In the Absence of Public Space: The Concept of *Common Space*

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Article Info	Abstract
	This article examines the privatization and commodification of urban public spaces through the concept of "common space," offering a comprehensive assessment of space's counter-political roles. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's assertion that "Space is a manifestation of social relations," the study argues that common spaces are dynamic processes for cultural sharing, social interaction, and collective identity formation, rather than merely physical areas. Within Lefebvre's theory of the right to the city, the re-publicization of common spaces is framed as essential for social equality, justice, and participatory democracy. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the study integrates Elinor Ostrom's theories on common resource management and David Harvey's work on urban space, highlighting how sustainably managed common spaces can foster social solidarity. It critically evaluates the impact of neoliberal urban policies on spatial justice, shedding light on their broader implications. The research explores the historical and social contexts of common spaces, positioning them as critical venues for spatial justice and social participation. As a result, the study emphasizes how "common spaces," rather than being finished products, are shaped through participatory processes, establishing them as living, evolving spaces, and develops a model proposal for the protection and reproduction of these spaces.

1. INTRODUCTION

The public sphere is a struggle ground where not only daily life but also social relations, political power and individual rights emerge simultaneously. In this context, Jurgen Habermas's seminal work "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" constitutes an important reference point that deeply examines the impact of public spaces on social structure. Habermas defines the "public sphere" as an area where people can freely come together, exchange ideas and reach social consensus. According to Habermas [9], the public sphere should serve the common public interest rather than the private interests of individuals. This perspective emphasizes that public spaces are the basic structures necessary for democratic participation and social interaction. Habermas [9], stresses that the notion of the public is related to the notion of the common. This view resonates with Hannah Arendt's perspective, wherein the public sphere is "the common world" that "gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other" [1].

According to Carmona [5], the idea of public space has always provided a concrete and symbolic ground for social interaction and citizen participation as a sign of democracy, participation and shared responsibility. This understanding of public space is closely related to Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city; Lefebvre argues that city dwellers should not only live in urban areas but also play an active role in their creation and transformation [16]. Public space functions as a democratic arena where individual and collective expressions, social harmony and equality are consolidated.

Lefebvre's views on cities and urban life also expand our spatial understanding. He argues that cities and urban life should be seen as dynamic and creative processes, almost as works of art. According to him, cities should continue to exist as spaces shaped by human experiences and providing opportunities for these experiences [22].

According to Habermas [9], public space has been characterized throughout history as a place where people congregate to share ideas, interact with one another, and talk about shared issues. However, the democratic participation and social solidarity functions of public space have been undermined by the commercialization and privatization of these locations, particularly under the impact of neoliberal policies [13]. The transformation of urban space has reshaped the social and physical context of social life and caused a radical change in the ongoing functions of public spaces.

This transformation process has led the public space to seek another concept that can replace it in the terminological context. At this point, commons have caused the public space to be reconsidered and paved the way for conceptual discussions. Common spaces do not only refer to a physical area, but also to a social production and sharing practice [18]. Lefebvre's theory of the production of space emphasizes that commons are constantly reproduced by social relations and practices [16]. The concept of "common space" emerges beyond public and private spaces as areas where participants take an active role and become the center of social interactions. Common spaces, rather than being fixed and completed spaces, appear as spaces that are constantly shaped and evolved with the participation of users.

This article aims to examine the concept of common space, which emerged with the transformation of public space, within a theoretical framework. First, the relationships between public space and common space will be explained, and then the effects of neoliberal urban policies on these concepts will be discussed. In the last section, an objective view will be presented on the sustainable management of common spaces and their potential weaknesses, creating a discussion area regarding the possibility of a tragedy of the commons.

2. METHOD

This research is designed to examine the theoretical foundations of the concept of "common space" and the meanings of these spaces on social life. The basic method of the research is based on a comprehensive and systematic examination of theoretical approaches in the literature. In this context, Henri Lefebvre's theory of space production, Jurgen Habermas' concept of public space, and Elinor Ostrom's approaches to common resource management are analyzed in depth. The works of other important thinkers working on urbanism and urban space, such as David Harvey, are also integrated into the research.

The first stage of the method section focused on determining the conceptual framework of the concepts of "public space" and "common space". An interdisciplinary approach was adopted in this process; fields such as architecture, urbanism, sociology, social theory, and spatial policies were utilized. In order to visualize the conceptual framework, a diagram has been added that reveals the different theoretical approaches addressed in the study and the relationships between these approaches. This diagram will help the reader to understand and follow the concepts systematically.

The second stage of the research continued by addressing the ideas put forward in the theoretical framework in the context of spatial justice and social participation. The data obtained during the literature review were evaluated with a critical and comparative approach, and these analyses created a discussion platform on the sustainable management of the concept of common space and its possible weaknesses.

Finally, in order to prevent repetitions in the research process and to strengthen the conceptual context, each approach was systematically addressed, and how common spaces are shaped by social and cultural dynamics was clearly analyzed. Thus, the article aims to understand the place of common spaces in modern urban life with its theoretical and practical dimensions.
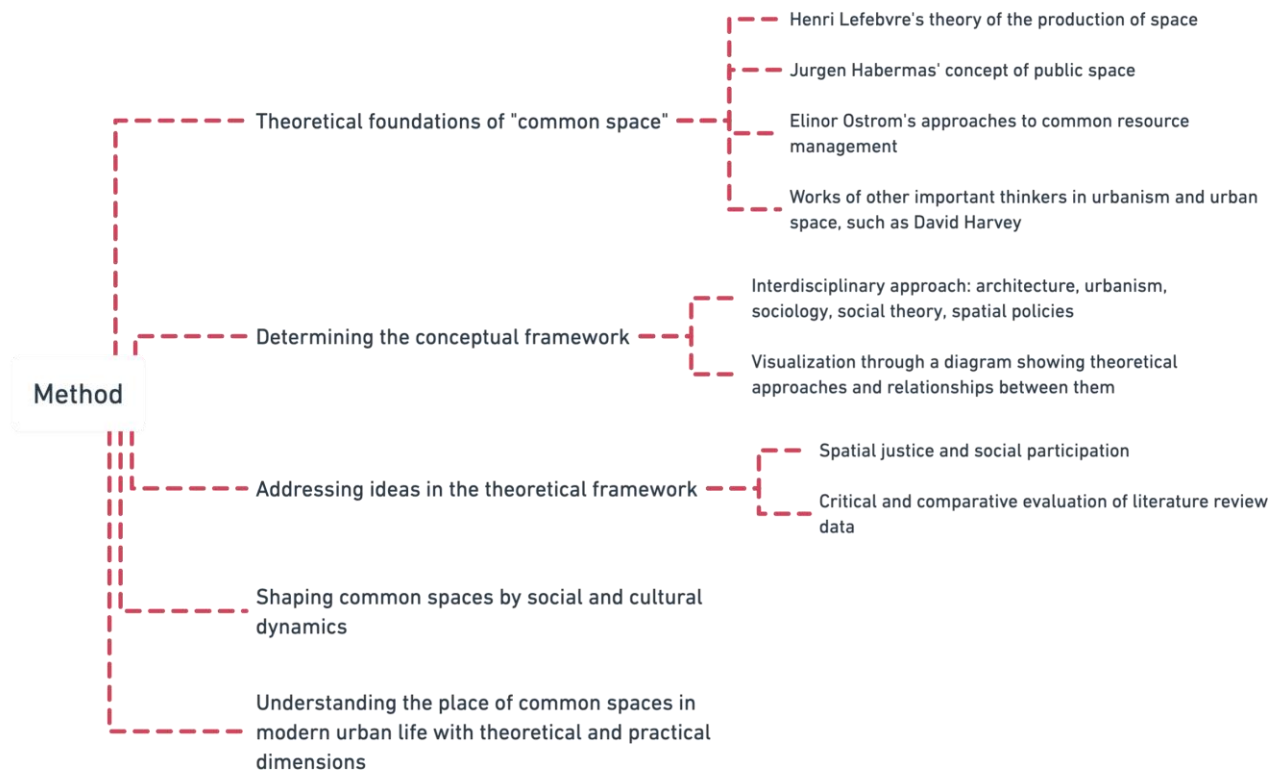
Figure 1. *Mind Map of Article Method*

3. TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

3.1. From Public Spaces to Commons

With the spread of industrialism (industrial capitalism) in the 19th century, several concepts and phenomena that triggered the collapse of the public sphere came to the fore. These concepts were considered important in explaining the changes in the social structure and the new dynamics brought about by modernization, and thus in terms of better understanding the "commons". With the emergence of concepts such as privatization, bureaucratization, mechanization, urbanization, social alienation, commercialization and social stratification processes, the transformation of the social structure accelerated and this situation led to the emptying of the concept of the public sphere.

With the rise of industrial capitalism, private property and individual interests came to the forefront more. Individuals focused on their own private property, work and family life instead of common interests in the public sphere, leading to the weakening of the public sphere. This rise of private life against the public sphere weakened social solidarity. On the other hand, the role of the state expanded and bureaucratic structures emerged in administrative systems. This caused the decentralized, participatory and collective decision-making processes of the public sphere to be replaced by a centralized and hierarchical administrative structure. In this process, citizens have become more distant from decision-making mechanisms. Industrial capitalism has caused economic activities and markets to expand, and a significant portion of the public sphere has been surrounded by commercial activities and consumer culture. The public sphere has ceased to be a space of discussion, participation and negotiation, and has become the center of shopping, consumption and economic activities. Another change is the emergence of large cities and the large migrations from rural areas to cities. This process has caused the weakening of face-to-face relationships and community ties between individuals. In large cities, people have become more anonymous and alienated within large masses of people, and public spaces have given way to less interactive spaces.

The development of capitalism has also seriously deepened the economic and social stratification between the working class and the bourgeoisie. These class differences have made it difficult to share common public spaces, and concrete, physical distinctions have emerged between the rich and the poor in the public sphere. Social divisions have made it difficult for a common public space to function. Towards the end of the 19th century, with the spread of printing and mass media (such as newspapers), public debates gained a more centralized structure. However, rather than democratizing public debate, these media tools contributed to the collapse of the public sphere by increasing the influence of certain authorities on public opinion.

As a result of all these changes, architectural spaces also underwent a major transformation. Factories, large production areas and workers' housing became decisive in cities, while public spaces became commercialized. Commercial structures such as shopping malls, arcades and large stores shaped public life, while spaces for socialization and discussion remained in the background. While new transportation infrastructures and wide avenues in cities accelerated economic flow, spatial segregation increased as the rich retreated to the suburbs. Thus, architecture began to serve industrial and commercial purposes rather than the social functions of public spaces. In this process, public spaces became commodified, and space began to be considered only as a physical entity. As a result, the design and management of space gradually came under the control of a more limited group, and city residents were excluded from the production of public space and pushed into the position of passive spectators.

According to Hegel's philosophy, a concept gains meaning only when what it represents is under threat or is nearing its end [14]. Starting from this perspective, the transformation of the public sphere can also be evaluated in this context. Historically, the public sphere has been seen as a space of freedom, expression, discussion and common life; however, as it began to lose its function under the pressures of the modern capitalist order, it became increasingly questionable. Just like Hegel's concept-reality relationship, as the public sphere comes under threat from processes of commercialization, privatization and individualization, the protection and redefinition of this space comes to the fore.

In this context, the concept of the commons emerges as a response to this transformation of the public sphere. The commons represent the idea that in a world where the public sphere is increasingly shrinking and commercialized, common resources, spaces and social life must be reorganized with a collective consciousness. The collapse of the public sphere necessitates the rediscovery and defense of this very space as the commons. Therefore, this transformation proves Hegel's dialectical process; At the point where the public sphere loses its existence, it gives way to a semantic search and a functional finding.

As noted by Fuller, "In order to change an existing paradigm you do not struggle to try and change the problematic model. You create a new model and make the old one obsolete" [2].

4. THE CONCEPT of COMMONS/ COMMON SPACES?

4.1. Origin and Theoretical Foundations of Common Spaces

To provide a theoretical framework for the term common, it would be a good start to go back to the origin of the word common. The Latin word "communis," which means "belonging equally to several" or "shared by all," is where the word "common" first appeared [16]. The fundamental words "com" (together) and "munis" (service or responsibility) are the source of this word [15]. The idea of shared ownership or involvement in something that benefits the public or a group is conveyed by this root [4]. The word was originally "comun" in Old French and then changed to "comon" in Middle English, which gave rise to the present English word "common" [21] It now refers to something that is utilized, shared, or available to many people or organizations. The term is often used to describe places, rights, or resources held or used in common in various disciplines such as law, sociology, and architecture [8].
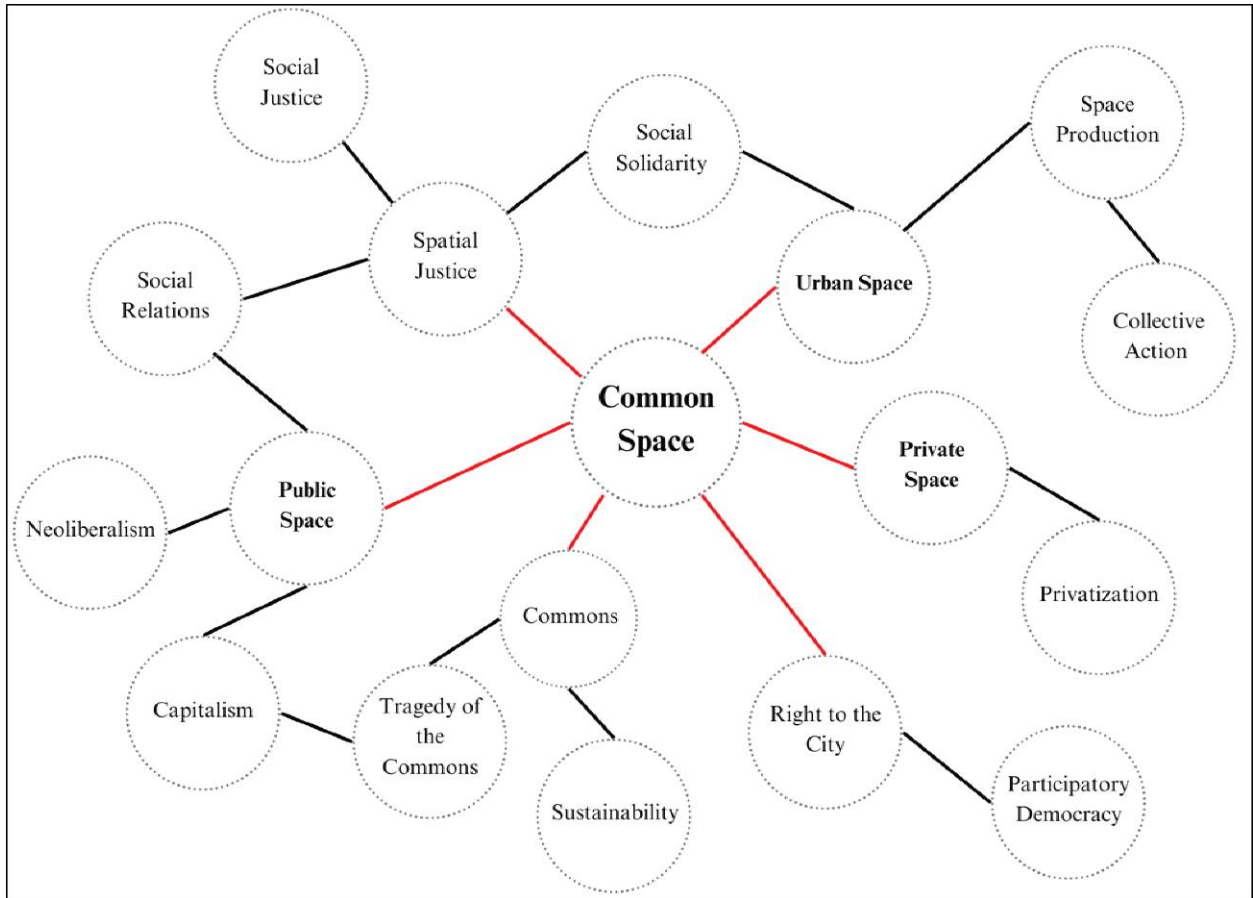
Figure 2. *Concept Map: Theoretical Framework of Common Spaces and Related Concepts*

The idea of common space has its origins in the way the public sphere functions in the traditional sense. Public space has always been a place where people may openly express their opinions, participate in democratic discourse, and experience common life. Public space is defined as "a ground where people, as equal individuals, discuss and make decisions about their common issues" [1]. However, under the influence of the modern capitalist order, this function has gradually weakened, commercialized and privatized spaces have replaced the public sphere. In this process, common spaces have re-emerged to offer an alternative to these transformations caused by capitalism.

The capitalist urbanization process emerges as a dynamic that threatens the existence of public spaces. Especially in big cities, the commercialization and privatization of public spaces have led to the need for common spaces. According to Harvey [13], neoliberal urbanization policies have commodified public spaces and restricted the rights of individuals in these areas. For example, shopping malls and private housing projects have narrowed the public spaces of the city and limited areas of social interaction. In this context, common spaces have the potential to rebuild social life and solidarity in the city. Common space is a concept that refers to areas where public space is reconsidered with a collective consciousness and where common use and benefit are provided. "Common space is relational and relative" [20].

The concept of "common space" is introduced in [20], where it is explaining that:

> It is not the public space as we know it: space given from a certain authority to the public under specific conditions that ultimately affirm the authority's legitimacy. Nor is it private space either, if by this we mean space controlled and used by a limited group of people excluding all others. Communities in movement create common space, space used under conditions decided on by communities and open to anyone who participates in the actions and accepts the rules which were collectively decided upon... The community is formed, developed and reproduced through practices focused on common space. To generalize this principle: the community is developed

through commoning, through acts and forms of organization oriented towards the production of the common. (p. 165)

4.2. Comparison of Public, Private and Common Spaces

"The common space is both spatially and verbally outside of the public/private space dichotomy. For example, neighborhoods such as urban thresholds, community actions such as slum areas, and spaces in transformation, albeit long-term or short-term; they embody the potentials of spatial experience and collectivity outside the public or private realm" [6].

Common spaces have a few essential characteristics that set them apart from commercialized and privatized public areas. Common areas are accessible to everyone and permit unrestricted engagement from an access and participation standpoint. They are not constrained by certain social or economic classes, in contrast to commodified environments. The goal of these areas is to establish a value that is shared by everybody [13]. Common spaces are managed collectively, by local communities and users instead of by centralized authority. This is known as communal management. A democratic functioning is ensured by emphasizing participation in decision-making processes [3]. Additionally, commons give precedence to group interests over private ones. Furthermore, commons give precedence to group interests over private ones. In these settings, cooperation and solidarity foster societal solidarity and develop social ties [10].

In the neoliberal world, commons stand out as an alternative to the conflict between public and private. Commons are shared spaces. While the public sphere, that is, the area determined by the existence of a sovereign authority, is a space "offered" to people under certain conditions, the common space is a space "obtained" by people through their own efforts. Unlike public and private spaces, "common spaces" are open to the public but are not subject to the control of any authority.

In this way, instead of the hierarchical structure that serves the capitalist system, it has its own order. The practices of commoning, which aim to redefine the usual forms of use of public spaces and whose rules are determined by the public authorities, give a clue to the scope of the notion of the right to the city as conceptualized in [16]. Likewise, the right to the city, as described in [16], expresses the city's desire to transform the city as a whole, not simply the sum of the rights they have. The public spaces of the city constitute the common space as a result of a transformative action, interaction of the participants.

To assert the right to the city, as [12], means to assert a certain level of influence over the dynamics of urbanization, concerning how cities are constructed and altered, and to achieve this in a fundamental and transformative manner.
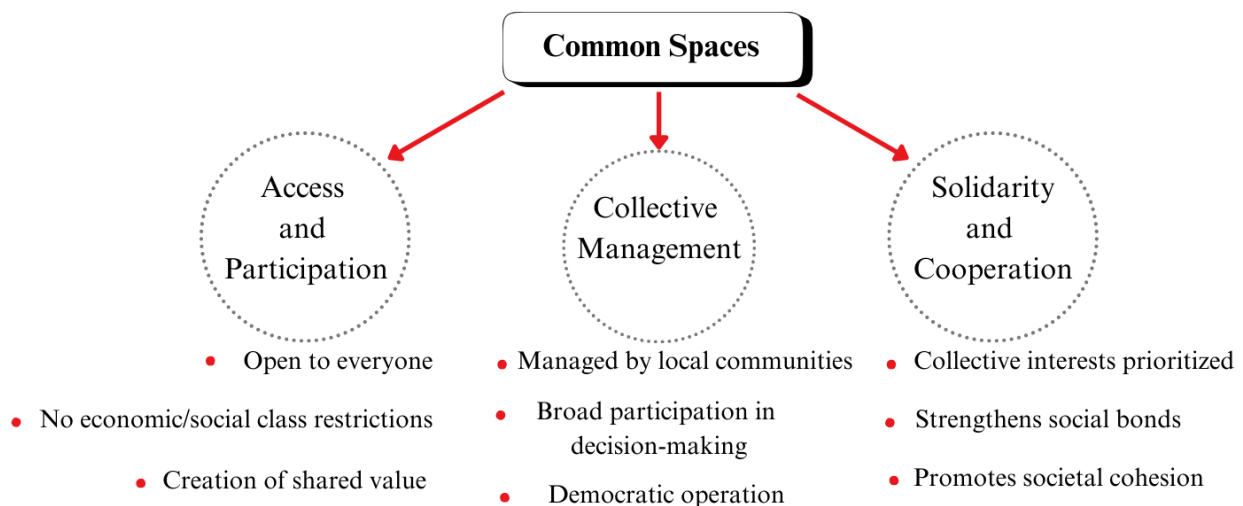

Figure 3. Characteristics of Common Spaces

An important conceptual framework that forms the theoretical basis of the commons is found in Elinor Ostrom's studies on the management of common resources [18]. It has been argued that common resources can be successfully managed by local communities without the need for state or market intervention. This approach supports the idea that common spaces can be managed collectively at the local level. The research demonstrates that individuals can cooperate to use common resources sustainably, and in this context, it is an important reference point for social movements advocating the protection of common spaces [18].

This perspective emphasizes the role of these neighborhoods in cultivating opportunities for collaborative practices and shared identities among residents, highlighting their significance in the broader discourse on urban commons and community dynamics [3].

5. COMMONS AND COMMON OWNERSHIP RELATIONSHIP

5.1. Urban Commons

The concept of commons originally referred to resources used collectively, especially natural resources, before their gradual takeover by capitalism. As Linebaugh [17] notes, "The commons existed before private property and capitalism, and the resources that were once shared by communities have gradually been taken over by capital" (p. 14). Commons were part of a system that was, at its origin, outside the realm of private ownership and capitalism. In [19], the concept is further elaborated by asserting that "commons are the public resources used collectively, and in the age of digital networks, this includes not only natural resources but also cultural and intellectual resources." This shift from natural resources to cultural and intellectual ones illustrates the broadening of the commons concept beyond its traditional boundaries.

However, commons also encompass cultural heritage, information, and public spaces such as parks and squares, as well as urban thresholds—both the material and intangible products of collective creativity. These urban commons contribute to the shaping of social life and community engagement. In this sense, they are not just resources, but also how these resources are used, shared, and accessed by a collective subject. "Capital needs the commons to perpetuate its accumulation through dispossession, enclosing common resources to privatize them and shift them into the market," emphasizing how capitalism exploits commons for continuous accumulation [11].

Urban commons play an important role in fostering a sense of belonging by providing participants with responsibility over existing resources and encouraging them to co-produce. In this perspective, participants do not claim ownership of these areas, but rather claim a sense of belonging through collective participation in the production of social spaces. As a result, this supports collectivism as a way of living and governing. As Harvey [13] notes, "the struggle for the appropriation of public spaces and public goods in the city for a common purpose continues" (p. 145). This ongoing battle to reclaim urban commons is essential for addressing issues of spatial justice in modern cities. Harvey further asserts that the reconstruction of an "urban common" is the key to realizing this spatial justice.

In this context, urban commons reflect the intersection of politics and space, as they are both produced through space and capable of producing new spaces. According to Stavrides [20], "The production of urban commons is not merely a question of reclaiming public space but involves creating a new type of space based on collective ownership and shared responsibility." This idea links political struggles and spatial practices, where the creation of urban commons serves as a means of opposing the capitalist appropriation of public goods.

To sum up, the urban commons are essential to reorganizing space for shared use and responsibility. The commons—whether they take the shape of public areas, cultural heritage, or shared resources—represent a fundamental obstacle to privatization and the growth of capital because, as Lefebvre [16] contends, the production of space is profoundly political. In all of its forms, the urban commons provide a way to redistribute power, allowing for more inclusive and equitable ways to produce space.

5.2. Challenges in Managing Commons: The Tragedy of the Commons

When considering how public spaces are managed and used in relation to ownership, it is important to remember that giving up control of public spaces to different institutions and authorities runs the risk of turning them from areas of public importance to areas governed by private interests. The fact that public areas are now under the control of private or governmental organizations separates them from their fundamental function as common areas, which is to serve the needs of the entire society without being constrained by ownership lines.

The term "commons" describes resources that are used and managed by a community as a whole. Prior to the emergence of private property and capitalism, the commons historically comprised natural resources like pastures, water, and forests [17]. In addition to natural resources, this idea has expanded over time to include cultural heritage, public areas like parks and squares, urban thresholds, and the intangible outcomes of group creativity. The commons is a system of social relations designed to subvert conventional ideas of private property ownership by offering a venue for the collective maintenance and management of shared resources.

Nonetheless, managing commons effectively requires careful consideration of rules and collective action. These areas cannot be maintained without a consensus on how to utilize them, according to Ostrom, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics for her seminal work on the commons. In [18], besides to being resources, commons are structures of governance that require accountability, trust, and collaboration. This study shows that local knowledge and community-based decision-making are crucial for effectively managing shared resources. Furthermore, her research highlights the necessity of establishing accountability and penalty enforcement mechanisms within these systems [18].

Garrett Hardin introduced the concept of the "tragedy of the commons" in 1968, which critiques the idea of shared resources. According to Hardin, when a resource is shared by everyone, people who act individually and in their own self-interest often overuse or exploit it, which causes it to deteriorate or even collapse. Hardin asserts that a tragedy will unavoidably result from the absence of desire for individual users to preserve the resource: "If there is a shared resource, it will inevitably be destroyed, because no individual has the motivation not to use it." This idea has received a lot of attention in social and environmental contexts, frequently portraying the commons as fundamentally unsustainable unless controlled.

However, Ostrom [18] directly challenges this pessimistic view by demonstrating that communities can avoid the tragedy of the commons through self-governance, rule-making, and enforcement. Through a combination of communal rules and trust-building processes, [18] provides case studies of diverse commons, such as irrigation systems, forests, and fisheries, where local communities have successfully managed their resources without outside intervention. The theory in [18] holds that when individuals in a community are invested in the preservation and correct use of a resource, and are given the means to manage it collectively, they are capable of avoiding the misuse and mismanagement described by Hardin.

The concept of the commons offers a new perspective on urban justice and spatial equity in city environments. By using the framework of urban commons, community members can reclaim spaces that have been commodified and collaboratively manage urban resources such as parks, streets, and public squares. These spaces promote civic participation and group accountability by ensuring that urban resources are distributed fairly among all community members.

Nevertheless, well-designed governance systems that incorporate resource management, access restrictions, and group action protocols are required for shared spaces to succeed in urban settings [7]. The survival of urban commons depends on the growth of shared accountability and social cohesiveness, ideals that go beyond individual benefit and promote the long-term welfare of the community.

Finally, while commons offer an alternative to traditional property-based ownership, they also raise a debate about the balance between collective responsibilities and individual rights. The management of

urban common areas should be approached with an approach focused on creating inclusive, fair and sustainable systems that prioritize collective good rather than private ownership.

6. PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS of COMMON SPACES

Theoretical discussions on common spaces, especially the management challenges addressed under the title of "The Tragedy of Common Spaces", necessitate an examination of how these concepts are applied in practice. Common spaces are more than a theoretical concept; a variety of solutions must be developed to ensure their long-term viability and spatial justice. In this part, how common spaces operate in practice, examples of community-based management, and the obstacles encountered will be discussed.

While common spaces in cities increase social solidarity as collective property and use areas, they also offer solutions to potential problems such as spatial justice and social equality. This section evaluates the extent to which common spaces strengthen social harmony, how they encourage collective participation, and scenarios wherein urban resources can be shared fairly with concrete examples. At this point, examples will also be discussed in terms of spatial sustainability. As a result, in various urban contexts, the functionality of common spaces can be better understood through concrete examples.

Urban spaces foster community interaction, establish social bonds, and promote shared values. For instance, Henri Lefebvre's theory that "space is a manifestation of social relations" was concretized in the 1968 Paris student protests. During this time, public spaces in Paris became a "common space" because to protests and communal engagement. However, these spaces cannot be defined as common spaces in the full sense because they lack long-term collective management and sustainability [16]. However, these examples are important in terms of emphasizing the potential of common spaces in social transformation.

Furthermore, Zuccotti Park, analyzed by David Harvey, was a space used with collective participation during the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011. This space functioned as a common space where neoliberal policies were criticized and spatial injustice was discussed [13]. However, the transience of use and the fact that the space is not subject to a long-term collective management distance Zuccotti Park from its status as a common space.

Elinor Ostrom's theories of common resource management provide a powerful framework for demonstrating that common spaces can be managed sustainably. The Brooklyn Community Gardens in New York City is a successful example of a common space managed through community participation in accordance with Ostrom's principles [18]. These gardens embody the concept of common space as models that promote sustainability and social solidarity.

The Exarchia neighborhood in Athens is important for demonstrating how common spaces can be created in times of crisis. Solidarity kitchens and community organizations have enabled the collective use and management of space [20]. Similarly, the Prinzessinnengarten in Berlin is an example of a common space based on urban agriculture. Created with the participation of users, these gardens offer a sustainable model of common management in urban areas [3].

Through these instances, it is made clear that common spaces must satisfy a few fundamental requirements in order to qualify as such. Brooklyn Community Gardens, Prinzessinnengarten, and the Exarchia Neighborhood fully meet the definition of common space by meeting the criteria of community participation, sustainable management, and providing common benefits. In contrast, even while they reflect transient uses of common spaces, locations like Zuccotti Park and those utilized during the 1968 Paris student protests do not entirely fit this criteria since they lack long-term communal control.

In this context, common spaces should be defined not only as spaces used with community participation, but also as spaces shaped by the sustainable collective management of these spaces. This discussion is important in terms of defining the concept of common space more clearly and understanding how it can be applied in different contexts.

7. CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, the transformation of public spaces under capitalist pressures, the concept of the commons and their role as collective governance and shared resources have been examined. The analysis has shown that the commons offer a critical response to the privatization and commodification of urban life and propose an inclusive, sustainable resource management model in response to criticism.

A comprehensive analysis of the literature explored the historical, social, and political components of the commons, drawing on the theoretical frameworks of philosophers such as Lefebvre, Harvey, Ostrom, and Stavrides, and evaluated the concept's significance in the present urban context.

The importance of defining urban commons as dynamic social spaces rather than static, stable spaces was emphasized. It was concluded that protecting these spaces required resisting privatization and commodification and advocating for equal access and community-centered governance. This approach was seen as having strong potential to not only preserve the physical and social benefits of the commons, but also to promote spatial justice and participatory democracy, thus reclaiming the "right to the city" in the face of increasing urban inequality.

It was determined that the commons are places where collective identities and practices are formed in addition to being resources. The commons are perceived as challenging conventional ideas of property and providing alternative models for urban living by promoting participation and placing a strong emphasis on shared governance. Ostrom's ideas showed that the commons could overcome obstacles like the "tragedy of the commons" and remain sustainable resources if the proper governance techniques (rules, sanctions, and collaboration) were in place.

The appropriation of the common area on the use value of the public area, as a defense of "expropriation" against privatization and "collective" use against commodification, this research has reached an interdisciplinary objective conclusion.

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