui tutti hanno dato qualcosa, tutti hanno fatto di più (Toccafondo, interview by the author).

[57]mica ci ha guadagnato, l'ha fatto perché è un servizio importante, andare dai bambini a fargli sentire il Barbiere di Siviglia è importante (Pizzo, interview by the author).

[58] è una cosa talmente bella che creava quasi una volta di dipendenza. Ogni volta che finiva io vivevo un piccolo… non dico un lutto, ogni volta speravo che riaccadesse, e infatti ogni anno riaccadeva (Almerighi, interview by the author).

when they called me from Reggio Emilia I didn't think twice, and I would have done it for free – that's how much I believe in it. It's all heart. [59] […] if I could turn OperaCamion into my career I would do that[60]

The mezzo-soprano Reut Ventorero, showing the same committed enthusiasm while also marking the distance from the peripheral community who felt insulted in their professionalism by the unconventional nature of OperaCamion:

I told Fabio: if you found a theatre company, I'll go where you go. Not all singers thought this way, it depends on your personality, but to me, it was much more important to sing this way than in Opera di Roma – I'd rather have OperaCamion every night.[61]

While most of these actions were somehow naturally inscribed in what Cremonini has called the "spirit" of OperaCamion, the general atmosphere of sharing and cooperating resulted in more specific episodes of gratuitous generosity. Ventorero remembered that "when I was warming up, kids would come and ask me 'how do you do that? Can you sing us an aria?'; and I remember sitting under a tree and singing for them"[62] Toccafondo noted how he "only figured out in the end that the two technicians we had did a lot more than they were supposed to do contractually[63]". Valeria Almerighi, speaking about Toccafondo himself, recalled that "he spent the entire afternoon under the sun to collect glass shreds in the [Danisinni] Farm. We all began collecting the shreds…"[64]

This dimension is particularly relevant for the hypothesis of the research on the theatre commons, because it allows to understand the core community as a community of commoners (and not simply of "workers") for whom theatre is a good to be shared with members of the theatrical community and to be co-produced with others (including the audience or the Danisinni commoners). These considerations echo Hughes' reflections on the theatrical commons and on the "passionate amateur, who makes and attends theatre as

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[59] quando mi hanno chiamato quest'estate non ci ho pensato due volte a dire di no, l'avrei fatto anche gratis, per quanto credo a questa cosa. È tutto cuore. (Rocchi, interview by the author).

[60] Se io potessi fare della mia vita OperaCamion lo farei (*ibid*).

[61] se tu apri una compagnia io vado ovunque vai". Non sono tutti i cantanti che hanno pensato così, dipende dal tuo carattere, per me era molto più interessante cantare così che all'Opera di Roma. Preferirei OperaCamion tutte le sere (Ventorero, interview by the author).

[62] Era molto bello il contatto, anche quando facevo il riscaldamento sono venuti, mi chiedevano "come fai? Ci puoi cantare l'aria?". E io mi ricordo sotto l'albero a cantare per loro. (*ibid*).

[63] Io ho capito solo verso la fine che i due attrezzisti che avevamo, che hanno fatto molte più cose di quante dovessero fare per contratto. (Toccafondo, interview by the author).

[64] Gianluigi Toccafondo che ha passato l'intero pomeriggio sotto il sole a raccogliere i vetri rotti da per terra in questa fattoria. Ci siamo messi tutti a raccogliere i vetri… (Almerighi, interview by the author).

an act of love, and of theatre as a place to think disruptively about work and time" (Hughes: 2017: 80).

This commoning practice pushed the artists towards a greater interaction with the audience – which, in turn, was more involved in the performance. The greater interaction and stronger involvement were the product of the greater artistic freedom perceived by the artists due to the informality of the setting, of their stronger willingness to contribute (in the light of this artistic freedom) and of a spatial factor – the diminished distance between the stage and the audience was a banal, yet determinant factor. As emphasized by Rocchi:

> something you don't always do in a theatre is looking people in the eyes, dedicating 'it' to someone particularly involved or curious – and in that moment you can donate something to her, make her become part of it.[65]

For what concerns OperaCamion as an enabling setting, both onstage and during the rehearsals, the interviewees all agreed on the positive effects it had on artistic freedom and on the possibility of the performers to contribute more intensively to the theatrical resource. Cherstich:

> "opera is untouchable", they say – we cut Shakespeare, Chechov, but opera has been cut or adapted so rarely – yet we also did that, we allowed ourselves to force it to meet the audience, to cut Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, to adapt *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*… This used to be done for children's *matinées*, but we applied it to every audience – without spoiling the musical dimension, but also without establishing it as the main aspect.[66]

Garcia recalls that, in one of the towns struck by the earthquake,

> the power unexpectedly went out during the *recitativo* which said "*tutto m'ha rotto! Sei piatti, otto bicchieri…*" [He has broken everything, six plates, eight glasses…] and I added "and the electric system!". From that moment on the audience began laughing and

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[65] una cosa che puoi fare e che in teatro spesso non fai è guardare la gente in faccia, poter dedicare a qualcuno, particolarmente coinvolto o curioso, e tu puoi "donare" in quel momento qualcosa, farlo diventare in questo senso parte (Rocchi, interview by the author).

[66] "l'opera non si tocca": noi tagliamo Shakespeare, Chechov, l'opera è stata tagliata o accorciata pochissime volte, noi abbiam fatto anche questo, ci siamo permessi la forzatura, per venire incontro al pubblico, di tagliare il Don Giovanni di Mozart, di adattare il Barbiere di Siviglia… questo di solito veniva fatto per il pubblico dei bambini, quindi in qualche modo si riservava al pubblico delle scuole per non appesantirlo, ma abbiamo applicato lo stesso principio a qualsiais pubblico, non andando a deturpare l'aspetto musicale, ma andando a non stabilirlo come aspetto principale. (Fabio Cherstich, interview by the author)

participating, as if they needed to break the fourth wall and become part of the performance[67].

Toccafondo provides a vivid description of what occurred during the rehearsals, on the fluidity of roles and on the vivacity with which new inputs were eventually brought onstage:

> It was a mix, the extras usually come and go, the choir does its part and that's all, but the actors brought something, and the singers brought something, and everything changed… Russo [one of the actors] made announcements during the rehearsals with a microphone which eventually became a stage prop, and Valeria [Almerighi] ended up singing her part. Also, last time in Reggio Emilia, with Manuel, our tenor… he used to get to rehearsals on his scooter, and what can you do, we decided to use it for its arrival onstage[68].

The greater artistic freedom had, therefore, a twofold result: one, mentioned by Rocchi, which was more immanent to the performance itself, and which consisted in creating a more immediate interaction with the audience and resulted in greater emotional participation for both performers and audiences. The other is a long-term externality, that is the progressive transformation of the operatic roles and conventions. Not only were the performers and the creators of the work better able to shape the theatrical resource that was brought onstage: in time, some of the actors changed their function to achieve a hybrid role, that acted and sung at the same time. This happening is not marginal, considered that, according to Almerighi and Toccafondo, it encountered institutional resistance face to the rigid taxonomies of the operatic roles. Almerighi's peroration of this transformative process is worth reporting:

> The institution struggles: when something is not comprised in a national contract or is not accounted for in the bureaucratic-administrative level, this thing must evolve based on a precedent; but it is never a bottom-up process, it must generate from the observation of evolving things. It might remain a monad, but it would be a waste. […] Another actor, Francesco, was less involved but he went through the same transformation… I'm not the only one who could do that, there are actors who could

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[67] Mi ricordo che fino a quel momento in cui non è saltata la luce non ci siamo messi a fare scherzi in diretta sul palcoscenico, c'era il recitativo che veniva dopo che diceva "e io aggiunsi *"e il sistema elettrico!"* da quel punto il pubblico ha iniziato a ridere, partecipare, come se avesse bisogno di rompere la barriera e diventare anch'essi partecipi dello spettacolo (Garcia, interview by the author).

[68] Era una mescolanza, i figuranti di solito partono, vanno a casa, il coro, fa il suo pezzo, fine, ma gli attori hanno apportato qualcosa, e i cantanti hanno apportato qualcosa, e tutto cambiava – c'era Francesco Russo che interveniva con un megafono che alla fine è diventato oggetto di scena, fino ad arrivare a Valeria che canta. Anche l'ultima volta a Reggio Emilia, con Manuel, il tenore che avevamo, lui arrivava sempre alle prove col monopattino e, che vuoi fare, glielo abbiamo fatto fare anche come ingresso di scena. Bello, una bella evoluzione da baraccone, da teatro da strada (Toccafondo, interview by the author).

vocalise some characters, work with the choir while staying silent, but in a more authorial, dramaturgic way, as singers could improve their acting. It would be beautiful if we could all become a Gypsy caravan… of course I would not reach high Fs, everyone sticks to what they know, but it would be great if we could defuse these definitions[69].

### *The emotional dimension of the project*

When referring to both the informality and the creativity of the OperaCamion atmosphere and setting, most of the interviewees used similar expressions, which bore reference to either a Gypsy atmosphere or to a caravan – or to both simultaneously, like Almerighi in the quoted passage above. More in general, the words used by the interviewees describe a precise emotional landscape which was shared among the particpants and with the audience:

**The Gypsy caravan.** It is worth noting that the Camion was not just an "easy" way to transport materials and set quickly the stage all around peripheries, but also a living metaphor of a new concept of theatre, mobile, freer and more spontaneous, and an enabler of human interactions both among the participants and between the participants and the audience. For Cherstich, this made the difference between his own OperaCamion work and the many imitations that followed – which "hid" the truck behind more typical theatrical vestments. According to Cherstich, this annulled the "rustic, wild, circus-like atmosphere which was so important"; Toccafondo remarks the "Gypsy atmosphere" and the "beautiful, circus-ish evolution of the project"; Rocchi and Cremonini compared it to a joyful "*sagra*" (the Italian *sagra* describes something a town festival, rustic and vivacious, occurring mostly in small scale settlements rather than in large cities, thus conveying the intimacy of the atmosphere).

**Beauty, joy, amusement.** The joyfulness of the project emerged critically from the interviews. Just like the "impacts" of the project on regeneration and on human reactivation (which will be dealt with shortly), this dimension is hardly quantifiable, and yet cannot be ignored merely because of the difficulty in seizing it. As has been noted earlier, both a dimension of necessity and of joy is present in the literature on the commons, underlying the motivations and the visions of commoners: Hughe's reference to Ridout's "passionate

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[69] L'istituzione fa fatica: quando una cosa non è compresa in un contratto nazionale, oppure non è prevista a livello burocratico-amministrativo, deve proprio accadere che si evolva in base a un precedente, però lì di solito non è mai dal basso che accade questo cambiamento, deve accadere dall'alto, deve accadere dall'osservazione che le cose cambiano. Potrebbe rimanere una monade, ma sarebbe molto brutto. Francesco Russo, un altro attore, c'è stato molto poco ma a livello di essenza di quel che ti sto dicendo… non sono l'unica che lo potrebbe fare, ci sono degli attori che potrebbero tranquillamente vocalizzare dei personaggi, lavorare con il coro anche restando muti, ma in modo molto più autoriale, drammaturgico, mi viene da dire, come allo stesso modo i cantanti potrebbero avere la possibilità di studiare di più sulla recitazione. Sarebbe veramente bello che si diventasse tutti un unico carrozzone in cui ovviamente io non ti sparo il la diesis perché le sedie nella piazza potrebbero spaccarsi. Ognuno ha studiato per il suo, però sarebbe molto bello, piano piano, disinnescare queste definizioni (Almerighi, interview by the author).

amateur" (with specific reference to a theatrical commons) has already been noted above; Han and Imamasa (2015: 91), quoting Kohso, conclude that

> Finding new uses for the city is not only a matter of how we organize and distribute resources, but fundamentally a matter of how we produce ourselves in relation to others […] Discovering new usages for the city, where a multiplicity of relationships among people is made possible, is the only way to resist the "purgatory of here and now" and forge happiness.

Cherstich recalled the comment of one member of the audience, who said that "he'd waited all his life to go to Caracalla[70], and in the end it was Caracalla that went to him[71]", adding this was "the most beautiful comment one ever addressed him". Almerighi, who went so far as to say that OperaCamion was "the most beautiful thing she did", noted how this beauty also conveyed joy and surprise, especially in children: "When they figured out it was an opera they were so happy… they couldn't believe that a truck opened and performed an opera. That's addictive for an actor, you wanted to open your window the day after and say 'I'll sing for you from my room'[72]"

**Magic, wonder.** The magic of OperaCamion was equally noted: interviewees referred to it as "magical spirit", "magical coincidence" (Cremonini), "the magic and *bravura*", "a dream" (Almerighi), while Cherstich defined it "moving".

**Caring, welcoming, trusting.** A fundamental dimension of care was involved in the project, which extended beyond making sure that the performance succeeded – it rather had to do with the togetherness of the project, and with the gift economy/willingness to contribute that has already been noted and that subtended to it. This care was practically enacted whenever the participants engaged beyond their assigned tasks – this engagement consisting of a wide range of gratuitous acts of care, from collecting shreds to singing under a tree; more broadly, in the words of Almerighi, 'just like when someone tells you "make yourself at home", and you are concerned with treating the house well, with taking care of it with love'[73]. The element of caretaking was also present in Brother Mauro's words when referring to the Danisinni project specifically: "taking care of the neighbourhood and the

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[70] Caracalla is the open-air setting of summer performances for Opera di Roma.
[71] Ho sempre voluto andare a Caracalla, e finalmente Caracalla è venuta da me (Cherstich, interview by the author).
[72] Quando poi capivano che era un'opera lirica erano di una felicità… non gli sembrava vero che un camion si aprisse con un'opera lirica; per questo creava dipendenza, volevi aprire la finestra il giorno dopo e dire "adesso vi faccio uno spettacolo in camera mia (Almerighi, interview by the author).
[73] come quando qualcuno ti dice "fai come se fossi a casa tua", e uno si occupa di trattare bene la casa, di prendersene cura con amore (*ibid*).

city", "taking care of the 'inner landscape' and of the 'external' [built] landscape", while Toccafondo perceived that the OperaCamion community was "taken care of" by the commoners.

Welcoming, which can be inscribed in the domain of caring, was mentioned multiple times by the interviewees, both in the active sense and in the sense of being welcomed (by the communities gathering in the square, by the Danisinni commoners). Fra' Mauro explained that "opera and other cultural works need a human and environmental context that welcomes them": meaning that, however generous and well-intentioned, cultural interventions in the urban space fail to produce sustainable and long-term effects without an enabling setting. The actors and singers perceived being "appreciated" and "welcomed" by the audience in Danisinni and in other peripheries, remarking the "beauty" and "intensity" of the audience's response to their presence. Pizzo's insistence on the dimension of trust and faith towards the participants and beneficiaries of the project can be inscribed in a similar relational attitude.

Care is largely present in commons literature: Euler (2018: 12) following Acksel et al. (2015), identifies commoning with "the creation of material abundance with the care for others and for nature". Artner and Schröer (2013), following Tronto (2008), postulates that "care should be seen as a prerequisite of one's citizenship status", and stresses the strong inter-connectedness of the "3 Cs": care, commons, citizenship. In the domain of cultural democracy, Gross and Wilson (2018), following Tronto (2013), link cultural democracy and the capabilities approach to development with a relational understanding of care, which is highly consistent with the way care is intended in the OperaCamion project, in which human relations were placed at the heart of the creative process.

Caring and commoning, as two inter-dependent concepts, additionally intertwine with urban regeneration and help understand the ways in which OperaCamion has contributed to it: as noted by Müller,

> Whenever residents are fully integrated in planning processes, the level of identification and responsibility with the object/resource increases. So people are more likely to continue to take care of their resource/neighborhood/park even after the completion of the planning process. (Müller 2015: 151)

**Simplicity, spontaneity.** A stress has already been placed on the informal dimension of OperaCamion, of its setting and of the interactions which were direct consequence of such

atmosphere. The interviewees all referred widely to the spontaneity and naturality of this informality, which created a fraternal and friendly environment. Cremonini remarked the "simplicity" with which the Camion addressed the square; Pizzo spoke of the "simplicity" of the OperaCamion people (referring to both audiences and participants); Cherstich, when describing the work with the Danisinni community, used the words "not induced, natural". Toccafondo spoke of the "clarity" with which OperaCamion was brought onstage, Rocchi of the "freshness and beauty" of rehearsing and dressing up in the open air, and Fra' Mauro spoke of the "spontaneous" citizenship that was involved in the project.

### *OperaCamion and cultural democracy: reconnecting the intangible heritage of opera to communities*

Among the needs that OperaCamion was created to address, in the view of most of the interviewed participants, is the dramatic gap of musical education which not only the school system, but the broader cultural infrastructure has created. Cultural heritage, and specifically the operatic one, is considered of a "high" sort, and conventionally appanage of a well-off niche. In this respect, OperaCamion seems to reflect one of the positions of cultural democracy as it has been recently conceptualised by Gross and Wilson (2018) as the "excellence and access" model – that is, of providing people with the opportunity to experience "great art". This label appears, however, quite restrictive when reflecting on the many dimensions in which OperaCamion brings "art" and "people" together: this is because it involved a radical rethinking of both the formats and spaces with which opera was brought in peripheries. As many of the statements above have indicated, the "OperaCamion people" perceived the obsolescence of the theatrical and operatic system as it is in the city: therefore, the project was not about bringing art to people, but rather re-designing the system from within to make it accessible.

In this respect, OperaCamion was an effort to bring people closer to their own heritage, filling the void created by the Italian educational system (which only poorly and badly accounts for musical education) and by a progressive distancing of institutions. Superintendent Giambrone noted, in this respect, that OperaCamion revived in Palermo the tradition of popular choirs, which allows people to acquire musical skills by making music together ("*fare musica insieme*"). Pizzo, more generally, denounces a deficiency in musical education, an illiteracy which OperaCamion seeks to address, adding that it brings the product of an opera theatre, a place which is made inaccessible by a series of barriers, which he mentioned in distinct passages of his interview: the economic one ("it costs so much that

nobody goes there anymore [74]"), the physical and perceptual ("entering a theatre is complicated, you feel like you are not cultivated enough to understand[75]"). To Rocchi, "bringing opera rather than another genre meant to make it enjoyable to those who might have never thought they could like it[76]".

As a consequence, OperaCamion was more than a simple act of indoctrination from the part of external authorities. Nor, however, does OperaCamion perfectly fit the definition of community arts as it has been theorised in the XX century – it being "Any form or work of art that emerges from a community and consciously seeks to increase the social economic and political power of that community" (Knight and Schwarzman 2005 in Clements 2016: *ibid*): OperaCamion did not originate from a bottom-up stance, and even though opera theatre can be regarded as a popular form of art (as also Gramsci did[77]), it is today widely regarded as niche entertainment.

What is interesting to observe, therefore, in the OperaCamion project, is the overcoming of two dichotomies; the first separates "highbrow" from "lowbrow" culture: as the lively engagement of audiences and the high popularity of the project have demonstrated, what makes a form of art accessible is a formal, and not a content-related problem: spaces and canons matter in making opera a popular form of entertainment. While this has been historically demonstrated, very few studies have addressed the problem of formal and spatial barriers to theatre (and to opera in particular), and OperaCamion represent a step towards this direction. The second dichotomy is the one that divides planning and participation as two apparently incompatible dimensions of cultural policy. The OperaCamion project appears as an enabling environment in which different layers of governance operate so as to create an enabling ecosystem: where the institution is able to bridge the distance from society and the urban fabric and to cooperate with other territorial actors, where artists are freer to express themselves and where the audience becomes co-producer of the theatrical space and the artistic work at the same time. In other words, OperaCamion potentially represents a different type of urban commons, one which Iaione has called a "collaborative ecosystem" (Iaione 2015: 170).

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[74]"Costa talmente tanto che non ci va più nessuno, quindi in qualche modo è importante" (Pizzo, interview by the author).
[75] Entrare in un teatro è complicato, non solo per i costi, perché senti di non avere la cultura per capire queste cose (*ibid*).
[76] portare l'opera piuttosto che un certo tipo di musica significa renderla fruibile a chi magari non aveva neanche pensato che gli potesse piacere (Rocchi, interview by the author).
[77] "In Italy music has somehow replaces the novel in popular culture, and musical geniuses have enjoyed the popularity that novelists never had". (Gramsci 1991: 79). Translation by the author.

## 4.6 Systemic issues and conflict
### *Funding*

OperaCamion presented a remarkable financial challenge: theatres decided to make it free for audiences literally at all costs. This meant that they waged the cost of the production without direct Ministerial support, and without the possibility of covering part of those costs with ticketing. The FUS (Fondo Unico per lo Spettacolo), the Italian Fund for the Performing Arts, was not allocated to the OperaCamion performance. The reason was quite paradoxical: OperaCamion did not produce tickets, its output was not quantified – therefore, according to the metrics of the Ministry, it barely existed. The paradox is appalling, as it is precisely those performances which lack ticket revenues for the sake of economic accessibility would require greater public support. Quantitative parameters, such as the number of musicians in the orchestra, and the number of seats in the theatre, are still the dominant component in the Ministry's evaluation (Sabatini, Trimarchi 2019).

According to Cremonini, the evaluation of artistic quality from the part of the appointed committee made up for this deficiency, while Cantù noted that the problem can somehow be avoided by producing "fake" tickets. Yet, as Cantù himself noted, "it is absurd that *escamotages* are needed to receive funds for something which produces value, and which has a cost[78]".

The literature around the value of heritage has become wider in recent years and, in the particular case of Italy, has brought to the surface a distorted interpretation of such value: as noted by Borchi (2019), Italian cultural heritage was seen as a material resource to extract and monetize – as the Country's 'gold' and 'oil'. This extractivist approach was matched with an institution-oriented rather than a project-oriented view (Balestra, Malaguti 2000), producing a static view of heritage preservation and associating cultural value with its economic proxy – money. Projects such as OperaCamion cannot be evaluated according to conventional logics, but call for new indicators, in which artistic quality and creative experimentation are matched with the ability to better permeate the city and to address social issues.

The three theatres, therefore, waged the costs of the OperaCamion project almost solely by relying on their budgets; some funds were eventually allocated by other public bodies, with some interesting observations to be made.

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[78] è assurdo che sia un escamotage per fare una cosa che ha un valore e che ha un costo (Cantù, interview by the author).

Opera di Roma, for instance, brought onstage the greatest number of performances, thus occurring in greater costs; some funds were nonetheless obtained with the tournée in those towns in central Italy that were struck by the earthquake. In the case of Teatri di Reggio Emilia, which staged OperaCamion during the COVID crisis, the theatre was able to use funds from the 2020 FUS allocation. These funds, in facts, were almost unused due to the halt to the whole performing arts sector during the pandemic. The Ministry, in facts, left unchanged the sums allocated to each theatre from the previous year to prevent theatres from economic collapse. The theatre additionally received a small amount of Municipal funds.

Teatro Massimo in Palermo did not just cover the costs of the operatic production: when OperaCamion was transformed into a participative project for the Danisinni community, it also incurred some unconventional costs for the upkeep and the physical regeneration of some spaces (more on which will be said later). Some funds were eventually obtained from the Municipality through Law 285 of 1997, which allocated funds to local administrations for societal activities. In addition to this, the theatre collected private donations using the ArtBonus Law, which in 2014 introduced tax reliefs for those donating to the arts, while a law in 2017 extended these benefits to donations to Italian opera theatres. According to the Superintendent, the theatre uses private donations to finance projects which public funding wouldn't recognise – which, again, testifies for the obsolescence of the performing arts funding regulations.

### Internal conflict and resistance

The strong common vision implied a greater willingness to contribute from the part of those actively involved in the realisation of the project: this "core community" shared visions and values, and an understanding of opera theatre that went beyond conventional views and beyond conventional spaces; as a consequence, they were willing to fulfill roles and tasks that went beyond the ones they had been assigned. Willingness to contribute was determined by motivation: when this motivation was absent, a fracture was created between 'core' and 'peripheral' community – the former being committed to the different socio-cultural layers of the project, and the latter detaching themselves from its radically innovative aspects. This determined a strong polarization between those who were committed to the project and those who weren't. This, in turn, resulted in conflicts with the more "peripheral" community, especially singers and musicians who, not sharing this view, felt almost offended by the project's detachment from theatrical artistic standards and, consequently, felt less motivated to participate to the project; in some cases, they even obstructed it explicitly. The distinction

between "core" and "peripheral" community is also present in the literature on the commons, specifically the cultural commons, in which Bertacchini et al. (2012) specify that

> The production of a given culture by the agents belonging to the "core" generates positive externalities that increase the value of the collective good. In the peripheral zone, instead, we can observe opportunistic behavior by agents that in the absence of some enforcement mechanism can exploit the collective good, but only marginally contribute to its production (Bertacchini et al. 2012: 8).

Rather than exploiting the resource (as in Bertacchini's definition), the peripheral community adopted an attitude which Ostrom, when speaking of communities of commoners, defined as "noncompliant", as they abstained from contributing *actively* to the project: involvement was passive, and somehow imposed by the theatrical authority. In this respect, the interviewees remarked the crucial importance of "working with the right people". Fra' Mauro recalls the difficulty of inducing musicians from the theatre to play in the Danisinni Farm, acknowledging that "it was unprecedented for them as well". A paradigmatic example was provided by what Almerighi called "strike of the gnats": during the last day of rehearsals (the only one in which the singers got to perform with the orchestra before the performance), the orchestra began complaining about the video animations in the backdrop of the stage, which were picturing gnats moving frantically. They abandoned the rehearsals. Almerighi, paraphrasing her thoughts on that day: "you wanted to tell them 'Fuck off, you don't really believe in this project', you wanted to share this only with the people who truly believed in it, and to part from those who did not"[79].

The line was not, therefore, sharply drawn between groups of stakeholders: some artists were more committed than others, young musicians were more adaptable and willing than professional ones. Moreover, the audience was not always happy. The singers recalled that rehearsals in Bologna were interrupted by a man screaming from his balcony that he had to go to work the day after; in Reggio Emilia, the audience was quite cold during the first performance, while it reacted with liveliness the night after – "as if it was the same audience from the previous night, but this time they got the jokes", García jokes.

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[79]"Non ci credete veramente in quest'operazione, ti viene voglia di condividerla con chi ci crede tanto e di separarti da chi non ci crede" (*ibid.*)
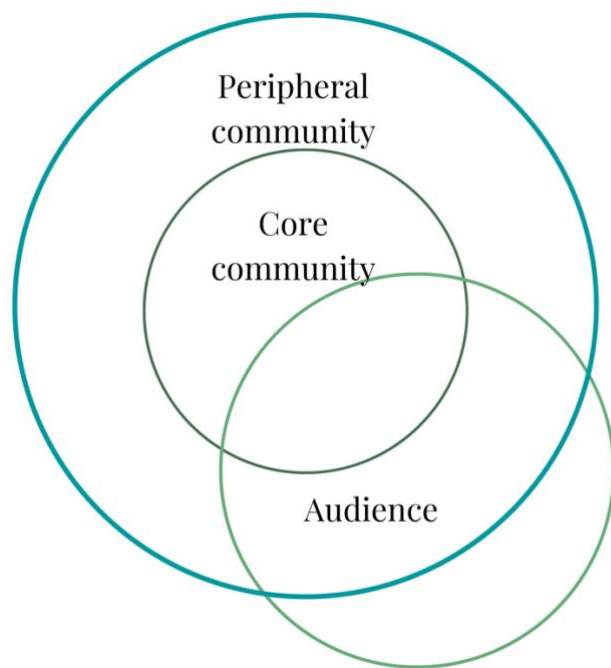
Figure 23. The core-periphery interplay in OperaCamion, potentially expandable to the theatrical commons, if properly outfitted in a setting in which the audience can become a committed community in the production of the theatrical resource.

Resistance also came from the theatrical institutions involved in the project. Pizzo complained that he had to "climb mountains all by himself" and that "he had to clash with the classical production of a traditional theatre", complaining about the "medieval hierarchy" (*gerarchia medievale*) of the theatre. Cherstich, who was firm in his plan to disrupt the system from within, quite proudly remarked that he was able to

> force the orchestra syndicates to have the musicians rehearse in cow dung... it was something so necessary, that if they refused to do it they would have looked like idiots, because I could have given a call to a journalist to tell them that they refused to play with forty amateurs in a mafia-confiscated land, I would have made a scene.[80]

Another dimension of conflict triggered by OperaCamion was that with conventional operatic audiences, namely opera critics and *loggionisti*[81]. Cherstich complained that no opera critic ever came to see OperaCamion - "because they are too attached to their rites". As a counterpart, he mentioned that the New York Times dedicated an article to OperaCamion

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[80] Anche obbligare in qualche modo i sindacati dell'orchestra a far suonare gli orchestranti in mezzo allo sterco... sei di fronte a una cosa così necessaria che se ti rifiuti fai una figura di merda megagalattica,perché se io alzo il telefono e chiamo un giornalista per dirgli che si sono rifiutati di suonare con quaranta amatoriali in un terreno confiscato alla mafia succede un casino (Cherstich, interview by the author)

[81] The traditionalist operagoers. The name comes from the word *loggione*, theatres' upper gallery, where they would stand, expressing their stern judgements on the performance.

in its cultural section, and not in the one devoted solely to the performing arts, implying that the project was able to attract people from outside the operatic world, rather than those who consider themselves initiated to it. Also Cantù in Reggio Emilia noted this antagonism from the operatic élite with reference to the *loggionisti*, stating that "a part of Reggio's melomaniacs would have pissed me off, because that performance isn't perfect; knowing I had a demanding audience I had to be very careful in doing that[82]".

## 4.7 Participation and impacts

Among the key dimensions of the OperaCamion project, for the organizers and to the purposes of this research, is participation: specifically, how the inclusion of audiences in mechanisms of co-production was able to reactivate (even temporarily) communities and to revitalise abandoned public spaces. While the section 4.5 focused on the effects of participation and of greater audience involvement on the "art" of OperaCamion, this section analyses how participation to an artistic project produced impacts on the communities which were touched, to various degrees, by OperaCamion.

The definition of impact in the artistic sector is both blurry and problematic. It is blurry because the value and the benefits produced by the arts and culture in society are hard to quantify – and sometimes they need not be quantified at all, because they escape quantitative logics (Throsby 2001; Klamer 2016). It is problematic for a twofold reason. First, because the arts have often been instrumentalised to fulfil social and/or economic objectives (Belfiore, Bennett 2008). Second, because the contribution of the cultural and creative sectors to the urban economy has shown in time some sinister downsides, as section 1.4 has illustrated.

The impacts described in this section do not fall into the category of measurable outcomes (and are, in facts, unaccounted for by public funding) nor result from massive infrastructural investments which are able to reshape poor neighbourhoods. This can be considered at a time a limitation and an advantage: OperaCamion did not produce lasting effects – at least, not in most cases. However, its marginality with respect to the conventional programming of the cultural institutions helped open a breach in the operatic system, producing changes in the modes of production and challenging the rigidity of roles; it produced an alternative,

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[82]sapevo che una parte dei melomani reggiani mi avrebbe rotto le palle, perché non è perfetto quello spettacolo; avendo un pubblico molto esigente dovevo stare molto attento nel farlo (Cantù, interview by the author).

even for a glimpse of time, for people who would not have otherwise benefitted from such cultural offer, and who would not have otherwise used those abandoned spaces.

It is in this framework that the impacts of the project are to be interpreted.

**Transformation of urban voids.** Most of the interventions in public spaces were temporary, and had the effect of momentarily revitalizing the squares. In the Danisinni case, instead, these transformations actually contributed to the physical maintenance and enhancement of the commons environment. As Cherstich notes,

> When the theatre arrives [in peripheries], it fixes something which had been uncultivated for years: manholes, potholes… worst case scenario, even though it did not leave a permanent mark, it left in people a nice memory - and, for a month and a half, an abandoned neighbourhood had functioning lights and mown grass[83].

Therefore, the theatre introduced, even if for a brief moment, a dimension of care in the neighbourhood, to which the whole OperaCamion team contributed. The greater spatial transformations, however, did not occur at the physical and tangible level, but rather at the social one: the performance transformed the square into an ecosystem where relations were formed and sociability was elicited. In Danisinni, as has been mentioned earlier, changes were more structural and concerned the Farm where most of the commoners' activities take place. While these interventions were mostly carried by the Theatre, they are still taken care of by the Danisinni dwellers. And yet Giambrone noted that the material interventions operated by the theatre in the Danisinni spaces were not the only perceived impact at the end of the project, the Danisinni dwellers asked the theatre to leave there Toccafondo's painted backdrops, which the theatre eventually gave as a gift to the community; "we were necessary, but not just because we fixed the lights in the Farm[84]".

**Safety.** Strictly related to physical urban transformations were transformations related to the perceived safety of the squares. Different interviewees have pointed out how the presence of the theatre in the neighbourhood was able to interrupt illegal activities in the squares. Superintendent Giambrone recalls a singular dialogue occurred with a *Carabiniere* (the Italian Police force) after a performance in the Zen neighbourhood:

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[83] Il teatro, quando arriva, obbliga a sistemare qualcosa che era incolto da anni, tombini, buche per le strade. Mal che vada se non ha lasciato niente ha lasciato nelle persone un bel ricordo, e per un mese e mezzo un quartiere abbandonato a se stesso ha avuto le luci funzionanti e il pratino rasato (Cherstich, interview by the author)
[84] "Siamo stati necessari

He came and said to me: "my most sincere congratulations, Superintendent, you managed to do what I was never able to do in the ten years I've been working here in Zen". "Excuse me, Commander, do you make operas?". "I don't, but you don't know that drug dealing has stopped in the whole neighbourhood since you've been here".

A similar dialogue occurred between Gianluigi Toccafondo and an old lady who told him the theatre was "disturbing the local business" (i.e. to drug dealing).

**Cultural opportunity.** The most evident impact is that, of course, of accessibility - that is, of giving those communities cultural opportunity. Pizzo spoke of accessibility almost in religious, vocational terms, as a gift and a mission to be fulfilled by public institutions (see note 17). His approach indeed recalls the 'excellence and access' model of cultural democracy, by which culture is somehow 'poured from above'. Yet, considering the lags of the operatic system, the approach is still a breakthrough. Cherstich recalls talking to a man before the performance who told him "I've always wanted to come to Caracalla, and finally Caracalla has come to me!" (see note 69). The singers noted that many of those people could not even imagine they would like opera, and that this gave them the opportunity to appreciate it, to experience it, while having an occasion for socialization - thus linking accessibility to the transmission of the operatic heritage to new audiences and younger generations. Almerighi, similarly, recalled that what mattered was "showing the children that it wasn't boring. They could see it with their own eyes"[85]. Again, in the case of Danisinni, cultural opportunity achieved greater depth: the direct involvement of the community in creating the context and the work of art itself, in a shared environment, made it possible for them to 'shape the meanings and structures of their social existence together' (Smith 2010) within a cultural experience.

**Cultural capabilities.** As the literature illustrates (Gross, Wilson 2018; Hadley 2018), the notion of cultural capabilities is linked to the broader capabilities approach to sustainable development. This approach aims at 'widening or redistributing the means of cultural production – the resources and powers of self-expression, voice and culture-making' (Gross, Wilson 2018: 2). The cases of Rome and Reggio Emilia do not affect cultural expression of the involved communities, but rather enable new uses of the public spaces and new opportunities for sociability in urban voids. It is in Danisinni, once more, that the development of cultural capabilities comes to the fore: OperaCamion is, in facts, inscribed in a broader creative environment where people are given the opportunity to co-create

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[85] Glielo fai vedere, loro vedono con i loro occhi che può non essere noiosa (Almerighi, interview by the author).

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culture and the space they inhabit. Commoners, in facts, developed participative projects on street art, opera and the performing arts in cooperation with arts institutions: such projects were bot connected to the 'high' arts, and the institutions which produce them, and to local forms of expression. During the 2020 pandemic, instead of developing a theatrical performance, Teatro Biondo produced with the commoners a short film on Saint Rosalia, the protector of Palermo; Teatro Massimo is rehearsing in Danisinni a concert of Portuguese *fado* songs, with lyrics written in Sicilian by the commoners. OperaCamion was a platform for the development of cultural capabilities in the neighbourhood. It was, first of all, an opportunity of making art together, an opportunity which is having lasting effects on the Danisinni community (an example is the choir still rehearsing today). But it also served a broader purpose, that of presenting an alternative for personal fulfillment and professional development at a time: according to the Superintendent, OperaCamion allowed young workers to understand that they, too, could contribute to an artistic endeavour with their knowledge and their skills:

> It helped them understand that behind a theatre there are people building sceneries, and that to build sceneries you need carpenters, and that to light up the stage you need an electrician – not a "lighting designer", a carpenter, not a scenographer. And the boy from that neighbourhood will tell you "my father is a carpenter, I might be a carpenter like my father, building the sceneries for Teatro Massimo – those jobs are at their reach, but within the apparently unreachable Teatro Massimo, which maybe is not that unreachable – it is something *useful* for them, from a practical point of view, not only a spiritual nourishment, but also a source of material well-being[86].

Not only young people, but children especially were significantly involved in most of the narrations by the interviewees. Fra' Mauro recalls that children who were diagnosed with ADHD were the most attentive during the performance, correcting the singers when they missed a line or even sung a wrong note[87]. The emotional involvement of kids was remarkable also on the squares, as Rocchi recalls that 'it was beautiful seeing the kids, more

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[86] ha fatto capire che dietro un teatro c'è una struttura che, per esempio, costruisce delle scene, e che per costruire delle scene ci vuole un falegname, e per fare delle luci ci vuole un elettricista – non un light designer, un falegname – non uno scenografo. Ci vuole anche lo scenografo, certo, ma ci vuole anche il falegname, e guardacaso il ragazzo della zona ti dice "ah, ma mio padre è falegname, quindi io potrei continuare a fare il falegname come mio padre, ma magari costruire le scene del Teatro Massimo, non fare il falegname come l'ha fatto mio padre, anche il teatro può essere un luogo dove falegname, parrucchiere, sarto, elettricista", che sono mestieri alla loro portata, mestieri familiari, per loro, hanno scoperto che incrociano una cosa per loro irraggiungibile come il Teatro Massimo, che forse non è così irraggiungibile, è qualcosa di *utile* anche per loro, da un punto di vista pratico, non solo dal punto di vista del nutrimento dello spirito, ma della vita quotidiana, come fonte di sostentamento (Superintendent Giambrone, interview by the author).

[87] I bambini, che a scuola sono diagnosticati iperattivi e arrivano (mancando l'asilo nido) in prima elementare con un'esperienza della strada che a lezione frontale fa dire loro "cosa dobbiamo smontare?" – questi bambini seguivano le prove, attentissimi, anticipavano le battute e correggevano gli errori dei cantanti. Bambini di 6, 7 anni (Fra' Mauro, interview by the author).

than the adults; entirely focused, all sitting in the first row – they were the funniest interlocutors'[88] Regarding capabilities, Almerighi remembers:

> In Danisinni there were children that, in the beginning, stole our props, and in the end greeted us telling "we want to be opera singers, we want to be dancers". This might not last forever - someone will come and say "you can't do that", but you are there to show them that they can make it.



Figure 24. Transformation of the farm during the OperaCamion performance. © Franco Lannino, 2018. Courtesy of Teatro Massimo di Palermo.

## Comparison and conclusive remarks

The three cases share similarities and differences. A common artistic elaboration, a common view of theatre, and a common understanding of the changing relationships between city and theatre are the threads that unite the cases. At the same time, differences emerge in the ways in which the projects have developed, and across the views of its participants: they had different timelines, produced different spatial transformations, and different degrees of commoning was involved. In this section, the similarities and differences will be explored with regard to the literatures at the basis of the theoretical framework.

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[88] una cosa bella, più che gli adulti è vedere i bambini super attenti, tutti in prima fila, e per me erano gli interlocutori più divertenti

The three cities are similar in aesthetic and in artistry: Toccafondo and Cherstich were able to provide OperaCamion with an unmistakable visual mark and an extrovert dramaturgy. The communal artistry was matched with a communal sensibility, in a unitarian view which encompasses theatre and city. From a strictly theatrical perspective, there is a will to innovate the operatic canon and to bring more artistic freedom into a domain which has been rigidly preserved for centuries. At the same time, there was a firm intention to also transform the way opera theatre is experienced: the dramatic lack of musical education in Italy, and the lack of cultural opportunities for some audiences (which are spatially marginalized in the city) were directly addressed by the project. The two things were inseparable from each other in the three cities, and can be comprised in the discourse over cultural and urban democracy. OperaCamion cannot be understood, however, within the dichotomies which have been identified as constitutive of the debate: 'access' was not related to 'excellence' – at least in the conventional meaning of the term. The project in facts featured both formal and artistic innovation, and was therefore oriented towards the creation of new types of cultural experiences, which combined heritage transmission to artistic innovation and socialization.

In the case of Rome, the project was not about 'redistributing the means of cultural production – the resources and powers of self-expression, voice and culture-making' (Gross, Wilson 2018: 2). And yet, they represented a cultural opportunity for people who would not otherwise meet culture in their neighbourhoods, or would not have reasons to value those public squares: the opportunity to revitalize common spaces that were previously devoid of meaning, to simply be together, co-creating public life, and to be joint in a common endeavour (that of making theatre and co-producing space). In Reggio Emilia, the discourse about cultural democracy was embodied by the subversion of accessibility mechanisms: in such a musically 'conservative' city like Reggio Emilia, the 'far from perfect', yet artistically remarkable performance of OperaCamion redesigned patterns of inclusion and exclusion to the operatic resource, thus operating a somehow 'forced' redistribution of access rights to the high arts. In the case of Danisinni, the project explicitly attempted to redistribute the means of cultural production, and was focused on the 'equitable distribution of the capabilities by which individuals can take part in shaping the culture around them and interpret the expression of others' (Jones 2010: 10). The 'culture around them' is not a metaphorical saying in the case of Danisinni: in time, the commoners-dwellers have created the opportunities for the community to jointly shape the meaning of their social existence through culture, featuring street art projects, theatre projects, film productions, and the two

operas. The attention placed on cultural capabilities, possibilities for self-development and on the inclusion of children make it particularly relevant in the framework of cultural democracy as embedded in the capabilities approach proposed by Sen already in the 1990s.

*Urban regeneration*

The relationship between opera theatres and their cities was pondered across all experiences. This relationship can be conceived on two scales: the first is the city, the second is the square. At the urban level, the displacement of opera (and the literal creation of an operatic space) in peripheral venues has a political meaning which ought to be read in the light of the existing literature on urban development and urban regeneration through culture. OperaCamion brings to the fore a delicate tradeoff: it is not inscribed in the massive interventions which, like Sidney Opera House and Elbphilharmonie, have transformed neighbourhoods and become iconic for the whole city. Therefore, the controversial implications of these transformations, under the aegis of neoliberal governmentality, can be avoided: marginalization and gentrification, in facts, would require a more persistent action. OperaCamion is a temporary happening, and leaves few lasting marks on the urban spaces where it lingers for the time of a performance. This posits obvious limitations to their effectiveness in the long term. In the case of Rome, these limitations arise from the fact that the project did not insist on the same territory: it covers several spots of the city, but it did not generate a continuous relationship with a specific square, or with a specific audience. A possible (and necessary) implementation of the project in Rome could include a greater interaction with a set of urban dwellers in a specific urban setting, possibly with the inclusion of other actors that progressively transform that urban void into a living space, with the active help and the suggestions for use of the people who orbit around that space.

Its effects, however, may be not as temporary as the happening itself (if reiterated as in a 'cultural guerrilla'): though hardly quantifiable, they are both social and spatial. For what concerns the social impacts, they concern cultural accessibility and participation as potential drivers of wellbeing, together with creating moments of socialization. The impacts on space concern the second scale of the project, the square. This process need not necessarily occur from the single initiative of Opera di Roma – quite the reverse, the activation of squares through different users is an effect that should be sought, even though it is difficult to elicit. This could be perhaps the role of OperaCamion itself – i.e., suggesting the possibility of living, using, transforming the square. However, even supposing that this process is actually elicited, a question would arise over who produces new uses and for whom: in this respect,

the Danisinni model represented a virtuous example in which the local community monitored the entrance of new users and new service producers in the resource, generating new functions and services which they alone could not have provided; their mediation between place and people ensured the respondence of uses to local needs (a characteristic which is typical of efficient commons governance systems). The greater limits posited by the Roman case consists, therefore, of the lack of continuous and persistent work of different actors over urban voids, and the difficulty of actually "creating" an aware community in charge for the stewardship of the spaces and for the monitoring of the processes that can be activated within it.

The Danisinni model presents a twofold limitation. The first is the presence of charismatic leaders among the Danisinni commoners, who coordinate the actions in the neighbourhood: the survival of the Danisinni experience will depend upon the community becoming more horizontal and include an even greater number of Danisinni inhabitants in the decision-making process concerning the neighbourhood's resources. The second is the instability of urban governance: at the time of writing a new municipal administration is about to be elected, with consequences on the interaction between the commoners and the Palermo municipality. The agency of the commoners has continued to grow, asserting itself in a variety of arenas (from the commercial one to urban governance), but it might still fall prey to predatory urban processes and progressively lose its grip over its contested and hardly fought for territory.

The Reggio Emilia example is the one with greater limitations. It was a single-time performance held in a conventional space (the circumstances being, on the contrary, exceptional). The width, scope and, consequently, effects of the project were limited, as the theatre seemed to 'fear' its audience in bringing the project forward. The project opens perspectives on the role of theatre and urban spaces for a post-COVID society; but, as many have emphasized in the interviews, both theatres and ministerial bodies lack the courage to consider such model a viable option. The square was an enabling setting for both citizens/audiences and the artists: artistic innovation could not have been conceived in a different setting, as the absence of rigorous institutional constraints and conventional spatial barriers allowed artists to move freely and made them more willing to contribute. The audience, at the same time, was able to redesign rules of behaviour, to co-create a theatrical space and appropriate unused and abandoned urban areas to transform them, even if for a brief moment. In so doing, they enacted in some way a theatre 'heterotopia'. As said by Primavesi (2012: 509)

> Theatre occurs in spaces by enabling them to be experienced in a particular way or by creating them as such. It allows spaces to emerge in the minds of the onlookers by staging an existing structure or site, transforming it into the setting of other, imaginary spaces.

The transformation of public spaces that were previously 'urban voids' through temporary heterotopias, then, is among the key features of OperaCamion, and a factor of urban revitalization (eliciting sociability) and regeneration (enhancing safety and partially transforming the unbuilt environment). While evidence of these processes was provided from the interviewed participants, a system for the proper evaluation and recognition of such impacts is hard to craft – it is not only missing in the evaluation of funding bodies, but also a challenging framework to create: how to account for the value generated and for the impacts produced by the project in order for similar initiatives to attract funding goes beyond the scope of this research; and yet, it is of paramount importance that indicators are produced and evaluation systems are designed: for instance the number of tickets, which in the case of OperaCamion could not be counted because it was free of access barriers, could still be obtained with the distribution of 'free' tickets for the mere purpose of quantifying the audience. Other indicators pertain to public space rather than the performance itself, and should concern the physical and perceived accessibility to the squares.

At both scales (the relationship of each city with its theatre, and the different transformations that occurred in space during OperaCamion) the projects had different outcomes, and considerations over governance and urban democracy arise. Reggio Emilia, compared to the other cases, appears as a bland example, where theatre, though in public space, occurs in a conventional form: in a central venue in front of the Theatre, with an orderly distribution of seats. Coproduction was not sought for artistically, nor was the coproduction of space possible, due to COVID restraints. What is curious to notice is that in Rome and Palermo exiting the theatrical building was sufficient to elicit artistic freedom and greater accessibility. In the case of Reggio Emilia, instead, the operatic tradition pervades the city itself, which would have produced constraints to artistic innovation. These constraints, however, were erased by the exceptional times in which OperaCamion was performed in Reggio Emilia – i.e., right at the end of the brutal national lockdowns. Therefore, even though spatial transformations were limited and conventional, they carried great political significance: OperaCamion allowed people to reappropriate public squares, to experience proximity and to attend a collective cultural manifestation that belonged, for once, to all citizens – to *loggionisti*, who were willing to 'forgive' the far-from-perfect production, for the sake of a

symbolic 'hug', and to other audiences, who found themselves included in an operatic experience they would have not otherwise attended.

With a longstanding four-year project touching all its Municipia, Rome had a complex governance and the mission to address peripheries explicitly. Therefore the opera's presence in the city has become a constant in the Roman summer, testifying for an attempt to exit the theatrical space and to bring opera to unconventional venues in unconventional audiences. While in Reggio Emilia governance was mostly in the hands of the theatre, in the case of Rome there was a lively engagement between the theatre, the local administration (the Municipia) and external agents (such as Cremonini and, to some extent, the creative team) who acted as brokers and mediators. Regarding the transformation of space, it can still be regarded in the framework of Foucault's heterotopias – or, more worldly, as an act of tactical urbanism, a temporary transformation of the unbuilt environment. It is at that moment that coproduction happens: while governance is not shared prior to the performance, it is the dwellers who, together with the truck, transform the space into a theatre, appropriating the space and rewriting the spatial and behavioural rules of theatre itself.

Danisinni in Palermo was yet a different experience, where coproduction and spatial transformation reached a higher degree of intenstity. The initial strategy followed the path of the Roman model, with OperaCamion being a coproduction between the two theatres. Collaboration with the Municipality was smooth, according to the Superintendent and fueled by a common vision. Not much later, however, the project had become something different (in facts, though it has been used for the sake of clarity in this research, nobody referred to the project with the name OperaCamion). This transformation was caused by the direct inference of a lively group of commoners among the Danisinni community who opposed the project as it was (as they had done many other times, resisting the Municipality); at that point, instead of changing to another, 'less problematic' neighbourhood, the Theatre engaged in a reflection with the dwellers and eventually transformed the project into a collaborative production, staging the commoners as the choir. After 6 months of rehearsals, the performance was held in the Danisinni commons. With the support and the economic contribution of the Municipality, commoners and the theatre have engaged in a unique cross-sector partnership, in which Teatro Massimo can be said to have gone through a process of 'institutional adaptation'. Emerson and Gerlak speak of adaptability in collaborative governance regimes between different sectors as 'the ability of individuals and groups to respond to and shape change through learning and flexibility to maintain or improve a desirable state' (2014: 770). In the case of Teatro Massimo, it has adapted to adhocracy and

to the rules of the Danisinni commons to improve what Emerson and Gerlak call 'a desirable state' – this state being that of togetherness in theatrical practices.

## Commoning

When looking at the cases, literature on the commons can be approached from a manifold perspective: the theoretical implications of the cases for the commons framework of analysis; the newborn discourse on the theatrical commons; implications for the commons in urban governance. On the one hand, then, the literature on the commons proves a fruitful analytical lens for the cases, helping unravel the dynamics of the different situations; on the other, each case sheds a light on different dimensions of the commons, thus contributing to the literature.

OperaCamion-Danisinni is the only case to have occurred in an actual commons environment. Danisinni is more than a urban commons, as it is described by the (somewhat simplified) literature on these commons: it rather fits Ostrom's design principles, having clearly defined spatial and community boundaries and rules of appropriation, provision and conflict resolution. At the same time, the Danisinni commons goes beyond Ostrom's seventh principle of minimal recognition of the rights to organize, and the commons has progressively asserted itself in different arenas: first, opposing the municipality and its plans to transform the area; second, opening to the cultural economy and to tourism with projects involving Airbnb and Lonely Planet. In addition, the natural-human interface that is at the core of Danisinni, the care for non-human living beings that inhabit (and contribute to) the Danisinni ecosystem is something to be acknowledged as a unique feature of this commons, and a diversion with respect to the anthropocentric view subtended to other forms of urban commons.

It was obvious, therefore, that OperaCamion would get entirely different features when it entered the Danisinni ecosystem and it met the commoners' strong will: the performance was transformed into a collaborative work with the Danisinni people. This work proved sustainable in time: it was able to produce two operas so far, and it is in the process of rearranging the next one after the dramatic COVID break. This is traceable in two factors that pertain to commons governance: the first is the presence of community boundaries, which made it easier for the Theatre to interact with a set of actors that had already identified themselves as the interlocutors for their territory; the second is the strong motivations that underlie the community, a community which has 'come alive as a plurality' (in the words of De Angelis 2017: 29) of active commoners, and as such was committed to the work. Müller,

'within the urban commons, collaboration is more focused: urban commons could be more adequate partners than the 'general public'' (Müller 2015: 151). This commitment was also shared by the Theatre, which delivered, jointly with the Danisinni commoners, two performances where the act of co-production is not an end in itself, but a partnership with the commoners, treated as professionals delivering an artistic work[89].

Various resources were, therefore, managed, produced and appropriated in common during the performance. The performance itself was an act of theatrical commoning (with all the intertwined layers of relations, space, dramaturgy), of actual co-production with the artistic team, in which rules of access, behaviour and appropriation were set by the community. The urban space was already co-owned by the dwellers, shaped by their everyday actions, collectively used and appropriated. The governance of the project was articulated between the Theatre and the Danisinni commoners, as both actors had the right to alter and negotiate the conditions under which the performance would occur.

In Reggio Emilia both citizen engagement and multi-scalar partnerships were bland: this was due to the environmental conditions, that is, the specific nature of Reggio Emilia as an operatic city in an operatic Region, and to the constraints imposed by COVID. Thus, no actual co-production occurred at any observable level – not even the one OperaCamion excels in, i.e., co-producing the theatrical space. And yet, the performance received an enthusiastic response from the part of old and new audiences, filling the whole square with citizens. While it is true that these conditions prevented much of the co-production from happening, what is also true is that timing probably contributed to its success, and that people were eager for sociability and for sharing a moment of artistic expression together. The quest for togetherness after isolation was fulfilled by an artistic endeavour occurring in public space – a public space that was long denied and deprived of its functions. This deprivation was not due to the controversies of urban development, as was the cases of the urban voids in Palermo and Rome, but rather to the COVID crisis. What OperaCamion represented in Reggio Emilia was, therefore, a catalyser of sociability after isolation, and an act of commoning in (and of) the urban space. The twofold articulation of the preposition is relevant: by commoning *in* the urban space, people encounter a togetherness with strangers that would be impossible in their households. This particular feature of a commoning event in public space, evoked by Huron in her work on the commons ('Working with strangers in

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[89] See Cherstich's remark in note 33.

a saturated space', 2015), also recalls Bianchini and Schwengel's definition of the public realm, as

> the sphere of social relations going beyond our own circle of friendship, and of family an professional relations. The idea of the public realm is bound up with the ideas of expanding one's mental horizons, of experiment, adventure, discovery, surprise (Bianchini, Schwengel 1991 in McGuigan 1996: 104).

To this 'sheer human togetherness' in public life, as Harendt would call it (1958: 180), a second dimension is added: the commoning *of* the urban space, and specifically of a public square where people, with their presence and their audiency, construct a theatrical moment and co-contribute to fill a public square with meaning. This, of course, would not be possible without the contribution of the artists onstage (and offstage, as for the creative team) and the Theatre which, as an institution, provides the material means of producing the performance. The commoning of the square occurs jointly between multiple actors and is triggered by an artistic performance. The convergence of commoning and the arts holds great political significance, particularly for a space like that of Reggio Emilia, where mechanisms of exclusion to the operatic resource are rooted in the city's tradition – all the more so after a crisis that has deprived urban dwellers of both human togetherness and artistic expression in common.

In Rome, it is possible to observe the features of the theatrical commons as it has been theorized in section 3.1. During OperaCamion, the three theatrical resources, space, relations, dramaturgy, are object of acts of commoning: concerning relations, they construct the theatrical moment from the scratch, in an unbuilt environment that is not devoted to space – or to whatsoever type of social work. In this respect, people create a relational space in an urban void, a space which does not exist outside the relations that create it, thus annulling the conditions under which that urban space was, precisely, a void. Here, people behave freely because they are not constrained by preexisting theatrical superstructures. As it happened in theatres in the XVIII century, it is possible to eat and drink, to react with loud emotionality and to talk to the actors as they wander through the seats. Here, *audiency* is redesigned to welcome behaviours that would have been prohibited in a conventional theatrical space, and people are allowed to access the theatrical resource freely. The lively sociability that is created around the festive event of the performance echoes the notion of commoning as a social practice introduced by Euler (2018).

Regarding space, it is entirely co-created in the hours that precede the performance, and during the performance itself. Not only, then, is the urban space shared as in the case of Reggio Emilia: it is the audience's actions that enable the transformation of the square into a theatre, a theatre that takes the form that the audience wants it to take. As such, it is not only a redesign of the square, which is suddenly revitalized by a temporary event, but a redesign of the concept of theatre itself. The section dedicated to OperaCamion-Roma has looked at this type of transformation through the lens of tactical urbanism. In a research on Do-It-Yourself (or DIY) urbanism, which is inscribed in the same framework of temporary interventions, Volont (2019: 260) has associated these interventions with the commons, stating that when DIYers 'modifiy the outlook or functionality of the city, the result can be shared, experienced, or used in common'. OperaCamion, then, becomes the enabling infrastructure in which 'microurban' devices reconquer the space of the city for collective use.

In turn, the theatre's relational space, shaped by acts of commoning in a public square, elicits the commoning of a new dramaturgic code, that does not pertain to the conventional operatic canon (yet is rightfully inscribed in it): the artists feel free to enact it onstage, interacting with the audience and addressing the performance to them. This dramaturgic code is received and accepted by the audience, which responds to it in ways which are elicited by the setting. Both the audience and the performers, then, reappropriate the operatic language and syntax by rewriting the rules of access to it and rewrite the language itself.

As has been said earlier, under such conditions even Huron's 'community of strangers' (2015) can become a community of theatrical commoners, by temporarily sharing and co-creating emotions, relations, and spaces around the act of the performance.

In this respect the societal objectives embedded in OperaCamion can be said to play a crucial role in enacting the theatrical commons and in revitalizing public squares: as posited by Olsen,

> Socially engaged art may foreground the transmutability of things, training city residents to search for alternatives within the present – to take apart the urban environment and combine or rearrange elements to form new social and material possibilities (Olsen 2019: 997)

This 'rearrangement' is, perhaps, one of OperaCamion's greatest contributions. It envisions new possible uses for an unbuilt environment that was previously devoid of meaning; it

produces an alternative for the cultural sector (and specifically the operatic one) by activating a collective cultural endeavour, an act of commoning which enables cultural democracy; it and eventually provides people with the means to shape their social existence together in the urban domain by sharing urban spaces and an artistic expression that belongs to their heritage, but had not been accessible before.

## Conclusions

Starting from the considerations of the above sections, reflections can be made on the contribution of the present thesis to the debate over culture, regeneration of urban spaces and the commons. The contributions are explained in detail in the following sections, and are synthesized as follows:

1. Cultural democracy: the thesis proposes to overcome the dichotomy of the two approaches to cultural democracy ('high' and 'low'). The theatrical example shows that the two notions of 'high' and 'low' culture are social constructs which can be overcome when formats and spaces are challenged; it shows the need to approach cultural democracy as spatial justice, reflecting not only on economic accessibility and expressive freedom, but also on the spaces of culture and on their position in the urban grid; it finally proposes a rethinking to public support to culture in Italy, from the perspective of cultural democracy, in the light of the results presented in the empirical section of the thesis.

2. Commons: the thesis elaborates a theatrical commons, a resource appropriated and produced by those who take part to it (actors and audiences) and which consists of multiple dimensions, spatial, relational and dramaturgic; it reflects on the practical implications that this commons has on culture-led urban regeneration and on commons theory, showing how commoning with a cultural focus shifts the conceptual meaningfulness from property relations to relations of production in the commons.

3. Urban regeneration: the Danisinni case shows the importance of going beyond "minimal recognition" for the urban commons, and of the interaction between the commons and external actors through the community's attentive monitoring, for a more sustainable regeneration action over time, able to develop human capabilities in fragile areas. The thesis reflects on the political consequences of this interaction. By observing temporary interventions in the unbuilt environment, the thesis looks at DIY urbanism as a commoning practice, able to temporarily reactivate urban voids, proposing alternative uses and reappropriation practices through culture.

### *Cultural democracy*

**Cultural democracy beyond 'high' and 'low' dichotomies.** The thesis has shown the need to overcome dichotomies between the two meanings of cultural democracy: the 'classical' one, epitomised by 'great art for everybody' in the 1970s, (Simpson 1976) and the one which, today, pushes for a redistribution of the means of cultural production against a

paternalistic artistic canon (Gross, Wilson 2018). Both meanings derive from the superstructures they aspire to overcome. In this sense, the thesis spouses the proposal of Hadley e Belfiore (2018: 221):

> Contemporary articulations of, and engagements with, the ideas of cultural democracy must both reconcile themselves with the nuanced and semi-documented history of cultural democracy and the significant macro-level shifts in economic, technological and social fields which have made an imperative of the need to reassess these arguments.

The thesis has contested this dichotomy through a historical and empirical analysis of theatrical practices: in the sub-chapter "Theatre and exclusion in the city" (in section 1.4), all'interno della sezione 1.4), the development of theatre is looked at from a sociological and urban perspective, observing how the structure of theatre has changed (responding to different political needs and social claims) and how it was articulated in the urban domain (reflecting or contesting hierarchies or power systems). The enclosure of theatre (and of opera) appears as a social construct, enabled by a specific strategy of spatial segregation, which coincides with a decline of the public sphere in the spaces where it is practiced:

> In a society with a strong public life there should be affinities between the domains of stage and street; there should be something comparable in the expressive experience crowds have had in these two realms. As public life declines, these affinities should erode (Sennett 1977: 61)

From an empirical viewpoint, OperaCamion represents a potential subversion of this process, showing how it is possible to design a new theatre for a new society in a complex city. What is more, in the case of Danisinni opera has offered more than a coproduction experience: it became a possibility self expression within the transmission of heritage which isn't conventionally inscribed in the 'Great art for everybody' approach to cultural democracy.

**Cultural democracy as spatial justice.** Many interviewees have noted that the two options (performing 'high' and 'low' opera in theatres and elsewhere) shouldn't be mutually exclusive: opera and its expressive richness find a preferred venue in the theatrical space. But before 'defending' traditional modes from the threats of modernity, fearing that theatres will lose their centrality, it is at least necessary to propose a new modularity of formats and spaces. Space, in facts, plays a crucial role in determining physical and perceived accessibility to a cultural experience. As said by Rosenstein (2011: 9),

there are important ways in which the cultural policies and cultural policy infrastructure of today's cities are less responsive, transparent and democratic than they must be in order to cultivate diverse and sustainable urban cultural life.

In this framework, actions like OperaCamion allow to collectively redefine behavioural rules with which to experience opera. Moreover, the unprecedented use of neglected spaces mitigates their abandonment and increases accessibility to urban spaces. The ability of cultural actions to produce places of meaning, 'third places' (Lim, Im e Lee 2019) is testified by OperaCamion. A square 'dressed up for the party' (*vestita a festa*) through a temporary event, ephemeral but incisive, becomes more familiar and more 'approachable' than a theatre from the late 1800s like Opera di Roma's main venue.

**Cultural democracy, policies and impact indicators.** The discourse on cultural democracy evokes political considerations, specifically concerning cultural policy and policies for the performing arts. The evaluation of artistic quality (which, in the case of the Italian funding FUS, is quite blurry) and quantitative indicators (number of tickets, number of artists involved) are insufficient to grasp the complexity of projects like OperaCamion; in a text from 2000, Balestra and Malaguti noted how in Italy the focus is never on projects, but always on [institutional] subjects – a statement which is still eloquent today. Qualitative and quantitative indicators need to be redesigned, and paired with impact indicators: the elaboration of such indicators goes beyond the aims of the present research work, but interviews have unveiled the effects of OperaCamion on people and space, going from the care for the unbuilt environment to the perceived safety of the squares, to an increased feeling of accessibility of the cultural offer. In the case of Danisinni, these impacts were even greater and concerned the space of the farm, the involvement of children, and the development of human and urban capabilities. Overcoming a view of culture as a product to be sold, used or bought, OperaCamion sheds a light on the relational value of culture, which is to be accounted for when evaluating the quality and impacts of projects.

Projects with such a strong social orientation present a structural frailty, that of financial autonomy: hybrid (public-private) funding models need to be put in place to make them less dependent from public funding. Teatro Massimo made use of Art Bonus, which allows for tax deductions to those patronizing the arts. Rethinking funding criteria at the ministerial level should be paired to the quest for greater autonomy from the part of theatrical institutions.

Segman, who investigated the 'tacit contract' between actors and audiences, draws from Rancière (2009) to point out that some theatrical experiences rewrite the rules of the contract, and its subscribers become 'performers of a collective activity' (Sedgman 2018: 14).

**The 'theatrical commons'.** This collective activity is at the core of the main contribution of this thesis to commons research. Once again, the analysis was both historical and empirical: it first reconstructed the history of theatrical spaces, their architectural evolution and their relationship with the urban fabric, to emphasize its character of relational, eminently social form of art. The urban and architectural transformations reflect the relationship of a society with their expressive forms and with the public sphere (Sennett, 1977). Secondly, the research has observed these spatial, relational and social dynamics in the cases of Rome, Palermo e Reggio Emilia. This analysis has allowed for the formulation of a theatrical commons, made of three inseparable resources: space, relations and dramaturgy, simultaneously coproduced by audiences and artists. Relations are formed between audiences and artists, between theatrical action and emotional participation, and among each group of contributors, who gather to 'be together' – an action subtended to commoning according to Mattei, 2012, a necessary precondition for the happening of a performance. Space, which goes beyond theatrical architecture, is the result of a relational process (it is a 'relational space', as Harvey, 2004, put it). Dramaturgy is a cultural commons, made of gestural, musical, linguistic archetypes. In some contexts, the theatrical enclosure has prevented the shared production of these three resources. In others, the boundaries and the formats have been challenged to oppose the dominant mechanisms of inclusion and inaccessibility.

When new resources are listed as commons, the risk is that of feeding a dystrophic taxonomy, ambitious and unproductive, leading to a conceptual insignificance. Having this risk in mind, theorizing a theatrical commons has not only enriched the existing literature, but unfolded the nature and dynamics of the theatrical resource, in order to develop policies that are more responsive to its characteristics – allowing theatre to elicit sociability, and theatrical spaces to be 'enabling ecosystems' (*à la* Manzini, 2019) for these relations.

**Relational commons and community.** A fruitful branch of the studies on the commons is that of its social, relational and governance dimension. The peculiar element of the theatrical commons is the ephemeral nature of the resource itself (it exists in the limited space and time of the performance) and of the commoners' relationships (strangers to one another, united only in the time of this collective activity). To think of the theatrical

commons helps understand how relations are articulated in other commons configurations, such as the urban ones, where strangers collaborate in saturated space (Huron 2015).

The discourse on the theatrical commons, therefore, posits itself in the research branch of the commons which investiates commoning as a social practice, rather than common sas goods. As such the theatrical commons (as in OperaCamion) is pivoted on the relationships underlying the theatrical action (as in the case of Rome and Reggio Emilia) and on cooperative relations between different actors (as in the case of Danisinni). The research shifts the focus "from property to relations of production (Roggero 2010: 364): it is not about *owning* the theatrical projects, but the cooperative modalities (and commoning processes) it is able to activate.

### Urban reactivation

**Commons and governance.** Insights on commons governance, urban regeneration and the processes with which it is managed represent a third contribution of the thesis. This dimension is mostly observed in the case of Palermo, where the management of the project has been actually shared between the cultural institutions and the commoners in Danisinni. Danisinni represents a unique urban commons:

1. Because of the deep integration between the human and natural element: the Danisinni ecosystem is not only made of humans, but of plants and animals (which are not eaten, but taken care of), in a relation of mutualism and reciprocity. As such, it is an unorthodox urban community, unseen in urban commons literature, exemplar in its sustainability and oblivious of the anthropocentric view which characterizes the urban domain.

2. It has been able, in the most advanced phases of its development, to claim its role as a relevant actor in urban governance, opposing the municipality in crucial matters regarding their own resources, and working in cooperation with cultural institutions to co-design and co-produce cultural actions. It has initiated a local economy which, though frail, will deserve further attention in its developments.

The original contribution of the Danisinni case is that of going beyond Ostrom's minimal recognition, becoming a relevan urban actor; this has implied some benefits for the Danisinni inhabitants, who have come alive as a plurality (De Angelis 2017) and have outsourced the production of cultural services to institutions which, in turn, could benefit from new creative inputs and activate projects that were aligned with local needs and expectations; this has forced them to a process of institutional adaptation, in the definition provided by Emerson

and Gerlak, 2014. OperaCamion in Danisinni can be considered a successful project of regeneration because it builds on existing cultural stances (Bailey, Miles and Stark, 2004). From the viewpoint of collaboration, Müller notes how

> Within the urban commons, collaboration is more focused: urban commons could be more adequate partners than the 'general public'... [they] have already developed common visions and requirements and could be able to bring the necessary collective power along to take an active political role […] Whenever residents are fully integrated in planning processes, the level of identification and responsibility with the object/resource increases. So people are more likely to continue to take care of their resource/neighborhood/park even after the completion of the planning process. (Müller 2015: 151)

The example of Danisinni shows that the cooperation between institutions and the commons is at the core of a more equal and potentially more effective way of managing urban regeneration, it is necessary to note that this example does not provide answers on how it is possible to replicate its community. A similar problem was raised by Manzini, and will remain an open question of the thesis and a future research development:

> In the past […] when social transformations were slow, social commons emerged "almost naturally" out of the long-term workings of communities. Today, in a fluid world in rapid transformation, traditional communities are dissolving and the new ones emerging are unable to recreate them in the quasi-natural ways of the past. Having understood this, we must now understand whether and how this can happen in other ways, considering the unprecedented nature of these new communities and the ways in which they themselves form and evolve over time (Manzini 2019: 16).

In the light of commons literature, the 'pacific cooperation' with the institutions could undermine the political vocation (or direct antagonism) which characterizes the urban commons (a problem made explicit by Bianchi 2018). As of today, this problem does not appear in Danisinni – quite the reverse, it can generate reflections on a productive cooperation, necessary for the survival of the commons and their success in the urban ecosystem. At the same time, a loosening of their political autonomy could imply their absorption in the neoliberal governance which characterizes today the majority of cities.

**Participatory, temporary reactivation of urban voids.** The research produces a contribution on culture-led urban regeneration. In the first chapter, the role of culture in reshaping city in a post-industrial economic framework has been illustrated through

theoretical reflections and practical examples, showing how cultural urban policies have exasperated, in many cases, the marginalization of fragile groups of people through massive interventions – little responsive of local needs and structural problems of urban development. Many actions have responded to this approach, which aim at making the spaces of the city more acessible, and the processes of production of such spaces more democratic. Many of these are commoning actions, which have taken the form of occupations of grassroot participatory processes for the management and appropriation of urban resources. In the cultural context, this implies questioning for whom, with whom and where culture is produced.

The actions described in this thesis go in this direction, and have a twofold nature: temporary reactivation of neglected spaces through cultural actions (as in Rome and Reggio Emilia) and cultural coproduction in a community-led space (in Danisinni). The interventions in Rome and Reggio Emilia share both the advantage and the limit of being temporary. In the Roman case, this has implied the possibility for people to reactivate the unbuilt environment, neglected urban spaces through a cultural experience: reproducing an co-producing the theatrical space, they have put in place a commoning practice and an action of "DIY urbanism" – which, in turn, produces urban commons (Volont 2019): while temporary, these actions happen at the convergence of the urban and cultural dimensions of regeneration; they produce sociability, allow for the accessibility of the cultural offer and they help imagine alternatives, imagining new uses for urban voids. This shift of power equilibria in urban processes (Mould 2014: 529) is a prefiguration exercise, and can fit in prefigurative politics, which

> challenge and confront hierarchical and centralized power at every turn and they patiently and diligently construct political processes and structures that limit the negative externalities of the inevitable power inequalities. (Maeckelberg 2011: 16)

Regarding the material contribution of the project to regeneration, as Cherstich noted:

> When the theatre arrives [in peripheries], it fixes something which had been uncultivated for years: manholes, potholes… worst case scenario, even though it did not leave a permanent mark, it left in people a nice memory - and, for a month and a half, an abandoned neighbourhood had functioning lights and mown grass[90].

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[90] See note 81.

These interventions, however, cannot truly be effective without a long-term intensive strategy on the unbuilt environment.

Reggio Emilia happened in a limited timeframe and without a coproduction element; however, as many interviewees have noted, many theatres have lacked the courage to do what Teatri di Reggio Emilia did: bringing theatre to its social dimension. Pandemic theatre has been characterized by the digital transformation, and the rise of new fruition and production mode which have, technically, made the intangible heritage of opera more accessible. Many of the interviewees have indicated OperaCamion as a necessary modality of doing theatre in cities, especially in the intra- and post-pandemic phases: resetting proximity, rethinking theatrical spaces and allowing for the reappropriation of public spaces, as it happened in Regio Emilia, is an action with which "cities reopen" (as Cantù evocatively put it), a priority in times of social disintegration.

Theatrical coproduction in Danisinni was facilitated by the presence of a strong community; it has involved the inhabitants in the production of para-theatrical spaces, and in the management and actual production of the performances in the 2017-2019 timeframe. The Danisinni experience opens new perspective on cultural coproduction in regeneration, and on the role of urban commons in governance – both dimensions being activators of human capabilities which Sen placed at the hear of his development model (1999), and which the literature on urban and cultural democracy has echoed:

> From a democratic perspective, cultural policy must focus on the equitable distribution of the capabilities by which individuals can take part in shaping the culture around them and interpret the expression of others. (Jones 2010: 10)

> The just city and nation is a place where anyone's creative impulses to "dicker" and improvise and reinvent themselves would be unleashed, where everyone would have the opportunity to make their own "vital little plans". (Jacobs 2016: 13)

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This research work has tried to contribute to the topic of urban regeneration, showing the role of culture and the commons in this process and proposing new models and new solutions. The preëminent position of culture in the production and reproduction of the spaces of the city, in the definition of its access mechanisms, in the economic dynamics at the core of its estate market, call for an intensive reflection on its political and economic

positioning within the urban sphere. Before asking 'how' to regenerate cities, a stringent question is to be answered: *who* should regenerate cities? *For whom?* Prima ancora che sul *come* rigenerare le città, emerge una domanda ancora più imponente: *chi* dovrebbe rigenerare le città? *Per chi?*

A univocal answer to this question would be arrogant – and unfruitful. Specifically, the quest for a universal panacea has caused the imposition of iconic architecture on popular neighbourhoods in New York and of mega-museums in small Basque villages; it took a long time to realize that these investments produced, indeed, disruptive effect on the local economy, but at immense social costs (often unaccounted for), generating marginalization and gentrification. Even Hugo, a XIX century novelist, identified two contrasting pushes in the production of urban spaces, the 'humblest house' and the 'royal Louvre', collective creativity, shaping everyday spaces, and great cultural interventions. He had the clairvoyance of seeing how the latter was suffocating the former, as cities fell prey to technocratic planning.

Cultural activities and venues can (must) follow a new development trajectory, able to respond to urban crises (and their consequences on space) in a coherent way with citizens' needs – especially in critical areas like peripheries, characterized by the absence of social and cultural infrastructures.

Actions of coproduction go in this direction. A diffused cultural strategy, a 'cultural guerrilla' able to penetrate the layer of neglect which covers peripheral ecosystems (and unbuilt environments within them), proposing temporary uses, does not have the capacity to erect buildings, but to activate processes: to contrast the sense of unsafety, and to attract citizens to places which abandonment had made inaccessible. The temporary reactivation of urban voids, the revitalization of neglected spaces, ephemeral coproduction, have the inevitable limit of being, precisely, temporary activities. At the same time, they have the advantage of freeing the potential users and coproducers of the limits and behavioural superstructures of the built environment, as an expression of hierarchies and power structures. Proposing new collective uses, new creative practices and new potential modes of spatial coproduction, these experiences elicit actions of care from the part of citizens, and have the potential to activate regeneration processes – thus replacing urban planning with urban design.

The active involvement of communities in actions of spatial re-production in unbuilt (or partially built) environments, and the co-production of cultural activities, can be described

as *reprodusage* (Euler 2018: 12-13), where users are producers, and where production is followed by reproduction, meaning care and upkeeping of a shared good; in order to elicit such actions, citizens need to be made accountable in the regeneration process.

Two propositions emerge: the former is the role of culture not as 'regenerator', but as 'activator' of processes. Culture as a moment of sociability, able to create meaningful shared experiences and to reactivate (temporarily at first, but progressively in a permanent way) communities and the spaces they inhabit. Impact indicators of these actions should be pivoted on social capital, the increased perception of accessibility and of the safety of places, and the increase of the cultural opportunities of citizens. These reactivation processes are particularly fruitful when they involve theatrical experiences: theatre as a commons, spatial coproduction, relations and a common expressive code have a great regenerative potential. This potential is fully displayed in spaces where formal, behavioural and spatial barriers are reduced to a minimum. In order for this to happen, however, public funding mechanisms ought to be allocated according to new methodologies, without diminishing the quest for artistic quality.

In this regeneration model, where culture is an activator, cultural institutions act as mediators, and of the commons as collaborative, enabling ecosystems. In spite of the polarized debate between planning (top-down) and contestation (bottom-up), the role the cultural infrastructure can play in the process of drawing decision makers and communities closer is of primary importance, as it offers a favorable ground for sharing artistic and societal objectives, develop knowledge and skills for citizens and reach new frontiers of artistic innovation. Equally important is the role of the commons for the development of new forms of governance for an accessible city and for a just urban regeneration: these forms go beyond minimal recognition (for the commons, which risk to become gated communities) and participatory urban governance, for public institutions (which often result in public consultations, leaving the actual power to institutions). This will lead to the creation of collaborative ecosystems where diverse urban actors participate, diversified skills emerge, and urban communities self-determinate themselves.

## Discussion of reviewers' comments

From the review process of the thesis, some potential limits of the research have emerged which are to be acknowledged and discussed in this session.

**Reviewer 1**

One of the remarks concerned the extent to which the Reggio Emilia case was useful to answer the research question. While it is true that the square used to perform OperaCamion there was not a urban void per se, what is also true is that squares during the COVID pandemic have all become voids, in reason of the drain in sociability that human societies have experienced.

The different collection methods, which in the reviewer's perspective made it difficult to compare the cases, were counterbalanced by triangulation of several direct and indirect sources: while the interviews were collected in different ways, the experience of OperaCamion was documented via videos, photos and the press, which made up for the different ethnographic methods adopted.

The asymmetry in the analysis of the cases (with Palermo being subject to a much longer analysis) was justified by the fact that Danisinni was, in the terminology of grounded theory, a research situation: the unexpected findings of a urban commons while investigating a theatrical commons asked for greater insights.

**Reviewer 2**

The reviewer contested the distinction between theatrical commons, urban commons and relational commons was pointless when applied to the OperaCamion case, and that the theatrical commons required a deeper theorization. For what concerns the first remark, a wide literature exists on both the urban and the relational commons, which has been dealt with in the state of the art of the research. Urban commons can partly be comprised in relational commons, as they embed social capital, but are not limited to it; conversely, relational commons are at the core of urban commons but expand beyond the notion. For what concerns the theatrical commons, it is indeed a concept which, having been subject to a very recent theorization from the part of the author herself, will require a greater and deeper exploration, which can be part of the future developments of the thesis.

Remarks about the vagueness of some terms (like politics and culture) was made; a deeper inspection of etymologies and of the semiotics of these terms could have indeed been useful, but it maybe would have extended the discourse beyond the scope of the thesis to discuss whether the meaning of culture used here was anthropological or arts-focused. It will nonetheless be taken into account that a more solid theoretical framework will have to be included in future research.

The reviewer additionally noted that the role of theatre in society emerges, but that a more focused theorization on the relationship between theatre, urban generation, commons and politicscould have given the thesis a more specific and methodologically rigorous layout. This is indeed an acknowledgement that must be made, and which could set the basis for a further step of the research.

Questions about the validity of the data collection method, especially prior to the beginning of my thesis, were raised. However, these have been addressed as a limit in the methodology section of the thesis. A comment similar to that of reviewer 1 about the different data collection methods was made (and has therefore been addressed).

Pictures were integrated in the annex after two of the reviewers mentioned it in their review. However, interviewees were not asked whether the full transcript of their interview could be placed in the thesis. Therefore, the transcripts will be available upon request (and upon the interviewee's consent), but have not been featured in the annex.

## Conclusioni

Alla fine del periodo di osservazione in presenza in Sicilia, nel luglio 2021, il Teatro Massimo ha comunicato che Padre Ugo di Marzo, Sacerdote di un'altra parrocchia palermitana che serve i quartieri Sperone e Brancaccio, ha portato un gruppo di bambini al Teatro per farglielo visitare, e ha chiesto di poter incontrare il Direttore Artistico, Marco Betta, al fine di iniziare un percorso con il Teatro che coinvolgesse i bambini delle due periferie. Il progetto, che è ancora in fase di elaborazione, porterà probabilmente alla nascita di un coro di voci bianche.

Questa vicenda ha due implicazioni: la prima è che OperaCamion è un'istanza in uno scenario variegato in cui attori urbani di ogni genere (sacerdoti, Sovrintendenti, artisti e cittadini) percepiscono la necessità di fronteggiare le crisi urbane attraverso la cultura in modi più sostenibili di quanto sia stato fatto finora – e stanno cercando di farlo in sinergia. In quanto 'goccia', ha un valore senza dubbio relativo e una valenza non generalizzabile. Eppure, (e questa è la seconda implicazione) quella goccia che è OperaCamion è un precedente da una serie di prospettive: è un modo di fare cultura nello spazio non-costruito e negletto delle periferie che, nella sua temporaneità, trasforma quei luoghi abbandonati in spazi vissuti e vivibili, mostrando l'esistenza di un alternativa all'abbandono e la possibilità di nuovi usi impensati per quelle piazze. È, più specificamente, un modo di fare opera, di ripensare i formati e gli spazi in cui l'opera è stata costretta, in cui la partecipazione verace e vivace dei cittadini smentisce il postulato che vuole l'opera un intrattenimento di nicchia *in quanto tale*: OperaCamion dimostra che format e spazi giocano un'importanza cruciale ai fini

dell'accessibilità alla cultura, e nello specifico a quella forma di patrimonio intangibile che è il teatro d'opera; crea, inoltre, un piccolo precedente 'artistico': la fluidità dei ruoli all'interno di OperaCamion, che consentono a un attore di diventare mimo e poi, in una certa misura, cantante, indica una dimensione di apprendimento sottesa al progetto, una dimensione trasformativa che la burocrazia istituzionale non è ancora stata in grado di cogliere e che la rigidità delle scritture artistiche non ricomprende.

OperaCamion non è un 'modello' in senso stretto – e infatti il progetto è stato declinato diversamente nelle tre diverse città, nonostante il team creativo alla fonte del suo sviluppo fosse sempre lo stesso. Tuttavia può essere considerato un paradigma, o, come molti degli intervistati lo hanno chiamato, una visione, un modo di fare teatro. In quanto tale, pur conservando un'unità estetica e di visioni, ha mostrato una capacità di applicarsi variamente a diversi contesti e di essere, di conseguenza, scalabile (ai fini della ricerca e della metodologia d'indagine, inoltre, questa specificità ha consentito di condensare il lavoro di ricerca attorno a un caso ben definito, così da analizzarlo nel dettaglio).

Questo 'modo' di fare teatro insiste sul dualismo di obiettivi artistici e sociali: l'innovazione artistica è stata resa possibile da un contesto informale, libero dalle restrizioni spaziali e comportamentali del teatro d'opera, dai suoi riti e dalle sue routine; dall'altro lato, se questa innovazione artistica non si fosse manifestata e lo spettacolo fosse rientrato a pieno titolo nei canoni dell'opera, il contesto sarebbe stato caratterizzato da una maggiore rigidità: gli artisti e gli spettatori non avrebbero interagito gli uni con gli altri nel modo vivace che in OperaCamion appariva tanto naturale.

In quanto lavoro interdisciplinare, questa tesi aspira a essere utile in più ambiti e a più professionalità. In ambito accademico, infatti, la tesi può essere d'interesse per i ricercatori studenti che si occupano di industrie culturali e creative, soprattutto perché la tesi tocca punti cruciali relativi al patrimonio culturale, alla sua valorizzazione e alla sua presentazione a nuovi tipi di pubblico cui era stato finora precluso, oltre a integrare il discorso relativo alla pianificazione territoriale e alle politiche urbane a quello relativo al management delle istituzioni culturali (e nello specifico quelle teatrali); per i ricercatori di cultural policy, soprattutto per quanto riguarda la democrazia culturale e il modo in cui le politiche culturali potrebbero favorirla, ridistribuendo i mezzi di produzione culturale e i finanziamenti destinati alla stessa attraverso un range più ampio e più inclusivo di proposte e di progetti; ma anche per comprendere in che modo possano essere forzati i limiti istituzionali e formali della cultura 'alta', così da renderla, appunto, più democratica e accessibile; ai ricercatori di

pianificazione urbana e rigenerazione, per comprendere quali sono i meccanismi sottesi alla produzione degli spazi della città, soprattutto quelli relativi alla cultura, e per conoscere modalità di riattivazione dei vuoti urbani alternative al paradigma controverso che ha caratterizzato finora la rigenerazione urbana a trazione culturale. Infine, gli studiosi di commons, che la tesi affronta nelle sue molteplici sfaccettature, cercando di fornire un quadro esaustivo per la rappresentazione dei vari fenomeni riportati in questa tesi: dalla dimensione culturale sottesa al commons teatrale a quella relazionale sottesa all'uso condiviso di spazi pubblici sotto l'egida di un progetto culturale, fino alla dimensione di commons urbano che contraddistingue Danisinni.

Al di fuori del contesto accademico, la tesi si presta a essere uno strumento utile per i *policymakers* – sia quelli interessati alle politiche urbane che a quelli che si occupano di supporto alla cultura. Per quanto riguarda i primi, la tesi infatti fornisce un esempio di quanto contino spazio e disposizione ai fini dell'esperienza culturale, e quanto sia necessario ripensare le caratteristiche formali del rapporto fra cultura e città per produrre un'infrastruttura culturale più accessibile – oltre che per proporre nuovi modelli di collaborazione fra le istituzioni e i cittadini; per quanto riguarda i secondi, la tesi suggerisce l'inadeguatezza dell'attuale supporto allo spettacolo, incentrato sui soggetti istituzionali anziché sulla validità dei progetti, su indicatori numerici anziché sugli impatti – e, anche quando questi ultimi sono presi in considerazione, il dato numerico e finanziario ha la meglio su quello relativo al valore sociale. L'esperienza qui illustrata può fornire spunti anche agli artisti e ai creativi nell'ambito dello spettacolo e non solo: per quanto riguarda la dimensione sociale, riguardo alle metodologie di coinvolgimento delle comunità, di rivitalizzazione degli spazi pubblici, di riavvicinamento dei pubblici a forme d'arte considerate elitiste; per quanto riguarda la dimensione artistica, fornisce esempi di come i confini formali e spaziali delle produzioni artistiche possano essere sfidati per produrre risultati artisticamente rilevanti e socialmente significativi. Infine, questa tesi ha presentato un esempio di come le comunità possano presentare delle istanze relative alla propria creatività e al proprio diritto alla città che finiscono col forzare le istituzioni (è stato il caso di Danisinni, sarà, si spera, il caso di Sperone e Brancaccio); il modello di cooperazione orizzontale fra artisti, istituzioni e comunità può fornire spunti ai cittadini e agli attivisti su come attivare dei processi sostenibili di rigenerazione.

## Limiti e futuri sviluppi

I limiti del presente lavoro sono di duplice natura, perché riguardano tanto la metodologia adottata quanto la natura stessa dei casi studio. Sul piano del metodo, sia l'analisi di casi studio che l'etnografia presentano delle limitazioni: la prima, in quanto fornisce, a fronte della possibilità di osservare nel dettaglio fenomeni specifici nei loro contesti naturali, un set limitato di casi non generalizzabili; la seconda, in quanto ricerca intersoggettiva, in cui l'ingresso del ricercatore nel campo d'indagine implica la presenza di condizionamenti (*biases*) che possono essere mitigati e di cui si può essere consapevoli, ma che non possono essere del tutto rimossi.

Durante le interviste, inoltre, sono emerse alcune criticità di cui è necessario tenere conto nella discussione dei risultati: una delle intervistate si è mostrata scettica rispetto alla definizione di bene comune applicata all'opera, in ragione della complessità organizzativa e progettuale che solo un'istituzione culturale, strutturata e pubblicamente finanziata, può sostenere. Uno dei cantanti, invece, si opponeva agli obiettivi sociali del teatro e alle forme partecipate, definendole una forma di 'concorrenza sleale' per i professionisti che si trovano ad affrontare difficoltà strutturali e precarietà diffusa – spostando dunque l'attenzione dal problema centrale della condizione degli artisti.

Sul piano dei contenuti, i casi studio presentano delle limitazioni per quanto riguarda l'efficacia delle loro azioni. Alla base di queste limitazioni c'è un fattore temporale: a Reggio Emilia, OperaCamion è stato rappresentato solo due volte nel settembre 2020; a Roma, il progetto si è dipanato nel corso di 3 anni, in alcuni casi riuscendo a toccare più volte le stesse periferie, ma comunque rappresentando un evento temporaneo, in grado di produrre una rivitalizzazione solo temporanea. Al fine di produrre risultati duraturi, le azioni di OperaCamion dovrebbero poter insistere sul territorio con regolarità, o essere inserite all'interno di un processo di riattivazione tramite eventi temporanei e operazioni di micro-urbanizzazione che consentano l'utilizzo, da parte dei cittadini, dei vuoti urbani.

La pandemia ha inoltre impedito di svolgere parte delle osservazioni in presenza; di conseguenza, si è attinto a una serie di fonti primarie e secondarie: l'osservazione partecipante del 2018 (anno in cui ho svolto il mio tirocinio curriculare presso il Teatro dell'Opera di Roma), le interviste, i video e le fotografie per ricostruire le modalità con cui le persone usavano gli spazi pubblici negletti durante la performance, e il modo in cui si relazionavano fra loro, con lo spazio e con lo spettacolo (rispondendo alla tripartizione delle risorse del theatrical commons analizzato nella sezione 3.1). Può comunque rientrare nei

futuri sviluppi della tesi integrare questa dimensione mancante, nel caso in cui OperaCamion continui a percorrere le periferie d'Italia: tramite l'utilizzo di metodologie per l'osservazione della vita pubblica, interviste non strutturare e *deep hanging out* prima e dopo la performance, sarà possibile ottenere nuovi dati di prima mano per afferrare una dimensione ulteriore del commons teatrale.

I futuri sviluppi della tesi potranno riguardare altri aspetti rilevanti emersi durante l'elaborazione empirica, che non potevano essere approfonditi nel dettaglio in questa sede e che nondimeno presentano caratteristiche di originalità degne di essere osservate: le interviste di Roma e di Palermo, ad esempio, hanno mostrato l'esistenza di un ecosistema culturale vivace che rimescola le categorie culturali e urbane, creando un'interazione fra cultura 'alta' e 'bassa', fra istituzioni e creativi, obiettivi sociali e artistici, e sarebbe interessante adottare metodologie miste (dalla network analysis allo snowball sampling) per far emergere queste interazioni; a Reggio Emilia, invece, la presenza di un cluster musicale sembra produrre tensioni rispetto alle istanze creative innovative, e potrebbe essere oggetto di ulteriori approfondimenti. Infine, il commons urbano di Danisinni, con le sue tensioni, le sue contraddizioni, la sua capacità di affermarsi nella scena della governance come attore urbano, richiederà osservazioni ulteriori per monitorarne gli sviluppi.

## Considerazioni conclusive

È a partire dalle considerazioni espresse nella sessione precedente che è possibile riflettere sul contributo che questa testi ha voluto apportare al dibattito nel quale si inserisce su cultura, rigenerazione degli spazi urbani e beni comuni. I contributi vengono illustrati nel dettaglio nelle sezioni che seguono, e vengono qui sintetizzati brevemente:

4. Democrazia culturale: la tesi propone di superare le dicotomie fra i due approcci alla democrazia culturale ('alto' e 'basso') mostrando attraverso l'esempio teatrale qui presentato che le due nozioni di cultura 'alta' e 'bassa' siano in realtà costrutti sociali che possono essere superati nel momento in cui i format e gli spazi culturali vengono sfidati; mostra anche la necessità di trattare la democrazia culturale come giustizia spaziale, riflettendo non solo sull'accessibilità economica e sulla libertà espressiva degli individui, ma anche sugli spazi della cultura e sulla loro posizione nell'infrastruttura urbana; propone infine un ripensamento del supporto alla cultura in Italia (e allo spettacolo specificamente) dalla prospettiva della democrazia culturale, alla luce dei risultati presentati nella sezione empirica del presente lavoro di tesi.

5.  Commons: la tesi elabora un commons teatrale, una risorsa appropriata e prodotta da coloro che vi prendono parte (attori e spettatori) e che consta di più dimensioni, spaziale, relazionale e drammaturgica; riflette sia sulle implicazioni pratiche che questo commons ha sulla rigenerazione urbana a trazione culturale, che su quelle teoriche nell'ambito dei commons, illustrando come il *commoning* a trazione culturale sposta il focus dell'analisi dalle relazioni proprietarie alle relazioni di produzione.

6.  Rigenerazione urbana: la tesi illustra, attraverso il caso di Danisinni, l'importanza di andare oltre la 'minimal recognition' per gli urban commons, e dell'interazione del commons con attori esterni tramite il monitoraggio della comunità, per un'azione di rigenerazione più sostenibile nel tempo, in grado di sviluppare le capacità umane in luoghi fragili. La tesi riflette al tempo stesso sulle conseguenze politiche di questa interazione. Osservando gli interventi temporanei di rigenerazione nell'ambiente non costruito, la tesi guarda al DIY urbanism come a una pratica di commoning in grado di riattivare temporaneamente i vuoti urbani, proponendo usi alternativi e pratiche di riappropriazione attraverso la cultura.

*Democrazia culturale*

**Democrazia culturale oltre le dicotomie fra cultura 'alta' e 'bassa'.** La tesi ha dimostrato il bisogno di superare le dicotomie fra le due accezioni di democrazia culturale: quella più classica, che si esprimeva con l'epitome 'great art for everybody' negli anni '70 (Simpson 1976) e quella che, oggi, spinge per una redistribuzione dei mezzi di produzione culturale e contro un sistema paternalistico che aveva 'imposto' il canone di arte e cultura in base a criteri ritenuti obsoleti (Gross, Wilson 2018). Entrambe le due accezioni derivano da quelle stesse sovrastrutture sociali che aspirano a superare, e che operano una distinzione fra cultura 'alta' e 'bassa' in base al contenuto. In questo senso, la tesi sposa la proposta di Hadley e Belfiore (2018: 221), per cui

> Contemporary articulations of, and engagements with, the ideas of cultural democracy must both reconcile themselves with the nuanced and semi-documented history of cultural democracy and the significant macro-level shifts in economic, technological and social fields which have made an imperative of the need to reassess these arguments.

La tesi ha contestato la dicotomia fra i due approcci tramite un'analisi storica e una empirica delle pratiche teatrali: nel sottocapitolo "Theatre and exclusion in the city" (all'interno della sezione 1.4), lo sviluppo del teatro è affrontato da una prospettiva sociologica e urbana, analizzando come è cambiata la struttura del teatro (rispondendo a diverse necessità politiche

e a diverse istanze sociali) e a come si è articolata la sua diffusione nello spazio urbano (riflettendo o contestando gerarchie e sistemi di potere). L'*enclosure* del teatro (e soprattutto di quello d'opera) appare dunque come un costrutto sociale facilitato da una specifica strategia di segregazione spaziale, che coincide con un declino della sfera pubblica e degli spazi in cui viene praticata:

> In a society with a strong public life there should be affinities between the domains of stage and street; there should be something comparable in the expressive experience crowds have had in these two realms. As public life declines, these affinities should erode (Sennett 1977: 61)

Dal punto di vista empirico, OperaCamion rappresenta una potenziale inversione di tendenza, mostrando come sia possibile pensare un nuovo teatro per una nuova società, in una città complessa – e come chiunque, anche senza essere un anziano abbiente[91], può godere del teatro d'opera. Inoltre, nel caso di Danisinni l'opera ha offerto più di un'esperienza di coproduzione, configurandosi come una modalità di *self expression* (di espressione del sé) che non viene solitamente ascritta al modello di democrazia culturale descritto come 'Great art for everybody'.

**Democrazia culturale come giustizia spaziale.** Come molti, nelle interviste, hanno sottolineato, non deve trattarsi di un *aut-aut*: l'opera e la sua ricchezza espressiva trovano nello spazio teatrale un luogo privilegiato. Però prima ancora di correre ai ripari, nel timore che il luogo preposto allo spettacolo perda la propria centralità, occorre quantomeno tentare di proporre una nuova modularità degli spazi e dei formati del teatro (e dell'opera in particolare). Lo spazio, infatti, gioca un ruolo preponderante nel determinare l'accessibilità fisica e percettiva a un'esperienza culturale. Come chiaramente specificato da Rosenstein (2011: 9),

> there are important ways in which the cultural policies and cultural policy infrastructure of today's cities are less responsive, transparent and democratic than they must be in order to cultivate diverse and sustainable urban cultural life.

In questo quadro operazioni come OperaCamion consentono di ridefinire collettivamente, da parte di nuovi pubblici le regole comportamentali attraverso cui usufruire dell'opera; inoltre, la fruizione inedita di spazi negletti attraverso un'esperienza che ne mitiga il degrado e ne aumenta l'accessibilità. La capacità, da parte di interventi artistici nel quadro della

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[91] Così dipingono i fruitori d'opera i piatti indicatori demografici degli studi di pubblico.

democrazia culturale, di produrre luoghi di significato e 'terzi luoghi', come indicato da Lim, Im e Lee (2019), viene confermata da OperaCamion. Una piazza 'vestita a festa' tramite un intervento temporaneo incisivo ma modesto risulterà comunque più familiare e più approcciabile di un teatro tardo ottocentesco vicino a una delle arterie più maestose e centrali di Roma (è il caso, appunto, del Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, situato vicino alla Via Nazionale).

**Democrazia culturale, politiche e indicatori di impatto.** Il discorso sulla democrazia culturale evoca considerazioni politiche, e specificamente considerazioni sulle politiche per la cultura e per lo spettacolo: le questioni inerenti al giudizio della qualità artistica (che nel caso del Fondo Unico per lo Spettacolo, o FUS, in Italia, appaiono poco trasparenti), così come gli indicatori quantitativi (relativi al numero di biglietti e al numero di artisti coinvolti nelle singole produzioni) si rivelano insufficienti per afferrare la complessità progettuale di operazioni emergenti come OperaCamion; in un testo del 2000, Balestra e Malaguti segnalano che in Italia "non si ragiona per progetti, ma per soggetti"; per quanto datata, è un'osservazione che non è stata mai recepita dal legislatore, e che di conseguenza si rivela quanto mai attuale. Agli indicatori qualitativi e a quelli quantitativi (ambedue ripensati) vanno associati degli indicatori di impatto: sebbene la formulazione di tali indicatori esuli dagli obiettivi del presente lavoro di ricerca, dalle interviste sono emersi una serie di effetti che OperaCamion è stata in grado di produrre sullo spazio e sulle persone, che andavano dalla cura dell'ambiente non costruito alla percezione di una maggiore sicurezza dovuta al presidio della piazza (soprattutto per quel che riguardava lo spaccio di droghe), fino alla percezione di accessibilità dell'offerta culturale manifestata dagli abitanti; nel caso di Danisinni, questi impatti hanno riguardato in modo più incisivo l'ambiente della fattoria e il coinvolgimento (peraltro molto fruttuoso) dei bambini, e quindi allo sviluppo delle capacità umane e urbane. Andando oltre una prospettiva che vede nella cultura un prodotto o un servizio da vendere, acquistare o di cui usufruire, OperaCamion consente di gettare una luce sul valore relazionale della cultura, di cui è necessario tener conto nell'effettuare valutazioni qualitative e d'impatto su progetti del genere.

Com'è naturale, progetti con una vocazione così spiccatamente sociale presentano una fragilità intrinseca, ovvero quella dell'autonomia finanziaria: modelli ibridi di finanziamento pubblico-privato devono essere messi in atto per consentire a questi progetti di rendersi autonomi, in una certa misura, rispetto al finanziamento pubblico. Il Teatro Massimo si è avvalso di Art Bonus, che consente detrazioni fiscali a chi fa donazioni alle istituzioni culturali, per finanziare gli specifici progetti che non sono supportati dal Fondo Unico (OperaCamion, che non produce bigliettazione, è fra questi). Il ripensamento dei criteri di

attribuzione del Fondo, a livello Ministeriale, dovrebbe dunque andare di pari passo con la ricerca di maggiore autonomia a livello delle singole istituzioni.

*Commons*

Segman, che ha parlato del tacito contratto fra attori e spettatori, riprende il pensiero di Rancière (2009) nel segnalare che ci sono esperienze teatrali che riscrivono le regole alla base di questo contratto, esperienze in cui si passa dall'essere spettatori all'essere 'performers of a collective activity' (Sedgman 2018: 14).

**Il 'theatrical commons'.** Questo essere 'attori di un'attività collettiva' che è il teatro è alla base di uno dei principali contributi originali di questa tesi alla ricerca sui *commons*. Ancora una volta, la ricerca ha operato su un duplice livello di analisi storica e di elaborazione empirica: dapprima ricostruendo la storia dello spazio teatrale, della sua evoluzione architettonica e del suo rapporto con il tessuto urbano, così da evidenziarne i caratteri di arte eminentemente sociale e relazionale. Le trasformazioni architettoniche e urbane riflettono il rapporto della società non solo con le proprie forme di espressione teatrale, ma anche con la propria sfera pubblica (una relazione trattata in modo esaustivo da Sennett, 1977). In un secondo momento, la ricerca è andata a osservare queste dinamiche spaziali e relazionali/sociali così come appaiono nei casi studio di Roma, Palermo e Reggio Emilia. Questa analisi ha consentito la formulazione di un 'bene comune teatrale' (theatrical commons nella formulazione inglese) composto, formato cioè da tre risorse inscindibili: lo spazio, le relazioni e la drammaturgia, che vengono simultaneamente coprodotte da attori e spettatori. Le relazioni sono quelle che si formano fra attori e spettatori, fra azione teatrale e partecipazione emotiva e anche fra gli spettatori stessi, che si riuniscono per 'essere insieme' (l'azione sottesa al *commoning* secondo Ugo Mattei, 2012, e senza la quale non ci sarebbe performance). Lo spazio, che va ben oltre l'architettura teatrale, è il risultato di questo processo relazionale (e rende, per questo, proficuo parlare di un vero e proprio 'spazio relazionale', che non esiste al di fuori delle relazioni che lo creano, secondo la definizione di Harvey, 2004). L'elemento drammaturgico è, invece, un '*cultural commons*', un insieme di archetipi gestuali, lessicali, musicali, di cui il teatro si nutre in ogni civiltà. In alcuni contesti, l'*enclosure* della risorsa teatrale ha irrigidito il commons teatrale impedendo la produzione e appropriazione condivisa di queste tre risorse. In altri, i confini e i format di spazio, relazioni e drammaturgia sono stati variamente sfidati per opporsi ai meccanismi dominanti di esclusione e inaccessibilità – gli esempi spaziano dalla *halqa* anticolonialista del Novecento teatrale arabo a OperaCamion stessa.

Il rischio, quando nuove risorse vengono inserite nel novero di 'beni comuni', è quello di alimentare una tassonomia distrofica, tanto ambiziosa quanto improduttiva, arrivando a una sostanziale insignificanza concettuale. Tenendo in mente questo ammonimento, con la teorizzazione di un commons teatrale si è cercato dunque non semplicemente di contribuire allo studio sui commons fornendo una nuova definizione, ma di far sì che questa teorizzazione fosse strumentale a capire la natura e il funzionamento della risorsa teatrale, e a sviluppare delle politiche che rispondano meglio a queste caratteristiche, facilitando dunque gli elementi di coproduzione e socialità, e degli spazi teatrali che siano degli 'ecosistemi abilitanti' (*à la* Manzini, 2019) di queste relazioni.

**Commons relazionali e comunità.** Ben più proficuo rispetto all'ambito 'tassonomico' della ricerca sui commons appare lo studio sulla dimensione sociale, relazionale e di governance legata ai beni comuni. L'elemento peculiare del commons teatrale, rispetto a molte altre risorse, è la natura effimera sia della risorsa (che esiste nello spazio e nel tempo limitati della performance) che dei legami fra i *commoners* (che sono estranei l'uno all'altro, e che sono uniti solo per il tempo di questa attività collettiva). In questo senso, pensare al commons teatrale aiuta anche a capire come si configurano le relazioni all'interno di altre articolazioni dei commons, come quelli urbani, in cui degli estranei collaborano fra loro in uno spazio saturo (Huron 2015).

Il discorso sul commons teatrale si inserisce dunque in quella branca di ricerca sui commons che si incentra sul *commoning* come pratica sociale prima ancora che sui beni comuni in quanto, appunto, beni. In questo senso, il commons teatrale, così come l'esperienza di OperaCamion, è imperniato sulle relazioni alla base dell'atto teatrale (nel caso di Roma e Reggio Emilia), e sulle relazioni cooperative fra attori molto diversi fra loro (un'istituzione culturale e i *commoners* di Danisinni). La ricerca dunque sposta l'attenzione dalla dimensione proprietaria alle relazioni di produzione – nelle parole di Roggero (2010: 364) riposizionando la questione dei commons 'from one centered on property relations to one focused on relations of production': il punto, nel caso del teatro, non è dunque chi *possiede*, in ultima istanza, il progetto teatrale, ma le modalità cooperative (e i processi di commoning) che questo è stato in grado di attivare.

*Rigenerazione urbana*
**Commons e governance.** Il contributo della tesi rispetto ai commons si assesta infine su un terzo piano, quello della governance, che interseca il tema della rigenerazione urbana e dei processi attraverso cui viene generata e gestita. Questa dimensione può essere osservata

perlopiù nel caso di Palermo, in cui la gestione del progetto è stata, effettivamente, divisa fra l'istituzione culturale e i *commoners* di Danisinni. Danisinni rappresenta un esempio di urban commons *sui generis* per una serie di ragioni:

3. Per via della profonda integrazione dell'elemento umano con quello naturale: l'ecosistema di Danisinni non è composto solo da umani ma anche da piante e animali (che non vengono mangiati ma solo accuditi), in un rapporto di mutualismo e reciprocità. In quanto tale propone un modello di comunità urbana piuttosto eterodosso, ma inedito nella letteratura sui commons urbani, esemplare nella sua sostenibilità e nell'abbandono dell'antropocentrismo distintivo della scala urbana.

4. È stato in grado, nelle fasi più avanzate del suo sviluppo, di affermarsi sul piano della governance urbana, ponendosi in opposizione con il comune su una serie di questioni inerenti alle proprie risorse, e poi lavorando in cooperazione con le istituzioni culturali per co-progettare e co-produrre azioni culturali; si è, infine, avviato verso la costruzione di una micro-economia locale che, per quanto fragile, meriterà di essere osservata nei suoi sviluppi.

Rispetto a quest'ultimo punto, dunque, il contributo originale presentato dal caso di Danisinni è quello di andare oltre la 'minimal recognition' identificata da Ostrom, divenendo attore urbano di rilievo; questo ha comportato una serie di benefici per gli abitanti di Danisinni (che, dopo essersi affermati come pluralità di *commoners* sul territorio, hanno potuto 'esternalizzare' la produzione di una serie di servizi alle istituzioni culturali mantenendo alto il livello di monitoraggio sulle istituzioni stesse) e per le istituzioni, che hanno potuto beneficiare di nuovi input creativi e costruire progetti in linea con le aspettative locali (arrivando così a un processo di adattamento istituzionale, nella definizione fornita da Emerson e Gerlak, 2014). OperaCamion a Danisinni dunque sarebbe un progetto di rigenerazione di successo perché in grado di innestarsi su istanze culturali preesistenti, come evidenziato appunto dalla letteratura (si veda Bailey, Miles and Stark, 2004). Dal punto di vista della collaborazione, Danisinni echeggia le parole di Müller, per cui

> Within the urban commons, collaboration is more focused: urban commons could be more adequate partners than the 'general public'... [they] have already developed common visions and requirements and could be able to bring the necessary collective power along to take an active political role (Müller 2015: 151)

È sempre Müller a segnalare che l'azione congiunta coi *commons* è non solo più efficace, ma anche potenzialmente più sostenibile nel lungo periodo:

> Whenever residents are fully integrated in planning processes, the level of identification and responsibility with the object/resource increases. So people are more likely to continue to take care of their resource/neighborhood/park even after the completion of the planning process. (Müller 2015: 151)

Mentre l'esempio di Danisinni indica che la cooperazione fra istituzioni e commons è alla base di una gestione non solo più giusta, ma potenzialmente più efficace delle questioni pertinenti alla rigenerazione urbana, occorre notare che questo esempio non fornisce risposte su come sia possibile replicare questo modello, ovvero su come sia possibile generare istanze di cittadinanza attiva simili a quelle di Danisinni. Una simile problematica è stata posta da Ezio Manzini, ed è destinata a rimanere una questione aperta di questa tesi, e un potenziale futuro sviluppo per il progetto di ricerca:

> In the past […] when social transformations were slow, social commons emerged "almost naturally" out of the long-term workings of communities. Today, in a fluid world in rapid transformation, traditional communities are dissolving and the new ones emerging are unable to recreate them in the quasi-natural ways of the past. Having understood this, we must now understand whether and how this can happen in other ways, considering the unprecedented nature of these new communities and the ways in which they themselves form and evolve over time (Manzini 2019: 16).

Riletta alla luce della letteratura sui commons, questa 'pacifica cooperazione' con le istituzioni potrebbe essere vista come un depotenziamento della vocazione politica (o, per altri, dello schietto antagonismo) che caratterizza i commons urbani. All'oggi, questo problema non sembra oscurare la forza dell'esempio di Danisinni, il quale può, tuttavia, contribuire a generare riflessioni sull'equilibrio fra una cooperazione produttiva, necessaria alla sopravvivenza dei commons e al loro successo nell'ecosistema urbano, e diluzione dell'autonomia politica dei commons, che porterebbe al loro assorbimento all'interno della governance neoliberale che contraddistingue oggi la gran parte delle città.

**Riattivazione temporanea e partecipata dei vuoti urbani.** La ricerca produce, in ultima istanza, un contributo sul tema della rigenerazione urbana a trazione culturale. Nel primo capitolo, il ruolo della cultura nella ristrutturazione delle città in un'economia postindustriale è stato illustrato tramite interventi teorici ed esempi pratici, mostrando quanto le politiche urbane a matrice culturale abbiano finito con l'esasperare, in molti casi, la marginalizzazione di gruppi fragili di abitanti tramite azioni massicce che poco rispondevano a bisogni locali e problemi strutturali dello sviluppo urbano. Esistono numerose azioni di risposta a questo

paradigma, che cercano di rendere gli spazi della città più accessibili, e i processi di produzione di questi spazi più democratici. Molte di queste azioni sono azioni di *commoning*, che hanno preso la forma di occupazioni o processi partecipativi partiti dal basso per la gestione e appropriazione delle risorse urbane. Nel contesto culturale, questo implica domandarsi per chi, con chi e dove viene prodotta la cultura, in un processo di ripensamento delle modalità con cui è stato fatto finora.

Gli interventi descritti in questa tesi si sono mossi in questa direzione, e sono di duplice natura: interventi riattivazione temporanea dei luoghi tramite azioni culturali (è il caso di Roma e Reggio Emilia), e interventi di coproduzione culturale in un ambiente rigenerato 'dal basso' (a Danisinni). Gli interventi di Roma e di Reggio Emilia condividono tanto il vantaggio quanto il limite di essere temporanei. Nel caso di Roma, questo ha significato la possibilità per le persone di riattivare l'ambiente non costruito, i vuoti urbani negletti tramite un'esperienza culturale: riproducendo e co-producendo lo spazio teatrale, hanno messo in pratica un'azione di *commoning* e realizzato un intervento di "*DIY urbanism*" – che è stato, a sua volta, osservato attraverso la lente dei commons (Volont 2019): sebbene circoscritti nel tempo, interventi di questo genere sono il punto di giunzione fra la dimensione urbana e culturale della rigenerazione; generano socialità, consentono accessibilità all'offerta culturale e aiutano a immaginare un'alternativa, producendo nuovi usi per i vuoti urbani. Questo spostamento degli equilibri di potere nel processo di urbanizzazione (Mould 2014: 529), soprattutto nella misura in cui diviene una forma di auto-organizzazione temporanea da parte dei cittadini nell'ambiente non costruito, è prezioso per prefigurare delle alternative – e può dunque entrare a pieno titolo nelle politiche di prefigurazione, in quanto

> [they] challenge and confront hierarchical and centralized power at every turn and they patiently and diligently construct political processes and structures that limit the negative externalities of the inevitable power inequalities. (Maeckelberg 2011: 16)

Per quanto riguarda l'impatto materiale di queste operazioni, le parole di Cherstich sono più che eloquenti:

> Il teatro, quando arriva, obbliga a sistemare qualcosa che era incolto da anni, tombini, buche per le strade. Mal che vada, se non ha lasciato niente, ha lasciato nelle persone un bel ricordo, e per un mese e mezzo un quartiere abbandonato a se stesso ha avuto le luci funzionanti e il pratino rasato[92].

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[92] Si veda nota 81.

Al fine di rendere questi interventi davvero efficaci, tuttavia, si rivela necessario immaginare una strategia più consistente e a lungo termine sull'ambiente non costruito.

La dimensione di Reggio Emilia è la più circoscritta nel tempo e quella in cui l'elemento di coproduzione è meno presente; tuttavia, come molti degli intervistati hanno segnalato, ai teatri è mancato il coraggio di fare quello che i Teatri di Reggio Emilia hanno fatto, ovvero riportare il teatro alla sua dimensione di pratica relazionale e sociale, oltre che culturale. Il teatro del periodo pandemico è stato caratterizzato dalla transizione verso il digitale e dalla nascita di nuove modalità di fruizione e di produzione che hanno, tecnicamente, reso il patrimonio intangibile più accessibile. Molti degli intervistati hanno tuttavia indicato OperaCamion come una modalità necessaria di fare teatro per le città, soprattutto nella fase intra- e post-pandemica: ristabilire la prossimità, ripensare gli spazi del teatro e consentire la riappropriazione degli spazi pubblici, come è accaduto a Reggio Emilia, è un'azione con cui 'si riaprono le città' (nelle evocative parole del direttore artistico Paolo Cantù), un'azione che dovrà diventare prioritaria per affrontare tempi complessi di disgregazione sociale.

L'intervento di coproduzione teatrale di Danisinni è stato meno temporaneo e facilitato dalla presenza di una comunità forte e attiva; ha visto il coinvolgimento degli abitanti nella produzione di spazi adibiti allo spettacolo, ma soprattutto nella gestione e nell'effettiva produzione creativa degli spettacoli negli anni 2017-2019. L'esperienza di Danisinni apre nuove prospettive sul ruolo della coproduzione culturale nella rigenerazione e su quello dei commons nella governance urbana, entrambi riattivatori delle capacità umane (le *human capabilities* che Amartya Sen pone al centro del paradigma di sviluppo da lui proposto nel 1999), che la letteratura sulla democrazia culturale ha poi ripreso, e che riecheggia l'ideale di Jane Jacobs di democrazia urbana:

> From a democratic perspective, cultural policy must focus on the equitable distribution of the capabilities by which individuals can take part in shaping the culture around them and interpret the expression of others. (Jones 2010: 10)

> The just city and nation is a place where anyone's creative impulses to "dicker" and improvise and reinvent themselves would be unleashed, where everyone would have the opportunity to make their own "vital little plans". (Jacobs 2016: 13)

Questo lavoro ha cercato di contribuire al tema della rigenerazione della città, mostrando il ruolo della cultura e dei commons in questo processo e proponendo nuovi modelli e nuove soluzioni. La posizione preminente della cultura nella produzione e riproduzione degli spazi della città, nella definizione dei suoi meccanismi di accesso e delle logiche economiche alla base del suo mercato immobiliare così come del suo modello di sviluppo, richiede una riflessione estesa e intensa sul suo posizionamento politico ed economico nella sfera urbana. Prima ancora che sul *come* rigenerare le città, emerge una domanda ancora più imponente: *chi* dovrebbe rigenerare le città? *Per chi*?

Una risposta univoca a questa domanda sarebbe tanto arrogante quanto profondamente infruttuosa – anzi, è stata proprio la ricerca di una ricetta curativa univoca ai mali della città ad aver causato l'imposizione di architetture iconiche in vecchi quartieri popolari americani e mega-musei in piccole cittadine basche, prima che ci si rendesse conto che questi interventi producevano, sì, un effetto dirompente (*disruptive*, in termini economici) rispetto all'economia locale, ma a dei costi sociali spesso insostenibili (e, per questo, tagliati fuori dai quadri economici), generati da processi di marginalizzazione e gentrificazione. Persino un romanziere ottocentesco, il già citato Hugo, aveva identificato due diverse spinte nella produzione degli spazi della città, e della cultura con essi: quella della 'modesta casa' e del 'maestoso Louvre', la creatività collettiva che dà forma agli spazi quotidiani e i grandi interventi culturali; in aggiunta a ciò, avuto la chiaroveggenza di intuire come la seconda spinta stesse progressivamente soffocando la prima, rendendo le città sempre più appannaggio di una pianificazione tecnocratica e affermando con insistenza i diritti di un segmento molto ridotto e molto privilegiato di popolazione urbana.

Le attività culturali e gli spazi dedicati alla cultura possono (devono) seguire un'altra traiettoria di sviluppo, che sia in grado di rispondere alle crisi urbane (e alle sue conseguenze sugli spazi della città) in modo reattivo rispetto agli effettivi bisogni dei cittadini – a maggior ragione in aree critiche come le periferie, spesso caratterizzate dall'assenza di infrastrutture sociali e culturali di riferimento.

In questa direzione vanno le azioni di coproduzione tanto delle attività culturali quanto degli spazi urbani. Un'azione culturale diffusa, una sorta di 'guerriglia culturale' che sia in grado di penetrare lo strato di negligenza che ricopre gli ambienti delle periferie (e soprattutto gli spazi non costruiti come le piazze) proponendo usi temporanei, non ha la capacità di elevare edifici, ma di attivare processi: di contrastare il senso di insicurezza diffusa e di attirare i cittadini verso luoghi che il degrado aveva reso inaccessibili. La riattivazione temporanea dei

luoghi urbani, la rivitalizzazione di piazze neglette, la coproduzione effimera, hanno l'inevitabile limite di essere, appunto, attività temporanee. Al contempo, hanno il grande pregio di liberare i potenziali utenti e coproduttori dalle sovrastrutture e dai limiti comportamentali che l'ambiente costruito, come espressione di gerarchie e meccanismi di potere, inevitabilmente produce. Inoltre, proponendo nuovi usi collettivi, nuove pratiche creative e potenziali modalità di coproduzione dello spazio, queste esperienze sollecitano delle azioni di cura da parte dei cittadini, e hanno dunque il potenziale di attivare dei processi rigenerativi in cui i cittadini siano integrati – sostituendo così il design alla pianificazione nel progetto urbano.

Il coinvolgimento attivo delle comunità nelle azioni di ri-produzione dello spazio in ambienti non costruiti o semi-costruiti, e la co-produzione di attività culturali, può essere descritto con un termine mutuato dalla letteratura sui commons come *reprodusage* (Euler 2018: 12-13), che prevede la coincidenza di utenti e produttori, e oltre che una costante operazione di cura e manutenzione (ri-produzione appunto) del bene condiviso; proprio per sollecitare questo lavoro di cura è necessario che i cittadini diventino parte dei processi di rigenerazione.

Emergono dunque due proposizioni: la prima è il ruolo della cultura non tanto come rigeneratrice, ma come attivatrice di processi. La cultura come momento di socialità, in grado di creare esperienze significative condivise e di riattivare (dapprima temporaneamente, ma in modo progressivo anche permanentemente) le comunità e gli spazi in cui vivono dovrebbe occupare una posizione di preminenza nell'agenda della governance urbana. Gli indicatori di impatto di queste azioni dovrebbero ruotare attorno al capitale sociale, all'aumentata percezione dell'accessibilità e della sicurezza dei luoghi, e all'aumento delle opportunità culturali dei cittadini. Questo processo di riattivazione ha esiti particolarmente felici nelle esperienze teatrali: la proposizione del teatro come bene comune, in cui la coproduzione dello spazio, le dimensioni sociali e relazionali e l'identificazione con un codice espressivo comune, mette in luce il suo potenziale rigenerativo; potenziale che emerge con maggior forza in luoghi che consentono l'abbattimento delle barriere formali, comportamentali e spaziali in cui è stato costretto da anni di *enclosure*. Affinché questo processo sia possibile, tuttavia, i meccanismi del finanziamento pubblico dovranno essere reindirizzati a nuove metodologie di valutazione e a nuove priorità, senza che questo sottragga rilievo alla qualità artistica del prodotto.

In questo modello di rigenerazione, a fronte del ruolo della cultura come *attivatrice*, emerge in seconda istanza il ruolo delle istituzioni e delle associazioni culturali come *mediatrici*, e dei

commons come ecosistemi collaborativi e abilitanti. A dispetto della polarizzazione del dibattito fra pianificazione (dall'alto) e contestazione (dal basso), il ruolo che l'infrastruttura culturale può avere nel processo di riavvicinamento fra i decisori e le comunità è di primo piano, perché offre tramite la progettazione culturale il campo ideale per condividere obiettivi artistici e sociali, per sviluppare saperi e competenze per i cittadini e per raggiungere nuove frontiere di innovazione artistica per le istituzioni. Ugualmente fondamentale, per una città accessibile e per una rigenerazione urbana sostenibile, è il ruolo dei commons urbani per lo sviluppo di forme alternative di governance: forme che vadano oltre il principio del riconoscimento minimo, per i commons (che rischiano di diventare comunità segregate), e i meccanismi di governance partecipativa, per le istituzioni pubbliche (meccanismi che spesso risultano in mere consultazioni, lasciando poi il potere politico, in ultima istanza, alle istituzioni), per procedere alla creazione di ecosistemi collaborativi che prevedano la partecipazione di attori urbani diversi, l'emergere di competenze diversificate, e l'autodeterminazione delle comunità urbane.

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# Annexes

## Danisinni

Pictures by the author.



1. Some street art in an everyday setting in Danisinni.

2. The Danisinni parish, with the corridor leading to the recently inaugurated residency.



3. Children playing in the Farm during the everyday activities organized by the volunteers of the civil service.

4. The Danisinni farm, with a view on the Chapitô tent.

*La Cenerentola di Danisinni*

All pictures are by Franco Lannino



1. Fra' Mauro talking before the performance of *La Cenerentola di Danisinni*.



2. The audience during the performance in the Farm.

3. Pictures from *La Cenerentola di Danisinni*



4. Pictures from *La Cenerentola di Danisinni*, featuring the Danisinni women as the choir.

5. Pictures from *La Cenerentola di Danisinni*, featuring the Danisinni women as the choir.

The following pictures are by Rossellina Garbo.



6. Night rehearsals of *La Cenerentola di Danisinni* in the Farm.

7. The choir rehearsing as children watch, almost mesmerized.

## L'elisir di Danisinni

Pictures by Rossellina Garbo



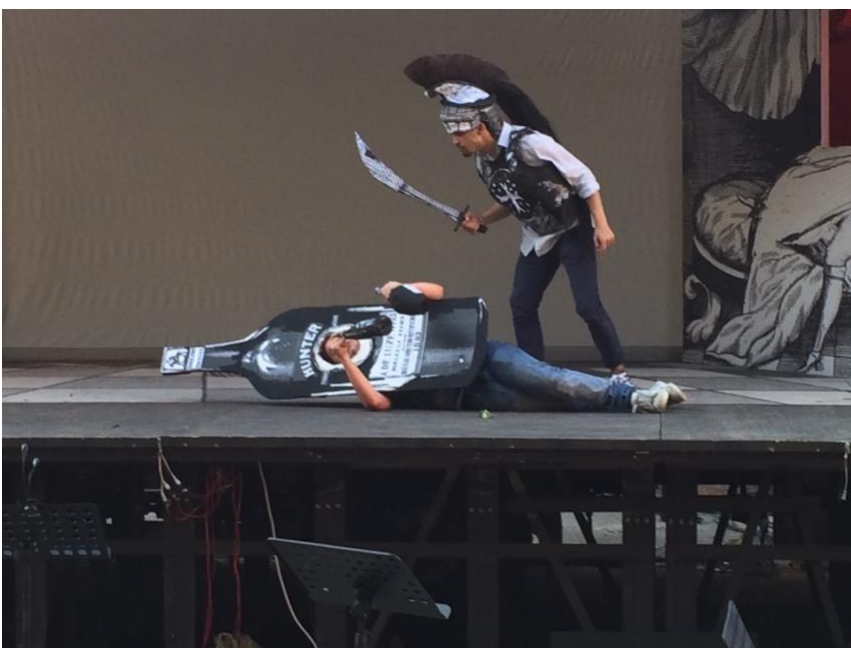1. The happy ending of *L'elisir di Danisinni*.

2. A *lapa* (a typical means of transport in Sicily) sumptuously carrying Dulcamara through the crowd in *L'elisir di Danisinni*.



3. Young players have been involved in the production.

1. Time to choose the props and costumes for a very unconventional *Figaro*. Picture by Gianluigi Toccafondo.



2. An animated duel onstage during the rehearsals of *Figaro! OperaCamion*. Picture by Gianluigi Toccafondo.

3. Gianluigi Toccafondo and the baritone Akaki Ioseliani (don Basilio) in a break from rehearsals.



4. Valeria Almerighi passing among the audience and teasing the crowd before the performance. Picture by Gianluigi Toccafondo.

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