

# Working in Common(s)

The implementation of the commons within the contemporary art institution

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# Declaration of Originality

I, Fabiola Fiocco, hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis submitted by me as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master in Museology and that I have compiled it in my own words. Parts excepted are corrections of form and content by my supervisor.

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## Abstract

Today the role of the museum institution is often questioned and consumed by crises of meaning, funding, and relevance. Within the European context the economic crisis resulted in major budget-cuts in the public spending, which also affected artistic and cultural public funds. It has been thus increasingly recognized the need to question the established economic system, and to re-conceive existing infrastructures, such as the museum, in the light of more sustainable and alternative socio-economic paradigms. Within this framework, the aim of this thesis is to analyze the motivations and conditions by which the concept of the commons is implemented in the cultural sector, with a focus on contemporary art organizations. On this purpose, the commons has been defined as a composite concept, and it has been evaluated its historical and theoretical development, and practical implementation by means of the analysis of a number of European art organizations. Various theoretical models were also taken into account regarding the development and criticism of the contemporary art institution through scholars such as Chantal Mouffe, Claire Bishop, and Gerald Raunig. Furthermore, through an in-depth evaluation of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and the Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove, I have tried to evaluate how and to what extent the models arising from the practice of small and medium sized groups outside the mainstream circuits can be applied in a more formal and traditional settings, as that of the museum of contemporary art.

# 1. Introduction

The commons<sup>1</sup> has been herein presented as a tripartite concept made up of a common-pool resource, an organized collectivity of people, and a social process of creation, preservation, and reproduction of the resource itself. The use of the concept goes back to the sixteenth century when by means of the process of enclosures, portions of English agricultural landscape began to be privatized with the aim to make the land more profitable for the landowners.<sup>2</sup> The historical roots of the commons therefore relate to natural elements such as land and water, and to a confrontation for the defense of freedom of access and use of these goods. Moreover, the concept of commons is very flexible and adapts to different economic and socio-political conditions. While the phenomenon of English enclosures occurred in a context characterized by monarchical power and agricultural economy, today developments in economic production, politics, and culture makes possible for both natural and immaterial resources to be considered as commons, depending on the environment in which they are implemented. Within the framework of this research, the commons is understood in relation to its immaterial aspect and to the artistic field. Furthermore, they are positioned within a context of Post-Fordist production and increasing privatization of the public space.

By the end of the twentieth century, Western metropolises all began replicating a similar model of smart and creative city while major changes regarding the composition and division of labour had seen the establishment of the creative class. To contextualize the situation within the cultural field, it can be noticed how the same toponyms easily recur in large metropolis. Apart from the presence of major retail chains all over the world, even the neighborhoods tend to reproduce the same atmosphere and the same style. The most striking example is that of the contemporary art museum with an iconic building usually designed by a famous architect<sup>3</sup>, a clear symbol of a specific cultural and economic vision<sup>4</sup>, but whose role within the city can be hijacked. Similarly, the archetype of the creative worker is a freelance whose work is project-based and whose working hours are more and more flexible as its working environment. The ascendancy of this new class is broadened to encompass all areas of life, “replacing traditional hierarchical systems of control with new forms of self-management, peer-recognition and pressure and intrinsic forms of motivation” defined as soft control.<sup>5</sup> This new working structure, depending on the imperatives of autonomy and creativity, imposes itself in an economic

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<sup>1</sup> Within the framework of this research, the commons is understood as a collective noun.

<sup>2</sup> For a broader and more comprehensive definition of the commons, see chapter 2, paragraph 2.1

<sup>3</sup> In this sense, infamous examples are the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao by Frank Gehry and the MAXXI Museum in Rome designed by Zaha Hadid.

<sup>4</sup> Major museums such as those previously mentioned represent a cultural and economic vision based on the values of entertainment and privatization. An entrepreneurial approach that aims at re-shaping areas of the city or old disused buildings by means of iconic architectures. The need for a well-designed and economically successful image tends to become predominant compared to the focus on the museum's collection and activity. See C. Bishop and D. Perjovschi, *Radical museology: Or, What's 'contemporary' in museums of contemporary art?*, London, Koenig, 2014, pp. 11-12

<sup>5</sup> R. L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, New York, Basic Books, 2002, pp. 12-13

environment increasingly dominated by the trends of immaterial production, feminization of work and new paradigms of migration.<sup>6</sup> The production of material goods, although still widely present, has been supplanted by the production of experiences, desires, and subjectivities. These new products require a business model where emotional and affective tasks prevail over mechanical ones, overcoming the characteristics of standardized Fordist production. In line with the traditional codification of sexes, these features can be regarded as predominantly feminine, as the distinction between productive (work time) and reproductive time (non-work time) becomes increasingly blurred. The immateriality and the high personalization of work translate into growing flexibility and uncertainty, and a continuous flow of people and workforce, within a highly skilled freelance workforce. Within this framework, culture and art take up a privileged position since they offer expressive and organizational models alternatives to those of traditional industry. In fact, cognitive capitalism<sup>7</sup> turns them into a productive asset as it appropriates social relations and forms of life, collectively produced as commons. However, according to Maurizio Lazzarato since creativity and immaterial labour require a free and open environment far from the Fordist production-consumption cycle in order to develop and increase in value, capital can never fully control its workforce through traditional power regimes, that usually rely on a management of time and space founded on rigid and precise rules and movements. The friction between the social nature of post-Fordist capitalist production and the private nature of traditional capitalist accumulation is what makes this new labor power and the commons potentially revolutionary in the Post-Fordist Western economy.<sup>8</sup>

The commons thus represent a key factor to comprehend current cognitive capitalism production since it simultaneously embodies both one of the productive forces and the outcome of the production of wealth.<sup>9</sup> At the root of these paradigm shifts there is a process defined as new enclosures, which spread throughout the Western world in the Eighties and Nineties of the twentieth century. Recalling the British model of enclosures, which took place in between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the term refers to the expropriation and privatization of common resources for economic and productive purposes in a contemporary context. Specifically it regards the practice of primitive accumulation<sup>10</sup>, intended as the necessary precondition of capitalist development achieved by alienating people from their tools of production. Contrary to the claims made by Marx, within the frame of the new enclosures, primitive

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<sup>6</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 132-134

<sup>7</sup> The term cognitive capitalism refers to an economic system founded on knowledge work, as it is already inscribed in the notion of 'knowledge economy', and the underlying conflictual relationship between the productive forces. While the term 'capitalism' designates the permanence of several fundamental variables of the capitalist system such as the driving role of profit, the adjective 'cognitive' highlights the new nature of the work and the resources of production, and the ownership structure on which the accumulation process is founded. See C. Vercellone, 'The hypothesis of cognitive capitalism', *Towards a Cosmopolitan Marxism, Historical Materialism Annual Conference*. London, Birkbeck College and SOAS, 2005

<sup>8</sup> M. Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labor', in P. Virno and M. Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 139

<sup>9</sup> Hardt and Negri, op. cit., p. 123

<sup>10</sup> K. Marx, B. Maffi and A. Macchioro, *Il capitale*, Torino, UTET, 1974, pp. 525-550

accumulation becomes part of a permanent process, which contributes to the preservation and progression of capitalism.<sup>11</sup> The new economic expansion embedded in the new enclosures takes place in a globalized world, concerning multiple locations and a range of resources, both material and immaterial. The main actor of such dispossessions is to be found in the neo-liberal policies pursued and promoted since the early eighties by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In addition to the subsumption of the means of production and reproduction, neoliberalism<sup>12</sup> was immediately characterized by a cut to welfare system, the privatization of a range of services initially contracted out to the state, and the implementation of pro-market development of urban spaces. The initial effects of this new economic regime begin to manifest themselves more clearly in the nineties, which represented a decade marked by global shifts and migrations, and new economic policies, reflecting in major shifts in the organization of work and social life.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, the commons has undergone a revival as the subject of economic progress but also of socio-political resistance. As noted by Pablo Alonso Gonzalez, commons represent a productive force as the concept of the commons usually emerges to address questions of governability and sustenance, and a response to attempts of resources appropriation.<sup>14</sup> It happened in the eighties with the emergence of the squatting phenomena and the implementation of alternative markets<sup>15</sup>, but also in 1999 in Seattle, when a massive demonstration, later named the Battle of Seattle, broke out against the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference that was taking place in the city. The heterogeneous movement gathered together an articulated network of worldwide groups and communities who were ready to come together against neoliberal economic policies. While the groups all had specific local stakes and were demonstrating against a universalistic vision of the world and a globalized economic system, the commons provided a shared framework to oppose to the epistemological impasse created by the dichotomy of the universal and the particular<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> An Architektur, 'On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *e-flux journal* #17, 2010, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67351/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>12</sup> Born within the field of economic philosophy in the 1930s, the definition of neoliberalism has relatively changed over time. Here, it is used in line with the definition acquired between the 1970s and the 1980s according to which it designates a market-based economic agenda founded on widespread economic liberalization policies. The main instruments of neoliberalism can be considered privatization, austerity policies, extensive deregulation and free trade, and reductions in government spending with the aim to favor the role of the privates within economy and society. See S. Springer, K. Birch and J. MacLeavy (eds.), *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*, New York, Routledge, 2016

<sup>13</sup> P. Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, Berkeley, University Press of California, 2008, p. 11

<sup>14</sup> P. A. Gonzalez, 'From a Given to a Construct', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, n. 3, 2014, p. 364

<sup>15</sup> Herein are considered as alternative markets those trades organized around the principles of degrowth, sharing, and fair-trade in opposition to the private neoliberal market. Note that the term degrowth only came into use in the twenty-first century, but its main features can already be found in the processes started in the eighties. See F. Demaria, et al., 'What is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social Movement', *Environmental Values*, vol. 22, n. 2, 2013, pp. 191–215

<sup>16</sup> The dichotomy at issue refers to the tension between the local and the global, but I have specifically chosen to use the term 'universal' with the aim to emphasize and challenge the Western cosmopolitanism as it clashes with the counter-practice of the social movements that on the contrary always rely on the specificity of every

Rather than descending from above, legitimacy was constructed from below through collective social practices and struggle.<sup>17</sup> The Battle of Seattle represented a turning point, followed by the spread of a range of social and cultural movements worldwide and a renewed interest in the subject of commons as a proactive tool. Despite the relevance and legacy of such a political process is far more articulated, it is interesting with regard to the present research to focus on the connections between the Battle of Seattle and the Occupy Movement in cultural and linguistic terms. Many of the theories and practices matured in those years were largely characterized by an extensive use of languages and techniques derived from the new-Situationists and the field of visual arts<sup>18</sup> who came into play again during the protests of Occupy in 2011. This generated new and significant tactics such as spatial occupations and horizontal, bottom-up organizing methods.<sup>19</sup>

The claims for social and economic equality and new forms of democracy unfolded at a time of global socio-economic crisis, which began with the US housing crisis in 2007<sup>20</sup>. This led to a questioning of the established neoliberal system in the light of socio-political and economic alternative paradigms. However, it has been noted and emphasized by many how the crisis represents an integral and necessary part of capitalist development.<sup>21</sup> In the current regime, in fact, the response to the global crisis has been to push the implementation of austerity measurements and to cut the supply of public goods and services as a way to further privatize public goods and services and facilitate capitalist accumulation. Once again, the private appropriation of the commons by the private market is presented as a mandatory precondition for economic and social improvement.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the current crisis needs to be mainly understood in subjective terms, since its main tool of production and reproduction, that is the biopolitical<sup>23</sup> commons, still requires free circulation in order to be valorized. Crises in

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fight and place, but also to include the tensions between the universalism of place-marketing and the peculiarity of culture and creativity intrinsic in the rhetoric of the creative city. See de B. Sousa Santos, 'Public Sphere and Epistemologies of the South', *Africa Development*, vol. 37, n. 1, 2012, pp. 43–67; A. C. Pratt, 'The cultural contradictions of the creative city', *City, Culture and Society*, vol. 2, n. 3, 2011, pp. 123-130

<sup>17</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 120-121

<sup>18</sup> N. Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*, Brooklyn, Melville House Publishing, 2015, pp. 21-22

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 26-27

<sup>20</sup> The Great Recession refers to a period of global economic downturn started between 2007 and the early 2010s, with different timing depending on the country. Its primary trigger has been detected in the US subprime mortgage crisis, a national financial emergency produced by a vast decline in home prices in relation to the collapse of real-estate bubbles. The crisis led to a global economic collapse, which caused the failure of major businesses, great losses in consumer wealth, and a liquidity crisis. As concern the Eurozone, the recession blown in 2009 causing a sovereign-debt crisis. Private debts resulting from the property bubble were transferred in many cases to sovereign debt as a consequence of banking system bailouts. The structure of the Eurozone, a currency union with no fiscal union, also contributed to the crisis and limited the ability to react. See Rosenberg, J. M., *The Concise Encyclopedia of the Great Recession 2007-2012*, Lanham, Scarecrow Press, 2012 or Coffee, J. C., 'What Went Wrong? An Initial Inquiry Into the Causes of the 2008 Financial Crisis', *Journal of Corporate Law Studies*, 9, 1, pp. 1–22

<sup>21</sup> Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143

<sup>22</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, pp. 85-86

<sup>23</sup> Here the term biopolitical is used according to the definition outlined by Hardt and Negri. They have been largely influenced from the foucauldian notion of biopower, namely a mechanism of power that allows for the

biopolitical circuit then must be viewed not as a necessary precondition but as an obstacle in the process of production.<sup>24</sup> Within this framework, the political recognition of the commons represents an effective alternative to state-supplied public goods and an efficient response to the public withdrawal of resources. Against this background, the relevancy of the present research arises out of the gap created by the crisis and the need to find more ethically and socially sustainable options, in opposition to the cultural production currently offered by the big corporate names such as the Guggenheim or to the adverse fate to which more experimental or smaller groups are often meant to. Furthermore, it binds tightly to the practice of all those small cultural centers and institutional museums which are already seeking to propose alternative methods of making culture in Europe, experimenting not only with the artistic practice but with self-management itself.

## 1.1 Research question

The aim of the research is to reflect on the development of the commons within the cultural sphere, and to analyse the motivations and conditions by which it is implemented in contemporary art organizations, with a special focus on the contemporary art museum.

Principles and concepts such as that of the commons have to be looked at not only as discursive gestures but also in relation to the people who refer and align to these principles in their discourses and actions. In this sense, they become performative gesture and can influence the way discourse and practice relate to each other. Therefore, within the frame of this research I consider as important to not only observe and evaluate the stating of the commons, but also the conditions under which this statement acquires its meaning. On the one hand, the urgency of the research lies in the significance of revitalizing and reanimating long-standing political concepts. Often fallen out of use, these concepts have powerful histories and “they disrupt the conventional understandings of our present world and pose it in a new light.”<sup>25</sup> In response to a generalized socio-political and economic crisis, it is necessary to imagine and propose alternative modes of organization and production, and to take possession of existing legal structures in order to re-conceptualize them from the inside. On the other, while providing a privileged environment for the revival of the commons within the art system, the economic crisis has been accompanied by a crisis of the institutions,

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control human bodies through state discipline to the extent that modern power by means of subtle regulations and social expectations grows into incorporated social practices and behaviors. However, while according to Foucault biopolitics is understood as a global control apparatus, Hardt and Negri connect the concept of biopolitics to that of production. Therefore, for Hardt and Negri biopolitics corresponds to “the real subsumption of society under capital”, meaning that the realms of politics, economy, and culture increasingly overlap, and control is exercised less through disciplinary institutions, and more via mobile and flexible human networks. To know more, see T. Lemke, *Biopolitics : An Advanced Introduction*, New York, NYU Press, 2011; M. Foucault, and F. Ewald, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76*, London, Penguin, 2008

<sup>24</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 299-300

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. xi

including the museum which has often been criticized and opposed from both within and the outside.

## 1.2 Methodology

As the scope of the research for this thesis focuses on the analysis of the implementation of a highly theoretical concept as the one of the commons within the cultural practice, the methodology uses both theoretical and empirical tools, relying on the collection of mainly qualitative data. Quantitative facts will be functional to the definition of a more specific range of investigation as regards the analysis of the practical element, and the empirical research.

### 1.2.1 Literature review

The term commons was popularized in its modern sense by Garrett Hardin's work.<sup>26</sup> However, commons have a long history of research and discussion in the political and economic field tracing back to the 17th century, which makes the concept historically wide and varied. For this reason, a substantial part of the literature review serves to politically and historically contextualize the concept of commons itself. The main texts in this respect are by authors such as Peter Linebaugh or can be represented in the text<sup>27</sup> by Elinor Ostrom and Frank van Laerhoven which traces the key trends and traditions in the study of the subject. Ostrom and Hardin provide opposing ways of describing and thinking about the commons in terms of its collectivity and the practice of self-organization. While considering the commons as both natural and man-made goods, and both tangible and intangible, the analysis is useful in understanding the tradition in which cultural commons is placed. However, the main core of the literary review revolves around Antonio Negri's and Michael Hardt's biopolitical definition<sup>28</sup> of the commons, with the aim of positioning and questioning the potential of the concept in contemporary settings and forms. This places the commons within a practical and modern understanding in the light of current cognitive capitalism and immaterial forms of life and work.

The thesis literary backbone is the academic production of the early twenty-first century, when a renewed interest in the commons arose in more radical milieus, approaching and expanding the idea of the commons within a strong political and philosophical connotation mainly in response to increasing privatizations and following the rise of Occupy movements. This part of the literature review is also defined as 'the metropolis', precisely because of the city internal conflicts and tensions which represents the ideal space within which the neoliberal policies and the reactions against

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<sup>26</sup> G. Hardin, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, Washington D.C., American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968

<sup>27</sup> E. Ostrom and F. Van Laerhoven, 'Traditions and Trends in the Study of the Commons', *International Journal of the Commons*, vol. 1, n. 1, 2007, pp. 3-28

<sup>28</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009

them become more materially visible. Herein, Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey texts<sup>29</sup> turn out to be important in managing to bring into the cityscape the daily macro-phenomena that are rising on a global scale, such as the re-appropriation of spaces and the development of alternative economies against gentrification and dispossession. The city also embodies the symbol of cognitive capitalism through the idea of the creative city and freelance worker, who is flexible, independent and itinerant, but living constantly in the uncertainty. The issues of work and the city thus unite with the third articulation of the literature review, of the museum institution. In the examination, the socio-political reflections coexist together with authors as Pascal Gielen or Nato Thompson together with art magazines and online platforms such as e-flux, who contextualize the discussion within the artistic and cultural field. Because of a personal professional interest in the contemporary art sphere, when talking about the museum institution, the research refers to the contemporary art museum institution. Starting from this premise, I analyze the institution's internal conflicts and the main schools of thought that have addressed these contrasts, such as the practice of Institutional Critique and the trend of New Institutionalism. The concept of the museum and the institutional structure have become battlefields in which to address the institutional and the political crisis, and where alternatives are negotiated which may have a match and positively affect the museum resource-communities. The museum is thus regarded as an active agent, belonging to a specific local but also global context, as a bearer of symbols and powers.

### 1.2.2 Fieldwork

Based on this rather broad understanding of the subject-matter, I decided to define an open methodology as concern the empirical fieldwork. An inventory of European cultural spaces that engage and work with the notion and practice of the commons has been compiled.<sup>30</sup> The main criteria for this first selection were three. The implementation of the concept has to concern the cultural practice of the space, either explicitly stated in the artistic research or implicit in the daily habit. Then, the nations taken into account have to be part of the European Union since it represents not only the geographical but also the shared economic and socio-political frame of the research. Last, they have to deal with art as their main cultural practice. Once the list has been drawn up, the material produced from these groups as regards their own work, organization, and programs was collected and analyzed. The decision to focus only on how these places self-narrate themselves derives from the desire to keep everyone on the same level, as the use of questionnaires or interviews could have not ensured the participation and inclusion of all groups in case of a lack of response, and because I personally believe that one of the fundamental aspects of the working with the commons relies precisely in the emancipating power of self-representation. The collected data were analyzed in two ways. On the one hand, all those data concerning the

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<sup>29</sup> See H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991 (original French edition 1974); D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix A

functioning and management of these experiences have been considered from a quantitative standpoint in order to detect trends and best practices, conscious of the fact that the contingent aspect of working with the commons may contrast with the very idea of best practices. On the other, I reflected on the terminology and the implications of the language used by means of critical discourse analysis. Therefore, based on the collected data, patterns were detected and exemplified by pointing out and reporting suitable illustrative models with the aim of forming what could be defined a 'practice review'. Finally, two main case-studies were identified, namely the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) in Madrid and the Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove (MAAM) in Rome. The two were analyzed more closely through semi-structured interviews<sup>31</sup>, on-site direct observations, and the examination of additional information materials in order to collect insights concerning how the commons is understood, used, for what purposes, and with what results in the two experiences. As regards the MNCARS, respondents are from different departments, so to have a picture as comprehensive as possible concerning their working environment and the relations with the context in which they operate. Furthermore, in order to ensure the requested anonymity answers are reported namelessly, while additional information regarding tasks and background may be specified if functional to a better understanding of the data. Concerning the MAAM instead data have been collected by following a slightly different pattern since interviews were always carried out with one respondent only that is the curator of MAAM Giorgio de Finis, once in July and then again in December. I felt this was the best way to maintain an approach as similar as possible, since I believe that including MAAM inhabitants or artists perspectives would have biased the comparison.

### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

Following the Introduction, in which I have tried to delineate the economic and political context in which to position the research, Chapter Two revolves around three macro-themes: the commons, the metropolis, and the museum. In the first paragraph, the concept of the commons is tackled from a theoretical perspective so to track the development of the notion throughout history, and to frame its current understanding within the artistic and cultural field. Then, the second paragraph delves into the topic of the metropolis as the new place of economic production in Post-Fordist times. Finally, the third paragraph focuses on the contemporary art museum and its agency, and on current trends and models in the field.

Chapter Three presents the evaluation of more than fifty European artistic spaces that engage with the topic of commons in their projects or daily practice. Findings are organized once more around three main themes, and in dialogue with the structure of the previous chapter. While the first two reflect on data that relate to organizational and functional aspects in the former, and social and political aspects in the latter, the third focuses by means of critical discourse analysis reflects on the terminology and language used by these groups in the processes of self-representation and communication.

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<sup>31</sup> Appendix C

In Chapter Four, the two main case-studies the MNCARS and the MAAM are analyzed. The data are evaluated in relation to their history, geo-political context, and category of reference, namely that of the contemporary art institution. While in Chapter Four findings are presented mainly in relation to the data reported in Chapter 3, the conclusive Chapter Five includes overall conclusions and reflections. Moreover, three core issues are highlighted as well as personal considerations and recommendations regarding future research topics.

## 2. Literature review

The subject-matter of this thesis is the concept of the commons, contextualized within the contemporary European economic and political milieu. This chapter aims to deepen and discuss in broader terms the historical and theoretical development of the concept with the aim to better define the background in which we want to position the discussion and how it connects to the role of the museum institution. Therefore, literature related to the current discussion around the commons is reviewed, grouping together texts which cross multiple fields including economy, politics and sociology. Then, the metropolis is discussed as an existing space and as a potential battleground. Connected concepts such as multitude, subjectivity, and antagonistic space are also examined. Then, building on these considerations, the chapter concludes with a focus on the art museum as an institution and active agent within the previously described city, and examines current trends and conflicts involving the art institution, also in relation to similar but also antagonistic structures.

### 2.1 The commons: an historical and political overview

The term commons generally embodies multiple meanings depending on the context and the field in which it is used. Generally, it refers to those resources, both material and immaterial, which are collectively held and whose access is open. The root of the word is to be found in the Middle Ages, when the practice of commoning<sup>32</sup> was applied primarily to natural resources such as water or grazing. Already at that time, commons rights were not to be understood as a synonym of human rights. They referred, in fact, to a specific ecology derived from and entered into by labor processes<sup>33</sup>, underlining the need for an active and conscious engagement in the management of the resource. As will be examined later in this chapter, over time the understanding and the meaning of commons has expanded and articulated, often assuming contrasting connotations. This is a symptom of the commons, as an expression of conflicting social and political interests. Indeed, commons is politics to the extent that politics represents “the sphere of activity of a common that can only ever be contentious”<sup>34</sup>. Besides indicating physical resources, it is also presented as a millennial-old form of place management and a specific form of ownership. It can also embody a purely theoretical phenomenon or a movement, the product of a discourse built on shared practices, symbols and experiences. The commons paradoxically stands both for the premise and the result of a shared process, but the process can't be removed from the

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<sup>32</sup> The term commoning is explained and historicized as an organizational and empowering practice through which English commoners were able to maintain and cultivate certain shared practices and customs, forcing the king to recognise them as de facto rights. See P. Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, Berkeley, University Press of California, 2008

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 44-45

<sup>34</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, p. 71

concept since it would mean nullifying the potential of the concept itself.<sup>35</sup> Currently the commons may be characterized according to two criteria.<sup>36</sup> Commons can be regulated or unregulated, as open access commons. Whether it is open to anyone or only to a defined group, then, it may be labeled open (or libertarian) commons or limited access (or associational) commons.<sup>37</sup> Overall, most of the existing and investigated commons are considered regulated and this is explained in that the resource is increasingly considered as being indivisible from the community that develops around it. The commons is not only an asset but a property right regime.<sup>38</sup>

Before going any further in the analysis of the word, it is important to make clear how the commons has been intended within the parameters of this research. Three elements contribute in this definition. First, it involves some sort of common-pool resource. In line with the biopolitical conception sustained by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt<sup>39</sup> in their work, the commons is understood as including natural resources together with “the constitutive elements of human society”<sup>40</sup> such as knowledges, information, or culture thus overcoming a more traditional resource-based definition. Second, a community has to be identified, meaning a collectivity of people built around the resource who autonomously define the norms according to which it is accessed and used. Thirdly, a last element is embedded in the action of commoning itself, describing the required social process of creation, preservation and reproduction.<sup>41</sup> The commons cannot only be considered a given physical resource, detached from the context in which it was developed, and it does not have to be fixed as an abstract phenomenon with no practical implications and duties.<sup>42</sup>

One of the key texts in the discussion around the implementation and the efficiency of the commons is surely *The Tragedy of the Commons*, written in 1968 by Garrett Hardin. While the text originally aimed to justify pollution controls through the metaphor of world overpopulation and reproductive controls, it soon became a cornerstone in the literature supporting private property and the right of use.<sup>43</sup> According to the author, since human morality evolves according to the system within it is performed, people do not really act rationally nor consciously, but on the basis of external social pressures and feelings of guilt.<sup>44</sup> The tragedy then lies in the fact that

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<sup>35</sup> P. Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, Berkeley, University Press of California, 2008, pp. 279

<sup>36</sup> Y. Benkler, ‘The Political Economy of Commons’, *UPGRADE*, IV, n. 3, June, 2003, pp. 6-7

<sup>37</sup> E. Ostrom and C. Hess (eds.), *Understanding Knowledge as Commons*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2007, pp. 250-251

<sup>38</sup> E. Ostrom and C. Hess, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009

<sup>40</sup> Hardt and Negri, op. cit., pp. 171

<sup>41</sup> An Architektur, ‘On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides’, *e-flux journal #17*, 2010, [http://www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67351/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/\(28/03/2017\)](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67351/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/(28/03/2017))

<sup>42</sup> K. R. Olwig, ‘Heritage as common(s) - Commons as heritage: Things we have in commons in the political landscape of heritage’, in H. Benesch, et al. (ed.), *Heritage as Common(s) – Common(s) as Heritage*, Gothenburg, Makadam Publishers, 2015, pp. 91

<sup>43</sup> Y. Benkler, ‘The Political Economy of Commons’, *UPGRADE*, IV, n. 3, June, 2003, pp. 7

<sup>44</sup> G. Hardin, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, Washington, D.C., American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968, pp. 1245

individuals can decide to not respect mutual coercion and prefer an opportunistic attitude towards society. Leaving free and uncontrolled access to a resource on the basis of morality then means to set up a selective system would lead to the overuse of the resource by those who do not recognize and thus to the elimination of morality itself on the long-term. This situation would be the origin of what is defined a double bind, namely an emotional distressing situation in which a person receiving conflicting messages is not able to confront nor resolve the resulting dilemma, with the potential to lead to significant psychological effects.<sup>45</sup> Within this framework, even if enclosures and thus a private property regime may harm personal and collective freedom, it is still a preferable option and a necessary precondition in order to maintain common-pool resources.<sup>46</sup>

Over twenty years, many theorists have ventured into analysis of commons, often challenging Hardin's proposition or citing it as an unquestionable argument for the superior effectiveness of private property rights with respect to resource uses.<sup>47</sup> The most substantial contributions in this sense are still recognized in *Governing the Commons* by Eleanor Ostrom. In her work, the author not only contends the main assumptions of Hardin's analysis as the representation of the individual as *homo homini lupus* or the understanding of private property as an economic and social panacea, but aims at re-conceptualising human interactions from a more realistic assessment of human limitations and capabilities and formulates an adequate theory of self-organization. The research starts from an assumption diametrically opposed to that of Hardin. The individual is not a 'prisoner'<sup>48</sup>, a passive subject, rather he is able to autonomously analyse costs and benefits of different options and even take collective decisions depending on internal and external variables.<sup>49</sup> In the work, Ostrom systematizes anthropological, sociological, and historical evidences and examples of individuals devising ingenious and highly sensible collective ways to deal with common property resources for both individual and collective benefit, while additionally establishing reasons and circumstances under which they succeed. Therefore, it can be observed how various communities decide to establish long-term institutions, where an institution indicates a set of working rules used to determine the agents involved and the actions and rules implemented within a given context.<sup>50</sup> This breaks the policy division of the State versus the market while deriving a mixture of instruments from both. Despite having evident limitations and problems, which the author herself points out in the research and will be explored further, Ostrom concludes that under certain circumstances common property regimes can be sustainable and even more efficient than individual property regimes when dealing with natural common-pool resources. While there is not one single structural scheme that applies to every situation, the

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<sup>45</sup> G. Hardin, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, Washington, D.C., American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968, pp. 1246

<sup>46</sup> Hardin, op. cit., pp. 1248

<sup>47</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, p. 68

<sup>48</sup> E. Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Actions*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 6

<sup>49</sup> Ostrom, op. cit., pp. 18-21

<sup>50</sup> Ostrom, op. cit., p. 51

different examples taken into account show indeed a broad spectrum of institutional settings.

The core of the findings then is not the definition of a blueprint for the commons, but the development of better tools to understand, implement, and theorize more sustainable and efficient self-organizing principles. However, the main weakness of Ostrom's work regards precisely the examples collected since most of them are relatively small to the extent they only consist of as many as a hundred commoners. While, the examples larger in size contradict the author's remarks. In fact, since direct negotiation among members is practically impossible, larger groups require much more complex decision-making structures, proving that what efficiently works at one scale does not automatically hold at another one. As it has been noticed by David Harvey, this aspect is not properly presented and evaluated by Ostrom in this specific work. On the contrary, he believes that Ostrom prefers to minimize and avoid making certain considerations or using certain words. However, as Harvey points out, a fetishism for a unique management model or political asset, as for example pure horizontality, often prevents from exploring more appropriate and efficient solutions. Plus, avoiding to use certain examples hinder the full understanding of an issue and its limits, not being thus prepared to overcome them when necessary.<sup>51</sup> Finally, a similar scale problem can also be found in Hardin's text, given that he uses a small-scale example as cattle in order to reflect on the global issue of world overpopulation. This shows that changes of scale can distort the perception of an issue and that it should be always taken into account both when opposing or supporting an argument in order to objectively reflect on a situation.

The opposition Ostrom versus Hardin has remained pivotal in the discussion around the commons, despite obvious flaws and misconceptions. However, its main value herein relies on the ability that it has fostered a renewed energy and brings the discourse around the commons back to the academic and institutional front line of social sciences. In the light of industrial revolutions and capitalist expansion, the commons were relegated to a mere romantic utopia<sup>52</sup> historically condemned to disappear and thus not foster relevant academic consideration. The discussion concerning the commons became itself enclosed in a far too narrow set of presumptions, mostly embodied in the example of the British land enclosures from the late medieval age onwards, resulting in a polarization between private property and authoritarian state intervention, or rather for or against enclosure.<sup>53</sup> The discourse was re-established within a new light thanks to the work of a group of mainly British Marxist scholars, who explored the economic dimension of the commons and contextualized it within a more anti-capitalist framework.<sup>54</sup> Detaching the subject from politically deployed environments, in the Eighties the study of the commons became more concentrated and organized, increasingly notably after 1985 as a result of the organization of several

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<sup>51</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, pp. 69-70

<sup>52</sup> P. Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, Berkeley, University Press of California, 2008, pp. 273

<sup>53</sup> Harvey, op. cit., p. 68

<sup>54</sup> P. A. Gonzalez, 'From a Given to a Construct', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, n. 3, 2014, p. 362

seminars and sectoral associations.<sup>55</sup> An important aspect of the revival of commons as a subject of study and analysis is the fundamental change in perspective to the extent that since mid-1980s scholars helped to form a substantial transdisciplinary approach to the subject. The urge for an interdisciplinary approach derived from the awareness that the processes at work within the commons are very complex and they influence and are influenced by variables from different disciplines and sectors.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, in 1989 the International Association for the Study of Common Property was established, that still maintained a great focus on commons intended as property-right regime.

What is apparent from the evolution of the concept of commons in the Eighties is that even though scholars by and large opposed Hardin's vision according to which private property regime is a necessary precondition for preserving the commons, they still work within the same liberal framework. Considering capital and property as an a priori, they continue to legitimize and perpetuate the same economic model and the related practices of enclosure and privatization.<sup>57</sup> The theories presented so far deal with a crystallized idea of the commons, far from the diverse formulation presented as the opening of this section. This is generally justified by the subject-matter treated in those years, that is natural resources subject to the regulations and the pressures of the market. As previously mentioned, since mid-1980s it was observed that a broader transdisciplinary approach to the subject was needed, so as to grasp the complex dynamics embedded in the development of the commons. However, at the turn of the century, a substantial re-conceptualization of the subject occurred, following the implementation in the West of large-scale neoliberal policies and the related phenomenon of new enclosures. Many groups, both inside and outside the academic world, began to go back to the practice of commoning with the aim to retrieve its political potential in reaction to phenomena of increasing commodification, privatization and corporatization.<sup>58</sup> This momentum was named the rise of 'new commons'. The adjective new did not only refer to those resources recently recognized as such, but mainly to those that were newly re-claimed as commons. Similarly, it can be labeled as new because the range of the movement, gathering together divergent fields, interests and geographies increasingly embraced the commons as a tool to address issues of collaboration, reciprocity, and sustainability.<sup>59</sup>

Although the rise of the new commons has involved multiple fields, the research will focus on what has been defined as constructed cultural commons. As stressed by Benkler, all pre-twentieth century knowledge, and much of the contemporary academic and scientific work, represents the most significant resource we as society have to

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<sup>55</sup> E. Ostrom and F. Van Laerhoven, 'Traditions and Trends in the Study of the Commons', *International Journal of the Commons*, vol. 1, n. 1, 2007, pp. 3-4

<sup>56</sup> E. Ostrom and C. Hess (eds.), *Understanding Knowledge as Commons*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2007

<sup>57</sup> K. R. Olwig, 'Heritage as common(s) - Commons as heritage: Things we have in commons in the political landscape of heritage', in H. Benesch, et al. (ed.), *Heritage as Common(s) – Common(s) as Heritage*, Gothenburg, Makadam Publishers, 2015, p. 105

<sup>58</sup> C. Hess, 'Mapping New Commons', *Presented at The Twelfth Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons*, Cheltenham, UK, July, 2008, pp. 3-4

<sup>59</sup> Hess, op. cit., p. 1

govern as an open commons.<sup>60</sup> Around 1995, a new movement appeared, named the “information-commons”<sup>61</sup>. This gathered together the work of a great number of intellectuals who had found in the concept of commons a tool through which interpret the new dilemmas emerging in the field of information and digital communications.<sup>62</sup> It is precisely in those fields and in its digital actualization that the development of new economic patterns were more apparent. Debates about open access and intellectual property rights, under the umbrella of ‘creative commons’, made it possible to draw new connections with the practice of commoning in relation to immaterial resources as well as becoming a battleground for relevant legal struggles for the creation of an open-access knowledge commons.<sup>63</sup> Moving from the category of knowledge to the wider category of culture, constructed cultural commons relies on the idea that cultural production is an inherently social phenomenon, occurring over a range of scales and complex institutional structures, both formal and informal. Social production of cultural goods became more economically significant as a result of the communications revolution and it is possible to argue that cultural commons developed against increasing processes of privatization and commodification of culture carried out by the industries of cognitive capitalism as they become more and more dependent on individuals’ immaterial and creative potential. Shifting the final outcome from the production of commodities to the production of subjectivities, the post-industrial regimes of value aligns to those of the cultural field.

Traditionally, the main issue of the commons regarded the governance of individual rational action in a situation where the outcome strictly depends on the actions of all the people involved. This took into account the asset typology, the people involved, and an undefined management structure. It is within this context that both the work of Hardin and Ostrom are formed. Unlike the various promoters of private ownership, in her research Ostrom shifts the focus from the resource type to a management structure strictly defined by shared rules. However, when dealing with cultural commons, it is the resource type itself which carries atypical qualities. Different to traditional commons which are characterized by high subtractability, namely that one’s use does reduce the resource for others, culture is both non-subtractive and non-excludable. It is not possible to prevent someone from using or accessing it.<sup>64</sup> In order for capital to be able to exploit a resource, this must be enclosed in the frame of a post-scarcity setting. Therefore, this quality as concern cultural commons is crucial as it excludes the issue of the free rider a priori. Sharing and using cultural resources do not have a negative impact, rather it enhances its value more. Relating culture with commons becomes crucial in order to observe the system of production within post-industrial economies.<sup>65</sup> Such a mechanism increases the ability and power of the users both as producers and consumers, calling into question the dynamics of power within

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<sup>60</sup> Y. Benkler, ‘The Political Economy of Commons’, *UPGRADE*, IV, n. 3, June, 2003, p. 7

<sup>61</sup> E. Ostrom and C. Hess (eds.), *Understanding Knowledge as Commons*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2007, p. 4

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, p. 72

<sup>64</sup> Ostrom and Hess (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 6

<sup>65</sup> P. A. Gonzalez, ‘From a Given to a Construct’, *Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, n. 3, 2014, p. 363

the neoliberal system. It is the vast potential of this type of structure that makes commons relevant in this particular historical and economic context.<sup>66</sup>

Despite being presented as a historically founded and potentially radical concept, it would be a mistake to recognize in the commons a universal panacea. While the commons itself would not be a difficult frame of analysis, it becomes exotic and utopist within the regular economic narrative.<sup>67</sup> The un-clarity of the term represents the first major obstacle, embracing too many meanings while firmly embedding none. The spread of the commons as a cultural phenomenon resulted in greater awareness for citizens, political groups and users communities. People were able to identify and reassert control over old and new commons. Furthermore it provided space for public discussion, enabling new values to be articulated and confronted in public policy discussions. However, this means not only the establishment of a safe and open space, but also the characterization of such a space as highly contentious and difficult to control. Collective management requires relations based on responsibility but it may lead to paralysis of governance when the resource is contested and it becomes difficult for those involved to recognize each others' perspective. This may result in a lack of accountability and stability thus making the situation overly expensive.<sup>68</sup> The presence of different interests and the unstable and undetermined meaning of commoning is also likely to create further separations and closures in the name of collective ownership, and with regard to culture this can frequently happen in cases of contrasting values and traditions. The making of a commons can then itself become an agent of enclosure through the dispossession and alienation of other commons.<sup>69</sup>

The history outlined so far is relevant not merely to understand the evolution of the commons over time, but the legacy inherent to the concept and the possible implications associated with its appropriation and use. The paragraph outlined the shift occurred in the academic world when moving from a natural and physical notion of the commons to a more immaterial understanding of the subject. The focus on the cultural commons in the last sections made it possible to bring back the concept to a more appropriate field as concern the scope of this study. While the first paragraph aimed at positioning the research in relation to the terminology used, the next one places the research within the specific context of the metropolis, also addressing the museum as an active social agent. The role of the museum will be further addressed in the closing section. The following paragraphs are thus conceived so to provide material substance at the commons, which is still presented as an abstract entity.

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<sup>66</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 164

<sup>67</sup> E. Ostrom and C. Hess (eds.), *Understanding Knowledge as Commons*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2007, p. 27

<sup>68</sup> P. Parker and M. Johansson, *Challenges and Potentials in Collaborative Management of Urban Commons*, Malmo, Malmo University, 2012, pp. 16-18

<sup>69</sup> De Cesari, Ch., 'Heritage as Commons: A Paradigm Shift?', in H. Benesch, et al. (ed.), *Heritage as Common(s) – Common(s) as Heritage*, Gothenburg, Makadam Publishers, 2015, p. 265

## 2.2 The metropolis

The supply of public spaces and goods, by both public or private revenues, has historically been essential for capitalist development to the extent that cities become predominate sites of class conflicts and struggles over both the production and regulation of access to spaces and goods. Herein a distinction needs to be made between public spaces and public goods, and the commons. While the former have traditionally been a matter of the state, it takes political action on the part of the people to appropriate and produce the commons.<sup>70</sup> Since the concept of the commons is based on theorizing the praxis<sup>71</sup>, the commons cannot be conceived only as a theoretical concept. In praxis space and power relations influence the concept of the commons, this circumstance cannot be adequately reproduced in a theoretical concept, as those parameters are highly diverse and very specific to context. Moreover, metropolises represent the privileged site of Western biopolitical production by fostering the encounter and interaction of people that produce the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and ideas at the basis of the production process itself.<sup>72</sup> Urbanization can be conceived as “the perpetual production of an urban commons (or its shadow-form of public spaces and public goods) and its perpetual appropriation and destruction by private interests”<sup>73</sup>. Also, even if the loss of the urban-rural partition has proceeded at a differential pace, currently for the first time the majority of the world’s population lives in urban areas.<sup>74</sup> The commons within the urban context highlights all discrepancies of the current political and economic system and even of the commons itself in a highly concentrated form. Therefore, the dependence of the commons on power relations and space<sup>75</sup> are closer investigated in the following section, with a specific focus on the metropolis as the new place of economic production in Post-Fordist times.

In their work concerning the commons, Hardt and Negri argue that the metropolis today embodies what the factory used to represent for the industrial working class, that is a site for production, encounter, and antagonism.<sup>76</sup> Differently from the industrial city<sup>77</sup>, where the space of economic production was still separated

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<sup>70</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, p. 73

<sup>71</sup> Here the term praxis is used according to its common understanding thus unrelated to the definition coined by Paulo Freire.

<sup>72</sup> Hardt, M., & Negri, A., *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 249

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 80

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p. 252

<sup>75</sup> Here the term space is understood in its social dimension in accordance with the definition given by Lefebvre. According to author, space is a social product generated by means of a dialectical relationship “within the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived.” Space cannot be separated from social productions as it is defined by spatial practice and spatial relations between people and objects. Therefore, space can be understood as both the medium and the outcome of human activity and experience. See H. Lefebvre, ‘The right to the city’, in E. Kofman and E. Lebas (eds.), *Writings on cities*, Cambridge, Wiley-Blackwell, 1996, pp. 63-184 (original version *Le Droit a la Ville*, Paris, Anthropos, 1968)

<sup>76</sup> Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 250

<sup>77</sup> Hardt and Negri use the concept of the industrial city in opposition to that of the biopolitical city as two theoretical concepts to describe the evolution of work over time and the impact it had on people’s living environment. While the former refers to the city in a context of Fordist production in which work and life had

from the space of the city, in the biopolitical city the two spaces overlap, with the production of the commons becoming the life of the city itself.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, within the framework of Neoliberalism States are pushed to mimic corporate way of governing to the extent they increasingly think in terms of material assets. As noticed by Don Mitchell and Lynn A. Staeheli, in advanced capitalist societies the natural landscape is not anymore conceived only as a space but mainly as a property, meaning a place defined by clear boundaries and a network of social relationships that governs the access and use of those spaces.<sup>79</sup> In this respect, the same situation occurs in the urban landscape. Since the relationships in play are meant to be relations of ownership, spaces within the city are often shaped by competing claims and struggles over property between the various communities involved. A space can bring together different patterns of emotions and various stakeholders thus triggering occasions for negotiation and conflict and mapping out public space.<sup>80</sup> This becomes particularly evident in cases of relevant public spaces such as public squares or parks, i.e. the struggle over Gezi Park in Turkey<sup>81</sup>. Moreover, the metropolis due to a constant and conspicuous flux of people is known for its capacity to increasingly foster unpredictable encounters with alterity. Capital however is not able to organize these encounters and exchanges, yet it expropriates what is produced in the city by means of rent and real estate values.<sup>82</sup> According to Hardt and Negri, because of the hierarchies and division of contemporary metropolises largely based on institutionalized racism and structures of exclusion and fragmentation, these encounters are reported to be generally conflictive and destructive to various degrees.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, these very qualities of fear, violence, and exploitation convey a potential for antagonism in the metropolis, representing a battleground where the commons is produced, reproduced, and organized against its own de-socialization promoted by capital.<sup>84</sup> The challenge as regards spontaneous antagonism is to come together and organize by means of increased cooperation and communication so to not avoid self-destruction.<sup>85</sup>

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separate times and places, the latter refers to the city in the current economic system based on the production of experiences and subjectivities and in which the time of work and the time of life are strictly intertwined.

<sup>78</sup> Hardt, M., & Negri, A., *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 251

<sup>79</sup> D. Mitchell and L. Staeheli, 'Turning Social Relations into Space: Property, Law and the Plaza of Santa Fe, New Mexico', *Landscape Research*, vol. 30, n. 3, 2005, pp. 366-367

<sup>80</sup> B. Latour and P. Weibel (eds.), *Making Things Public*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2005, pp. 14-15

<sup>81</sup> Gezi Park is a urban park in Istanbul and it is considered one of the few remaining green spaces in the city. In May 2013, plans were disclosed regarding the construction of a shopping mall to replace the park. The conflicting interests of the privates involved in the construction, the government, citizens, and also activists and environmental groups culminated in several nationwide protests, demonstrations, and sit-ins to which the government responded with heavy repression by the police. See E. Uzer, 'Commoning in Resistance: Gezi Park Protests and "Veryüzü Sofraları"', in H. Benesch, et al. (eds.), *Heritage as Common(s) – Common(s) as Heritage*, Gothenburg, Makadam Publishers, 2015, pp. 309-327

<sup>82</sup> Hardt and Negri, op. cit., pp. 257-258

<sup>83</sup> Hardt and Negri, op. cit., pp. 252-255

<sup>84</sup> Within the framework of cognitive capitalism, capital has to seize and neutralize human knowledge, talent, and creativity in order to generate economic resources and goods. For this reason, it tends to fragment and break social relations and the socialization of knowledge by means of privatization processes. See J. Andersson, *Socializing Capital, Capitalizing the Social: Contemporary Social Democracy and the Knowledge Economy*, 2007. Available from HAL. Archive ouverte en Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société, (accessed 13/03/2017)

<sup>85</sup> Hardt and Negri, op. cit., pp. 259-260

Neoliberal globalization fostered a change in the way power is spatialized, intensifying the privatization of services and infrastructures, and resulting in physical and social fragmentation.<sup>86</sup> This combination of speculation, lessening of State responsibility, and socio-spatial reorganization has become defined as neoliberal urbanism<sup>87</sup> or creative destruction.<sup>88</sup> It is typically sustained and legitimized through the rhetoric of urban regeneration and civic improvement. The leitmotiv of this kind of practice is extensive gentrification, with bureaucratic and commercial forces taking over common spaces and influencing property values and social geography through displacement and dispossession.<sup>89</sup> Thus, capital manages to control the allocation and distribution of wealth and the collective surplus, gathering it in specific rich urban areas. The expropriation of the commons, which has been defined as new enclosures, does not then relate to the expropriation of a tangible resource but of the social value collectively produced. New enclosures are not stated merely on displacement nor on class exploitation, but on the misappropriation of the wealth produced in commons.<sup>90</sup> That is the qualitative difference between capital and the commons. While the surplus value is conceiving surplus as exclusion and separation, surplus common is conceiving surplus as inclusion.<sup>91</sup> If the new enclosures represent a seizure of the commons, the commons become a generative space that reacts to and overcomes the processes of enclosures themselves.<sup>92</sup> However, this opposition of the commons conceived as a reaction to new enclosures can never be considered as a given settled cause effect binary state, but as a set of specific spatialities and subjectivities produced by the tension among the two.

A further element to be taken into account within this research in relation to the metropolis is its being a citizenship laboratory, a notion that may be illustrated by two conditions. First, in the metropolis there is a continuous flow of people and human capital; high skilled mobile subjects who work into networks and who can value their expertise in multiple locations, thus expanding the notion of citizenship and detaching it from a specific territoriality. The previously considered processes of privatization and enclosure are themselves encouraging new patterns of participation and new socio-political claims, showing how the dichotomy enclosure-commons does not represent separate entities but are intertwined socio-political practices.<sup>93</sup> In this respect, a key concept is that of the multitude as theorized by Negri and Hardt<sup>94</sup>. The term multitude refers to a set of singularities, intended as social subjects whose “difference cannot be

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<sup>86</sup> A. Jeffrey, C. McFarlane, and A. Vasudevan, ‘Rethinking Enclosures. Space, subjectivity and the Commons’, *Antipode*, vol. 44, n. 4, 2012, p. 1250

<sup>87</sup> C. De Cesari and M. Herzfeld, ‘Urban Heritage and Social Movements’, in L. Meskell (ed.), *Global Heritage: A Reader*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, p. 171

<sup>88</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, p. 16

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Jeffrey, McFarlane, and Vasudevan, *op. cit.*, p. 1249

<sup>91</sup> C. Casarino and A. Negri, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp. 22-23

<sup>92</sup> A. Jeffrey, C. McFarlane, and A. Vasudevan, ‘Rethinking Enclosures. Space, subjectivity and the Commons’, *Antipode*, vol. 44, n. 4, 2012, p. 1254

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 1254-1256

<sup>94</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York, The Penguin Press, 2004

reduced to sameness”<sup>95</sup>, which operate on the basis of what these singularities share in common. Therefore, “the multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common”<sup>96</sup>. The plurality of singularities inherent in the notion of the multitude challenges the modern idea of universality. The multitude does not reduce diversity into one mutual identity such as class, ethnicity, or genre; nor it can be considered as a passive agent, dissimilar to the categories of the crowd or the masses. The multitude must be activated from the inside so to escape external manipulation and arbitrary rage.<sup>97</sup>

Going back to the parallel between the metropolis and the factory, it is further backed up by the one between the multitude and the working class. Within the framework of the metropolis, antagonistic claims and spaces cross the different groups and classes in the name of what has been indicated as the ‘right to the city’, the expression of a thought process that points at Lefebvre’s notion of the right to the city as the one that holds and combines them all. It does not pertain to a wider improved access to city spaces, even though space often represents an element of unification from and around which many struggles are developed. Instead, it is something which includes all those demands, but it also goes beyond by exemplifying a higher layer of the commons.<sup>98</sup> Hence, the focus with regard to this research is to analyze how starting from Lefebvre this concept has been consequently used and re-conceptualized by Harvey within the current economic and social framework. In fact, in his work Harvey contextualizes how the right to the city was originally conceived in 1967 as a radical response to an actual crisis of the everyday life in the urban context and a call to face that crisis and to imagine an alternative and less alienated urban environment, but still in conflictual and dialectical terms, meaning staying open to new encounters and continuous change. Lefebvre’s idea, although easily applicable to other contexts, was based on a specific understanding of urban life and social division, namely that of France just before the eruption of the ’68 movement. Twenty years after the end of World War II, the Western context was a context of political stability, and great economic and cultural changes with a strong increase in consumption and economic prosperity, and also the beginning of the process of globalization. Lefebvre recognized in the working class the main urban agent as well as the only one actually able to subvert the status quo.<sup>99</sup> To apply with accuracy this notion in the current environment, however, means to reconsider the right to the city in all its aspects, so as not to fall into the pitfall of nostalgia for something that no longer exists.

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<sup>95</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York, The Penguin Press, 2004, p. 99

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, p. 100

<sup>97</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 259-260

<sup>98</sup> An Architektur, ‘On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides’, *e-flux journal* #17, 2010, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67351/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>99</sup> H. Lefebvre, ‘The right to the city’, in E. Kofman and E. Lebas, *Writings on cities*, Cambridge, Wiley-Blackwell, 1996, p. 179 (original version *Le Droit a la Ville*, Paris, 1968)

As previously analyzed, the metropolis is in a time of considerable change with ever more privatized areas and increasingly fragmented populations. The working class is no longer the main agent of conflict, which may instead be identified in the Western in the category of the 'precariat'<sup>100</sup>, meaning frequently part-time, insecure, and unsystematic low-paid workers. As underlined by Hardt and Negri, this emerging class of precarious workers has at stake a completely new relationship to wage labor, since it still depends on it but it also increasingly relies on external means of reproduction associated to other sources of social wealth. The new dynamic tries to break the ties of dependence on wage labor to devise new modes of support so as to proactively react to a completely transformed labor market.<sup>101</sup> Within this changed context, Harvey approaches the right to the city as an empty signifier that can be claimed simultaneously by multiple agents. The question then becomes whose rights are being identified and recognized within the claim. The characterization of the right itself becomes the preliminary object of the struggle and the starting point of its materialization.<sup>102</sup> It is in this sense Harvey's use of the right of the city overcomes the formal understanding of the concept to apply it to the urban movements that throughout the world operate to create alternative ways of living and managing the urban dimension. The definition of a new urban context thus cannot be exempted from the recognition of those who are working towards it and within this research the agents of change are to be found in the conceptual category of the precariat and the multitude because of the economic and political connotation of these two somehow intertwined terms. Additionally it requires a focus on the artistic city and cultural milieu.

The final component that needs to be analyzed as an integral part of the metropolis is its cultural field. Especially because of a the policy paradigm of the creative city. While the actual substantive meaning of the creative city differs widely among authors, the suggestion of integrating culture into urban planning was formalized in 1988 by David Yencken, who presented a rather idyllic proposal of a city. The creative city goes beyond the need for efficiency and the material well-being of its citizens to be characterized by the capacity to recognize and foster variety and complexity. But needs to embrace creativity in its every form, promoting a dynamic cultural milieu and iconic architectures, and a talented and skilled workforce employed in new-economy industries; to promote the principles of choice, participation, and "a unifying symbolic identity in the guise of a striking global brand"<sup>103</sup> it needs to emotionally excite and inspire its inhabitants creativity, while supplying areas of calmness and serenity.<sup>104</sup> A characterization of this kind has significant blind spots, clashing with practical and theoretical obstacles, but at the same time it also represents an effective and functional suggestion in ideological terms, offering constructive insights into current urbanization

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<sup>100</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, p. xiv

<sup>101</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 290

<sup>102</sup> Harvey, op. cit., pp. xv-xvi

<sup>103</sup> A. J. Scott, 'Beyond the Creative City: Cognitive-Cultural Capitalism and the New Urbanism', *Regional Studies*, vol. 48, n. 4, 2014, p. 565

<sup>104</sup> D. Yencken, 'The Creative City', *Meanjin*, vol. 47, n. 4, 1988, pp. 597-608

processes.<sup>105</sup> In the Nineties, the notion of the creative city began to gather more and more momentum together with the emergence of post-Fordism and the idea of flexible production, which highly promoted the ideals of education, innovation and creativity. As it has been repeatedly stated, within the framework of cognitive capitalism, economy and culture are increasingly merged to the degree that arts and culture are produced by for-profit organizations as commodities, economic outcomes become the embodiment of aesthetic and semiotic values.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, within the context of the creative city and in relation to the new creative class, the production model of the creative industries is established. Although deriving from the field of cultural industries, term developed by Theodor W. Adorno and Mark Horkheimer<sup>107</sup> in the early 1940s with a negative connotation, the creative industries are today successfully established, especially within European cultural policy programs, and the change in terminology reflect this more emphatic and positive turn<sup>108</sup>. The heterogeneity of the term manages to include a variety of sectors and scales, and many aspects of artistic and cultural production. However while it is difficult to recognize it as a coherent object of analysis, it also represents a successful brand. As a result of the economic crisis and further dismantling of the welfare state, nowadays most of the state funding programs for art focus on those projects and organizations that are able to support this kind of social integration and creative industries rhetoric. The process had already begun in the 1990s, in line with the implementation of neoliberal policies, when Europe started pushing for a shift in cultural policy-making in order to de-politicize state-funded artistic production. The claim for democratic culture promoted by counter-cultural organizations at the end of the Twentieth century now becomes an obligation for art institutions to increasingly rely on quantitative data and the imperative for the individual to be creative.<sup>109</sup>

As a consequence of these remarks, the metropolis presents itself as an exemplary space, contextually unique yet globally replicable and networked. Spaces are enclosed and controlled through the tools of gentrification and creative economy, filtering out people and aiming at controlling the quality of the encounters. A core element of the creative city consists precisely in the creation of clusters in which skills and human capital are gathered together and honed. The whole wider social fabric of the metropolis then has to support and sustain those clusters by providing and a vibrant and creative milieu and a recognizable brand as symbols of the economic vocation of the city. Within this framework, the local artistic and cultural heritage has to serve the same purpose; a regulatory technique that appropriates and uses positive figures and concepts in order to consolidate control over what is subsequently transformed into

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<sup>105</sup> A. J. Scott, 'Beyond the Creative City: Cognitive-Cultural Capitalism and the New Urbanism', *Regional Studies*, vol. 48, n. 4, 2014, p. 565

<sup>106</sup> Scott, op. cit., p. 570

<sup>107</sup> M. Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno and N. G. Schmid, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002 (original version *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 1947)

<sup>108</sup> N. Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*, Brooklyn, Melville House Publishing, 2015, pp. 13-14

<sup>109</sup> G. Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2013, pp. 112-114

valuable property.<sup>110</sup> However, there are significant contradictions faced by capitalists when implementing this system. As remarked by Harvey, “by seeking to trade on values of authenticity, locality, history, culture, collective memories, and tradition they open a space for political thought and action within which socialist alternatives can be both devised and pursued”<sup>111</sup>. It is the cultural milieu as collectively produced, with its bonds and the inherent need for negotiation, that represents a safe space for intense exploration and alternative production in which progressive forces can re-appropriate and destabilize the capital. The potential of the commons within the metropolis lies in its own privatization to the extent it creates a path from the community to the commons, in which the political merges with the private and the public space becomes politicized. It is in this moment of temporary trust and improvisation that belongs an actual opportunity of eluding the current economic and cultural regime.<sup>112</sup> Within this framework, the museum intended as an institutional representative, and a cultural and economic asset of the metropolis, may actually occupy a relevant role in supporting and translating a moment of insurgency into a moment of government. The political power of these specific sites of becoming is considered to be still highly undervalued.<sup>113</sup> The constant engagement with these spaces in fact contributes to the formation of a political community as they not only merge alternative forms of living, but also activate the people in order to generate new models for being in the world.<sup>114</sup> Regardless the will or not to critically engage with its role and the economic model it may rely on, it is worth noting that the museum has an agency and its decisions are looked up not only by a small resource community but by society as a whole.

### 2.3 The museum

The world is made of complicated infrastructures, expansive networks of interrelated economies, authorities, and social organizations. When these structures jointly produce and shape complex networks of meaning and understanding of the world and ourselves, they define an infrastructure of resonance.<sup>115</sup> Institutions are part of these networks, representing at once the actual organizations of people, structures and possessions and the entire system of shared values, customs and norms considered vital for the operation of a society.<sup>116</sup> The research does not approach the museum as an abstract concept, but as a physical entity, geographically located, and in close relationship with its physical and emotional surroundings. Furthermore, on the base of

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<sup>110</sup> C. De Cesari and M. Herzfeld, ‘Urban Heritage and Social Movements’, in L. Meskell (ed.), *Global Heritage: A Reader*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, p. 173

<sup>111</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, p. 112

<sup>112</sup> P. Bruyne, ‘From Community Art to Communal Art’, in P. Gielen, P. Bruyne and T. Björfors, *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2011, p. 249

<sup>113</sup> N. Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*, Brooklyn, Melville House Publishing, 2015, p. 132

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 59-60

<sup>116</sup> See P. Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2010, p. 41; E. Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Actions*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 51

observable trends in the field and in line with my own personal interests, it expressly focuses on the museum of contemporary art as its target of analysis. Therefore, before delving into the museum subject, it is necessary to dwell on the relationship between art and politics.

Since the early 1990s socially and politically engaged artistic rubrics started developing becoming today major trends in the contemporary field.<sup>117</sup> The new socio-political inclination in the arts fits into the political context discussed so far. The current creative entrepreneurship is marked by a high degree of de-collectivization of work organized in a fluent network structure, contrary to the alienation of the Fordist assembly line. The enthusiasm with which it is received and promoted, mostly in the name of individual autonomy, makes art particularly sensitive to neoliberal value regime.<sup>118</sup> Both Gielen and Raunig, found in the figure of the Bohemian nineteenth-century artist and its values of self-determination and idiosyncrasy a prototype of the contemporary work ethic.<sup>119</sup> Also, the artistic elements of the early twentieth century are now considered basic advertising skills and the production of art is now widespread, experiencing the creative economy as an opportunity and a challenge.<sup>120</sup> While it may open the path for art to become a leading segment of the new economy, it could make it impossible for art production to stay autonomous from market forces.<sup>121</sup> To underline the relation between art and politics in relation to economic production may be considered significant inasmuch that it requires us to reconsider the role of art and the artist detached from any aesthetic evaluation.<sup>122</sup> In fact, all around Europe are numerous the cultural organizations, including examples that will be examined in the following chapter, who decide to engage in alternative management models and experiment with more political concepts as the commons. On the other hand, Gielen argues that from an aesthetic and theoretical standpoint, neoliberalism and the dismantling of the welfare state contributed to the creation of the perfect background for a revival of participatory art<sup>123</sup> inside the art system.<sup>124</sup> In this sense, the most striking pattern is the use of highly

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<sup>117</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between art and politics and the rubric of socially engaged and activist art, see M. G. Birchall, 'Socially engaged art in the 1990s and beyond', *ONCURATING*, n. 25, May, 2015, pp. 13-19; Y. McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition*, New York/London, Verso, 2016

<sup>118</sup> P. Gielen, 'Institutional Imagination. Instituting Contemporary Art Minus the 'Contemporary'', in P. Gielen, *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2013, p. 24

<sup>119</sup> See P. Gielen and P. Bruyne, 'Introduction. Fresh Air and Full Lungs', in P. Gielen and P. Bruyne, *Being an Artist in Post-Fordist Times*, Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, 2009, p. 8; G. Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2013, p. 98

<sup>120</sup> N. Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*, Brooklyn, Melville House Publishing, 2015, pp. 17-21

<sup>121</sup> P. Gielen and P. Bruyne, 'Introduction. Fresh Air and Full Lungs', in P. Gielen and P. Bruyne, *Being an Artist in Post-Fordist Times*, Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, 2009, pp. 9-10

<sup>122</sup> M. Hardt, 'Production and Distribution of the Common', in P. Gielen and P. Bruyne, *Being an Artist in Post-Fordist Times*, Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, 2009, pp. 51-52

<sup>123</sup> Here the term participatory art is used according to the definition given by Claire Bishop, according to whom this includes an expanded field of post-studio practices that goes under a number of different names such as socially engaged art, community-based art, interventionist art, or collaborative art. Each one of these names encompasses a particular shade of meaning, therefore specific names will be used when needed. Here, however, it refers to those projects in which people constitute the main artistic medium and material, so to

political concepts as the main themes in the world's most important art biennials and the inclusion of activist groups and practices within these contexts as in *All the World's Futures* and *Manifesta11*. However, the disparity between the growing antagonism in the streets and that institutionalized in the museum and the gallery shows how the agenda of contemporary institutional practice revolves around the idea of shaping, promoting and presenting only some form of antagonism. This 'professionalized antagonism' is an important component in many curatorial and artistic projects and it has been highly exposed and used within the frame of our global social-economic conditions thus producing what can be interpreted as the normalization of global mass antagonism. The roots of current professional art antagonism are found in humanism and Enlightenment, and even if it may critique or reject them, they are historically intertwined.<sup>125</sup> Within the modern Western art field the notion of participatory art represent a contradiction in terms. In this respect, Gielen distinguishes between *auto-* and *allo-*relational aesthetics. While the former designates a relation in which the struggle is functional to the enhancement of the artist identity, the latter indicates an artistic project which serves the identity and the cause of the other person or group involved in the project.<sup>126</sup> While the demands for originality and individuality coming from the art market are hard to reconcile with the commitment to a group or community, communities may have difficulty in accepting art as a possible means for creating and sustaining the commons.<sup>127</sup>

Nevertheless, the way we as people understand art and politics is by and large shaped by how we encounter and experience their use in our every day context. Even if critical intervention by the arts often seems unattainable in the West, accepting the situation as incontrovertible could become counter-productive. While acknowledging the transformations brought by Post-Fordism, Chantal Mouffe argues that the new forms of capitalist production are believed to allow innovative modes of resistance and even if the opinions on how to implement this resistance are divergent, artistic practice is believed to have a crucial contribution.<sup>128</sup> According to the author, it can take place in two opposing way depending on the type of relation to be established with the institution. One approach is the withdrawal from institution, which is considered complicit with capitalism. Artists working inside the institution are totally instrumentalized by the art system and encouraged to contribute to its reproduction. A major critique of this approach is that it would preclude an inherent critique of the institution and thus the real possibility for a counter-hegemonic resistance. To believe

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include all the various facets of this type of practices. See C. Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, New York, Verso, 2012, pp. I-II

<sup>124</sup> P. Gielen and P. Bruyne, 'Introduction Between the Individual and the Common', in P. Gielen, P. Bruyne and T. Björfors, *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2011, p. 3

<sup>125</sup> el-Baroni, B., 'Notes on the Question of Audience', in M. Hlavajova and R. Ranjit (eds.), *Future Publics (the Rest Can and Should Be Done by the People): A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, Utrecht, BAK/Valiz, 2015, pp. 120-122

<sup>126</sup> P. Gielen, 'Mapping Community Art' in P. Gielen, P. Bruyne and T. Björfors, *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2011, p. 18

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>128</sup> C. Mouffe, 'Institutions as Sites of Antagonistic Intervention', in P. Gielen, *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2013, p. 64

that existing institutions cannot represent a space of contestation in fact is deeply disempowering because it does not take into account the existing tensions within a given configuration of forces and the opportunity of subverting them from within.<sup>129</sup> Another strategy is that the art directly engages with the institution. Society can be considered a political construct and as such it is the result of a particular hegemony. For this reason it can always be challenged through counter-hegemonic practices. Herein culture is crucial because it represents where the 'common sense' is formed and subjectivities are shaped. In order to be functional to the struggle critical artistic practices have to engage with the institution, with the aim and capacity of "fostering dissent and creating a multiplicity of agonistic spaces where the dominant consensus is challenged and where new modes of identification are made available"<sup>130</sup>. Therefore, without trying to romanticize the role and the power of the museum, by opening up and embracing critical (self-)reflection in discussion with artists, activists, academics, and its publics as peers, it could represent a new space for agonistic confrontations.

Today the museum finds itself in a number of crises as its public and political role is constantly questioned. In addition to the crisis of funding, it is largely affected by crises of audience, meaning, and political legitimacy.<sup>131</sup> It is not necessary to take over a major institution in order to reclaim an infrastructure. It requires a longer-term approach, starting the production of new forms of meaning from one's own small segment, and over a sustain period of time. Similarly, Thompson explains, the construction of legitimacy doesn't have to involve large existing structures. Museums are vulnerable to public opinion and even the slightest provocation, push or demand could influence the museum boards and have a noteworthy impact. The self-conscious use of this power in fact may ultimately have a major impact on the world's sensibility, contributing to find one's own legitimacy.<sup>132</sup> Historically the art museum in the West has been considered a very bourgeois institution, and today it has been turned into an entertainment apparatus or a 'modulating museum'<sup>133</sup>, as defined by Gerald Raunig, meaning an institution in which the relationship with its publics is structured on the logic of quantity-over-quality in the name of 'culture for all'. The individual is conceived as a consumer and the offer of the museum tends to be based on events, with an increase in temporary exhibitions with more interactive and attractive displays and blockbuster artists, which could be considered to the detriment of research and education. The production of an autonomous critique in the art field therefore, has been often believed to pertain to the alternative scene, suggesting that being counter-mainstream is an inherently good value even if most alternative spaces tend to borrow their programming

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<sup>129</sup> C. Mouffe, 'Institutions as Sites of Antagonistic Intervention', in P. Gielen, *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2013, pp. 64-66

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68

<sup>131</sup> S. Sheikh, 'The Trouble with Institutions, or, Art and Its Public', in N. Möntmann, *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*, London, Black Dog Pub, 2006, pp. 142-144

<sup>132</sup> N. Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*, Brooklyn, Melville House Publishing, 2015, pp. 70-71

<sup>133</sup> G. Raunig, 'Flatness Rules. Instituent Practices and Institutions of the Common in a Flat World', in P. Gielen, *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2013, pp. 170-171

and business structure from commercial galleries.<sup>134</sup> Mouffe sustains that this paradigm can be altered. Contemporary art museums could be transformed into agonistic<sup>135</sup> public spaces, challenging their hegemonic role of conservative organization. While the author recognizes that there was a moment when it made sense to discard museums, within the current conditions the museum may become a privileged place for escaping the supremacy of the market. Deprived of its normative function, the museum could be regarded as a privileged location in which artworks can be presented as distinguished from commercial goods thus resisting the effects of commodification. Therefore, the actual task is to engage with the institution in order to develop its progressive potential against the neoliberal hegemony.<sup>136</sup>

The critique of the museum in the arts has historically been carried forward by the practice of institutional critique<sup>137</sup>. In its historical form, institutional critique was mainly conducted by artists against the art institutions, including galleries and collectors. By means of artworks, writing and activism, arts institutions were politically and theoretically inquired as spaces of cultural control and repression. While this experience is still artistically relevant despite its internal and external contradictions, for the purposes of this research I am going to focus on a different phenomenon, that of New institutionalism. The term New Institutionalism, or experimental Institutionalism, refers to a debate around new curatorial, educational, and organizational practices that began in the early 2000s. The debate spread when a group of formerly (quasi-)independent curators was appointed as directors of mainly medium-size, publicly funded, contemporary art institutions located in the social democratic axis of north-central Europe.<sup>138</sup> The term in itself is still quite contested as it is believed to have a branding and categorizing effect, also there is still comparatively a little analytical material around the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the fundamental traits of New Institutionalism is that it operates conscious of the social engagement and the agency of the museum. The exhibition is no longer the only privileged format but is approached as a discursive and inclusive practice that has to deal with controversial issues. Also, there is an equal emphasis on the other functions of the museum, which result is a more fair

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<sup>134</sup> N. Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*, Brooklyn, Melville House Publishing, 2015, p. 133

<sup>135</sup> The term 'agonistic' is used by Mouffe to describe a conception of democracy that acknowledges the contingent character of most of hegemonic political and economic features that determine the particular configuration of a society at a given time. As a consequence, society is recognized as a political construct and hegemonic elements that used to be looked at as necessary end up being considered as contingent and precarious constructions that can be deconstructed and transformed by means of social struggle. To know more, C. Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces', *ART&RESEARCH: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, v. 1, n. 2, 2007, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/mouffe.html> (28/03/2017)

<sup>136</sup> C. Mouffe, 'Institutions as Sites of Antagonistic Intervention', in P. Gielen, *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2013, p. 70

<sup>137</sup> Institutional critique emerged in 1970s with artists as Hans Haackes, Daniel Buren, and Marcel Broodthaers, whose aim was to deconstruct the museum and the traditional canons of art history in order to make visible its historically and socially constructed boundaries. See P. Gielen, 'Institutional Imagination. Instituting Contemporary Art Minus the 'Contemporary'', in P. Gielen, *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2013, pp. 15-16

<sup>138</sup> A. Farquharson, 'Bureaux de Change', *Frieze*, 2 September 2006, <https://frieze.com/article/bureaux-de-change> (28/03/2017)

distribution of financial and human resources. Despite most of these experiments were in crisis already in 2006 with different outcomes, New Institutionalism is still relevant because it aimed at developing alternative ways of re-conceiving the museum in the light of its socio-political function. It theorized a more discursive institutional model that had to connect the museum practice to the formation of a more critical and diverse public sphere.<sup>139</sup> However the promoters of New Institutionalism are now considered all successful curators who to a certain extent keep promoting a very similar approach in their various projects. The experience is considered to be over since as a result of budget cuts several of the institutions involved had to close down or modify their vision. On the one hand this happened because museums were subject to governmental repressions because of the topic they dealt with. On the other, they generally failed to actually engage more than their relatively small peer community thus lacking of an effective relevance for society as a whole and consequently of a strong support group that could have mobilized against closure.<sup>140</sup>

While not completely successful, the influences of New institutionalism are still present in several institutions mainly due to specific figures. However, these experiences align to a small series of further radical cultural policies that developed in the critical art field between the 1990s and 2000s under the frame of the commons. Following the hypothesis of Raunig, an institution of the commons does not simply imply the administration and conservation of 'public cultural treasures'. The institution of the commons goes beyond the claim for general accessibility on the base of a tripartite plan. As regards the content, it rejects the reproduction of traditional canons without becoming unintelligible. It aims at deconstructing the canons to enable political-aesthetic reflection and long-term effects. Therefore, concerning the modes of production the institution of the commons has to question and redefine its rigid time management in order to address the issues of the self-exploitation and precarization of working conditions in the field. Starting from these internal analysis, it is also possible to critically discuss the combination of economic funds beyond the dichotomy of state against private sponsors. Finally, in terms of what Raunig defines 'machinic understanding', activation methods regarding the audience have to be reconsidered in the light of Post-Fordist imperatives of participation and creativity. Instead of patronizing the publics, the museums material and immaterial resources should be made available to the people to collectively create programs and methods to engage with and address common relevant issues.<sup>141</sup>

In the following chapters, I will investigate the practice of those experiences, both institutional than counter-institutional, that in Europe acknowledge this approach. Then, I will focus on two specific case studies, that is the MAAM and the MNCARS, as representative of two opposite ways of practicing contemporary art in the name of the commons.

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<sup>139</sup> A. Farquharson, 'Institutional Mores', in P. Gielen, *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2013, pp. 220-222

<sup>140</sup> L. Kolb and G. Flückiger, 'New Institutionalism Revisited', *ONCURATING*, n. 21, December, 2013, pp. 14-15

<sup>141</sup> G. Raunig, 'Flatness Rules. Instiuent Practices and Institutions of the Common in a Flat World', in P. Gielen, *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2013, pp. 173-174

### 3. Inventory Review

The theoretical development of the commons is complex, but at the same time strictly linked to its practical implications. For this reason a list of fifty-seven European cultural spaces that in their practice engage and work with the commons have been compiled<sup>142</sup>, comprising spaces of different size and nature and covering the 64.2% of the EU members.<sup>143</sup> As previously mentioned in the Methodology, the main criteria according to which the organizations have been selected are three. These spaces have to be situated within the European Union, they have to deal with art as their main cultural practice, and they must engage or have engaged with the commons in their everyday practice or in a recent project. These criteria are functional to the research as they try to define as homogeneous as possible frame within which to analyze the specificities of the various experiences and try to identify patterns. A few places in the list have been personally visited and experienced both for work and leisure. For research purposes such personal comments and remarks are not going to be taken into account so as not to create unequal treatment. The material taken into account in the analysis comes predominantly from their websites or, when not possible, it has been collected from their social media accounts. Then, the material has been approached through critical discourse analysis. In this respect, it was possible to trace a specific terminology and mechanisms of representation. Similarly, it was also possible to obtain useful information on the operation of the different structures and insights on various social, economic, and political features.

Nevertheless, during the analysis limitations were identified. The first is time as set within an established academic frame. Having started the inventory during my internship in June, I established December as my deadline in order to have time to go through the date before actually starting the thesis. This is thus the result of seven months of exploration. Also, while examples are by and large fairly distributed around Europe, the most represented nations are Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands [Fig. 1]. The reason lies in the fact that this typology of cultural space is often bottom-up and deeply rooted in its local context and to other similar experiences. As a result, I have found it much easier to trace examples in countries of which I already had a pretty good knowledge of the cultural field, such as Italy, Spain and the Netherlands. An additional limitation is communication. Since each space tends to contextually decide its communication strategy, it may occur that some do not concern much about self-narration and self-representation. Consequently, translations or updated documentation are not always available. Concerning the issue of language, in some case my knowledge of French and Spanish together with Italian allowed me to understand everything consistently, otherwise I decided to make use of automated translation when possible. Finally, the high degree of transdisciplinarity of these spaces made it difficult to

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<sup>142</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>143</sup> Great Britain has been included in the research in that, despite the favorable vote to Brexit, at the time of this research it is still part of the EU. A. Hunt and B. Wheeler, 'Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU', *BBC*, 24 March 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887> (28/03/2017)

consistently apply the clear-cut criteria previously stated. This is generally mirrored in the conjunction with many art forms but for 30% of the cases their practice crosses also multiple areas of everyday life including claims regarding work, housing, or the environment. The attention to external socio-political issues relates to the bottom-up nature of these organizations, which tend to rise and gather around contested subjects. This is even more significant considering that local socio-political claims also represent the entry point for many progressive institutions aiming at increasing their agency. Therefore, the point of contact between experiences that are so far apart, as a commercial gallery and a community centre, is political awareness and a critical approach.

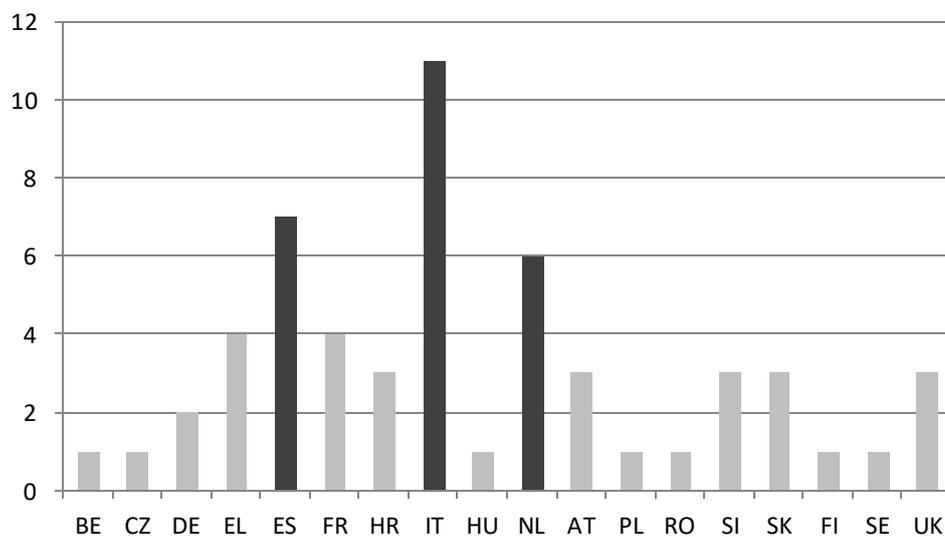


Fig. 1 Case studies distributed according to countries. Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain are highlighted in dark black. The codes as regards European countries are taken from Publications Europa, 'Denominazioni e sigle da utilizzare', <http://publications.europa.eu/code/it/it-370100.htm> (23/03/2017)

### 3.1 Deconstructing the institution

The decision of instituting the commons represents a political project that cuts transversely across the dichotomy of the private versus the public and aims at opening new pathways for politics. Assuming that engaging with the commons underlies the presence of a resource, a group, and the commitment of everyone, it also aims at creating systems of collective management that overcome the reliance on the State and the market. Therefore, those groups who are willing to experiment and implement alternative ways of living and working within the cultural sector should primarily question the very idea of institution itself. However, this approach collides with the bureaucratic conditions required to a social and economic agent. The analysis therefore focuses on two distinct aspects, on the one side the legal form chosen by these groups and on the other their management structure. On their websites around 50% are explicit as regards their legal entity and rely on legally and traditionally recognized forms such as ExRotaprint<sup>144</sup>, a non-profit limited liability company. However, a similar discourse can be done for a small number of places operating illegally that claim the lack of a legal status to stake out their otherness and that find in the law a battleground for the negotiation of values and rights. As stressed by Macao<sup>145</sup>, a space and the practices that occur within it could be defined as commons by its community of citizens, workers, and users because of the full legitimacy of those forming processes based on participation and active citizenship. However, as they remain extremely fluid in their composition and organization (i.e. by rejecting hierarchical organization and delegation), these realities are structured in ways that cannot and refuse to be formalized into legal entities within currently required canons.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, in the case of markedly artistic and experimental projects I've identified two opposite attitudes. On the one side they invent or use unclear terms as a mean to emphasize their own specificity. On the other they hijack the bureaucratic tools in order to fulfill their own goals.

A good example in this respect are the artistic projects Robin Hood Asset Management Cooperative<sup>147</sup> and Fondo Speculativo di Provvidenza.<sup>148</sup> The constitutive

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<sup>144</sup> ExRotaprint, 'Nonprofit status', <http://www.exrotaprint.de/en/gemeinuetzigkeit/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>145</sup> Macao is an independent center for art, culture, and research based in a occupied slaughterhouse in Milan. By means of its practice, Macao aims at creating new models of governance and labour, while art production is considered an important instrument for social change and political critique. To know more, see Macao, 'Chi siamo', <http://www.macaomilano.org/spip.php?rubrique44> (28/03/2017)

<sup>146</sup> Macao, 'Città costituente', <http://www.macaomilano.org/spip.php?rubrique24> (28/03/2017)

<sup>147</sup> Robin Hood Asset Management Cooperative is an art project as well as an investment cooperative. It has also been defined as an "activist hedge fund" since it aims at challenging today's economy financialization by hijacking its own tools and mechanism. Robin Hood is a cooperative and is open for everyone to become a member and take active part to the decision-making process in opposition to financial elitism. According to Robin Hood principles, money put into the fund is then placed in the Wall Street stock exchange by means of an algorithm called "The Parasite". Moreover, part of the profit generated by the fund is invested into projects building the commons. Therefore, the technological and financial systems and instruments actually used within the Stock Market such as algorithms are taken and collectively used for the production and reproduction of the commons. See Robin Hood Coop, 'Main Page', <http://www.robinhoodcoop.org/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>148</sup> Fondo Speculativo di Provvidenza (FSP) is an art project and a hedge fund. It aims at fostering and producing a collective political practice by means of the use of money. The FSP works within the context of larger artistic projects such as festivals or biennials, and thanks to the economic and personal involvement of the public. In

features of the cooperative and the fund, as the strategic use of investments and algorithms, are manipulated in order to question the very functioning of the funding institution, and more generally of the financial sector. Therefore, under a neoliberal economic model, law takes up an ambiguous position of being both a mechanism of dispossession and active citizenship.<sup>149</sup> In this example it becomes a modular tool which on the one hand serves to fit within a context according to its given terms, but on the other represents a juridical instrument through which to create new rights and new political space. While the first case is widely spread among the other cases, the second is much less noticeable but nevertheless worthy of reflection because it is rooted precisely in those spaces that claim their own illegality. A last consideration regarding the legal form is that in some cases it is historically defined or dictated by external needs and pressures. La Tabacalera is an example as it regards the variance between bureaucracy and management and the instrumental use of a legal form as detached from the actual operation and mission of the space. In fact, as stated on its website, the CSA La Tabacalera Cultural Association of Lavapiés is an association created for the only purpose of having a legitimate legal entity but with no agency, while in the everyday practice the place is managed horizontally through an articulate system based on a main assembly held every fifteen days, a plenary that every three months evaluates the former period and traces the new guidelines, common working sessions every last Sunday of the month to deal with practical issues, and six working commissions.<sup>150</sup>



Fig. 2 Assemblies in Macao (left) and S.a.L.E. Docks (right). © Macao, S.a.L.E. Docks

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agreement with the hosting event, the FSP increases by a fixed amount the price of each ticket. The increase has to be such that it does not interfere with the visitors' decision to whether or not to purchase the ticket. Moreover, each ticket grants its owner to be part of the FSP. The extra money is then set aside so to constitute a fund that belongs to all visitors in equal measure. Finally, all members are encouraged to speculate and decide on how to use the money. Everything has to be decided, nothing is guaranteed. In this way the project questions commons habits and values in order to create conditions that allow participants to discuss and experiment with new models of living, thinking, and acting collectively. See Fondo Speculativo di Provvidenza, 'About', <http://thespeculativefund.org/about/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>149</sup> A. Jeffrey, C. McFarlane and A. Vasudevan, 'Rethinking Enclosures. Space, subjectivity and the Commons', *Antipode*, vol. 44, n. 4, 2012, p. 1250

<sup>150</sup> La Tabacalera, 'About', <http://latabacalera.net/about-la-tabacalera/> (28/03/2017)

Therefore, concerning management and organizational structures a different assessment has to be made. As Ostrom points out, organizing is a process that can result in a number of different systems, each of which has different costs and benefits that need to be considered.<sup>151</sup> Yet with regard to the examples analyzed the process becomes itself part of the management system. Around 30% of the experiences taken into account state to be process-driven whereas nearly all of the samples claim to have an open planning in which everyone can get involved. However, only 10% of those taken into account formally implement a membership system and secure voting rights, fostering not only active participation but a sense of accountability for all those involved. The vast majority do not elaborate how this is made possible and how it is regulated, thus actually maintaining a clear distinction between the team and the audience. As regards to size instead, a similar discourse can be applied to the size of the examples themselves. Majority of the organizations (86%) are small thus confirming the remarks reported in the previous chapter in relation to the work of Ostrom and the issue of scale, that is the ability of a group to maintain contingent management strategies and a high degree of authority and accountability as dimension increase.<sup>152</sup> A final assessment as regards internal organization concerns the tool of the assembly. Despite being the primary decision-making body for only nine of the considered cases, the assembly has strong symbolic and political connotations [Fig. 2]. It derives from the realm of radical movements and it opposes the traditional organizational forms founded on unity, hierarchy, and central leadership. The constitutive assembly is an horizontal and democratic process, whose aim is not unanimity but inclusion, combining together conflicting ideas and desires towards optimal and shared solutions while protecting and empowering the minorities.<sup>153</sup> The assembly defines its own autonomous temporality in open conflict with that of the neoliberal economic model, investing considerable amount of time and resources in the process of negotiation and discussion.<sup>154</sup> Therefore, the assembly then really presents an alternative paradigm to the extent that it stands on opposite premises as it regards the organization of time, space, life, and social relations, but it is also for this reason that it may not always represent the most effective solution.

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<sup>151</sup> E. Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Actions*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 39-40

<sup>152</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, pp. 69-70

<sup>153</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Declaration*, New York, Argo-Navis Author Services, 2012, pp. 56-57

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49



Fig. 3 Annette Krauss and the Casco team, *Unlearning exercise #3: collective cleaning*, as part of *Site for Unlearning: Art Organization*, 2014, at Casco, Utrecht. (left) ; *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)*, workshop, printed matter, installation, reading list, Casco team, Annette Krauss, 2014–present. (right) © Casco

Here, it is noteworthy to mention the research project *Site for Unlearning: Art Organization* carried out by Casco together with the artist Annette Krauss.<sup>155</sup> Since 2014, the staff of Casco is involved together with Krauss in a inner process of detecting and questioning internalized social norms and structures with the aim of reflecting and rethinking individual and collective habits and priorities, and imagine new ways of behaving and working [Fig.3]. By unlearning Casco intends to challenge the traditional art institution and the relationships within it, and to include the values of wellbeing, care, and collective responsibility into the institution itself, practices that are inherent of the concept of the commons. The idea of unlearning was also present in the program *Communal Knowledge* carried out by The Showroom in 2010, in which artists and designers were invited to work with schools, organizations, and individuals from the neighbourhood.<sup>156</sup> In this case however, the aim of the project was more theoretical and focused on the local community and less on a radical change of the organization as a whole. Nonetheless, this awareness with respect to internal and external power dynamics fits into the notion of the institution of the commons as theorized by Raunig, and tries to respond to the necessity of challenging rigid time management in the light of precarization and self-exploitation.<sup>157</sup> The issue of time is also tackled on a macro-level by Ὑλη[matter]HYLE, that through its work aims at deconstructing and replacing the Modernist conception of history that is believed to dominate the whole labor-life structure.<sup>158</sup>

A common characteristic of these experiences is the will to experiment with existing structures and create something innovative. 56% of the examples taken into account consider research as their core functions [Fig. 4], of which 24% of times

<sup>155</sup> Casco, 'Casco Case Study #2: Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)', Annette Krauss, Casco Team, Case Study', <http://cascoprojects.org/casco-case-study-2-site-for-unlearning-art-organization-0> (28/03/2017)

<sup>156</sup> The Showroom, 'Communal knowledge', <http://www.theshowroom.org/programmes/communal-knowledge> (28/03/2017)

<sup>157</sup> G. Raunig, 'Flatness Rules. Instituent Practices and Institutions of the Common in a Flat World', in P. Gidlen, *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2013, pp. 173-174

<sup>158</sup> Ὑλη[matter]HYLE, 'About', <http://hyle.gr/about.html> (28/03/2017)

research involves primarily or only artists such as the artist-run spaces W139<sup>159</sup> and 3 137<sup>160</sup>. Whereas more than 32% involve artists together with academics, activists, and cultural workers.

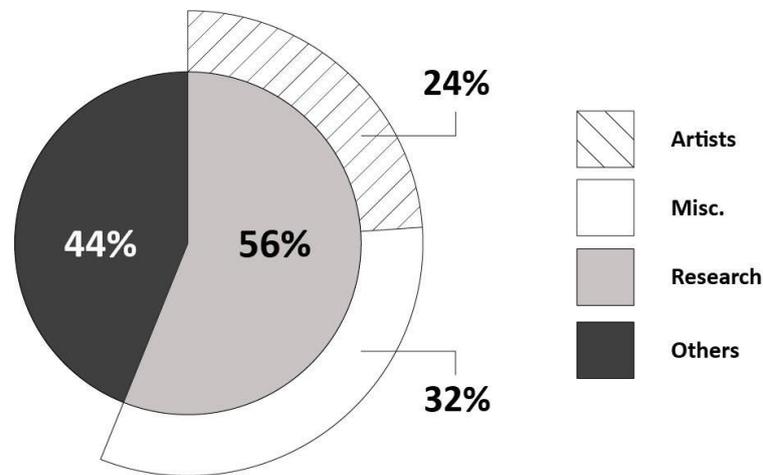


Fig. 4 The graph shows the percentages of cases in which research represents the core function (dark grey). Moreover, on the right it is represented a further division between artists-centered research and that including a variety of professionalism.

The importance of research is closely connected to the need and the importance of experimenting with new ideas, models, and practices expressed by many of these groups. Furthermore, although key figures such as artists, activists, and academics have been detected as main targets, a good number of these experiences are intended to be open and inclusive for all, regardless the professional and academic background. In this respect, a relevant example is *zona sette mon amour* by mare culturale urbano, a project of active research carried out together with citizens and associations with the aim to investigate the socio-economical character of the Zona 7 neighborhood. Zona 7 is one of Milan's largest residential areas and former working-class districts which has currently become a laboratory for urban planning practices and a contested ground for controversial social dynamics.<sup>161</sup> The outcome of the research is a manual that has been conceived not only as a tool for the citizens but also for the invited artists-in-residence of mare, thus reversing the traditionally patronizing relation between the artist and the community.

As a final point, more than 55,3% of these organizations are part of larger and international networks. In this respect, tranzit<sup>162</sup> represents an exception and a

<sup>159</sup> W139, 'About W139', <http://w139.nl/en/about/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>160</sup> 3 137, 'About us', <http://www.3137.gr/en/aboutus> (28/03/2017)

<sup>161</sup> 'zona sette mon amour', mare culturale urbano, <http://maremilano.org/home/zonasettemonamour/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>162</sup> tranzit is a network with a polycentric structure working independently in Austria, , Slovakia, Romania, Hingary, and the Czech Republic. Each local unit is autonomous as concern its program and local activity, and in constanst dialogue and cooperation with the other transit units. See tranzit, 'Mission', <http://www.tranzit.org/en/about/> (28/03/2017)

confirmation to the extent it is a network itself, with branches in five different countries. Each transit has its own peculiarities and its own program, depending on the environment in which it operates and the people involved. In a context like that of the commons, and especially in the case of bottom-up experiences, there are no clearly defined rules and best practices. Therefore, networks are crucial as regards the promotion, exchange, and communality of skills and assets. In this way it becomes easier for organizations to collect and define models and examples in a highly heterogeneous and unsystematic field. The small size and the local scope are balanced by combining with similar national and international experiences that share the same aims and values. In this way, organizations can work together on joint projects and increase in accountability, strength, and resources. This practice has also entered the museum field as shown by MG+MSUM and the MNCARS, who are both part of L'Internationale<sup>163</sup> network together with other four art institutions and a number of artistic and academic partners. Furthermore, networks may have different dimensions depending on the mission they have, and one organization can be part of multiple networks depending on its needs. For example, Cluster<sup>164</sup> is a very small network made of only eight visual art structures that fosters the physical encounter and exchange among all the parties involved, while Trans Europe Halles<sup>165</sup> represents a much larger and structured network whose activities mainly include promotion, counseling, professional training, and two annual international meetings.

### 3.2 Space matters

In the second section of Chapter 2, I've analyzed the relationship between the commons and the city as a privileged site of reproduction. Going from theory to praxis, this tendency is by and large confirmed. More than half of the cases taken into account are physically located within metropolitan conglomerates. Moreover, 70% work with projects dealing with citizenship and the public sphere. Within this framework, art acquires a functional role as it becomes a means by which arrive to a range of outcomes. In the context of economic crisis and fragmented social fabric, Kunsthalle Athena emphasizes art's ability to stimulate the social imaginary but always within the mechanisms and dynamics of an art center.<sup>166</sup> Conversely, *mare cultural urbano* with

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<sup>163</sup> L'Internationale is a confederation of six modern and contemporary art institutions, namely Moderna galerija, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Van Abbemuseum, and SALT. The aim is to create a space for art in the light of non-hierarchical and decentralized internationalism, and on the basis of difference and horizontal exchange. L'Internationale approach is locally grounded but globally connected, working in collaboration with a number of complementary partners and cultural agents. See L'Internationale, <http://www.internationaleonline.org/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>164</sup> Cluster is a network comprising eight visual art organizations, all located in peripheral areas. All these organizations are active in their local context, while also being actively present on an international level by means of exchange and joint projects. See CLUSTER, 'About', <http://www.clusternetwork.eu/read.php?id=4,43> (28/03/2017)

<sup>165</sup> Trans Europe Halles is a Europe-based network of cultural centres initiated by citizens and artists. Established in 1983, currently Trans Europe Halles has gathered together about 90 multidisciplinary cultural centres and organisations. See Trans Europe Halles, 'About us', <http://teh.net/about-us/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>166</sup> Kunsthalle Athena, 'About', <http://www.kunsthalleathena.org/about.php> (accessed 19/02/2017)



the years, many famous artists and curators have lived and worked with Isola Art Center, taking a stand with the citizens' movement and against real estate speculation. Therefore, through these examples it can be identified how processes of privatization and gentrification can actually foster new patterns of participation and empowerment thus corroborating the idea that the commons-enclosures dichotomy actually represents two intertwined socio-political practices.

The connection between this feeling of urgency and the commons is explicitly underlined by a number of cases. Klub MaMa stresses how the spread of the commons as "the mobilizing credo of social struggles"<sup>171</sup> represents a sign and response to the present historic conjuncture in which socially destructive austerity policies, increasing poverty, and shifts of property relations and balance of powers have been contributing to an enduring economic crisis. In the previously mentioned project Park Fiction, instruments coming from the cultural sphere were used within the process of questioning and reshaping democracy, the city, and society. The artistic practice in the public space is used for example to make planning processes more accessible for everyone, or as a facilitator in the process of definition of common goals and desires. Centrum and Kunsthalle Athena subvert this relationship by drawing their inspiration from the modes of action for the commons to self-reflect on the social role of art institutions and art's ability to affect the social imaginary in the context of a weak social fabric from an aesthetic and curatorial perspective.<sup>172</sup> However, MG+MSUM recognizes that for the commons to be more than a mere discursive utopia it is necessary to celebrate, share, and manifest the various forms of producing and managing the commons outside the cycle of expropriation while protecting the right to diversity.<sup>173</sup> Therefore, as stated by Casco, commoning as "a way of doing, relating, and sharing—that works against the idea of privatization, competition, oppression, and alienation; it is a cultural, aesthetic, and ethical principle that points to a politics that interferes with the existing boundaries of public and private."<sup>174</sup>

As a result of the rise of the service and the information economy, and the following de-industrialization process that occurred in the West many former industrial plants have now been cleared of machinery so to be moved to work to more peripheral areas of the world. Over the years, many civic policies have focused on these aimless and abandoned areas of the city trying to valorize and revitalize them by means of culture and innovation thus combining their former vocation for production and technology research with the architectural potential of the factory building. A framework that makes the organizations taken into account particularly sensitive to the phenomenon of creative industries as potential agents of creative destruction.<sup>175</sup> Around 20% of the observed experiences are located in former industrial complexes, while 44.6% are

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<sup>171</sup> Klub MaMa, 'Programi i projekti', <http://www.mi2.hr/en/programi-i-projekti/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>172</sup> Kunsthalle Athena, 'About', <http://www.kunsthalleathena.org/about.php> (28/03/2017)

<sup>173</sup> MG+MSUM, 'Glossary of the Common Knowledge | Commons', <http://www.mg-lj.si/en/events/1751/glossary-commons/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>174</sup> 'We Are the Time Machines: Time and Tools for Commoning', Casco, <https://cascoprojects.org/we-are-the-time-machines-time-and-tools-for-commoning> (28/03/2017)

<sup>175</sup> See chapter 2, paragraph 2.2, pp. 23-24

generally located in areas undergoing strong economic investment. It becomes thus even more important to constantly look for new ways to escape or not contribute to these processes. For example, Vaciador 34 operates in an industrial space and accommodates artistic productions of various kinds. The organization though goes beyond the promotion of a dynamic cultural milieu and the construction of iconic architectures to focus on self-employment and the development of anti-systemic practices. Vaciador 34 works horizontally through assemblies, and aims at empowering people and generating new forms of production and relation away from the cycle of wage labour.<sup>176</sup> Also, it has defined a parallel economic model named as *precio libre* according to which everyone can personally assess and decide one's own contribution or barter, thus eliminating money as a necessary requirement. Another peculiar but interesting example is S.a.L.E. Docks, an independent space for visual arts in Venice located not in an former factory but in an old salt warehouse.<sup>177</sup> The building was occupied in 2007 by a group of artists, activists, and cultural workers who wanted to reclaim a vacant space against ongoing processes of privatization and speculation in the city. Today S.a.L.E. Docks is positioned within the 'art kilometer'<sup>178</sup> and it represents a real alternative to the local artistic scene both in regard to its programming and its mode of production. In this case S.a.L.E. Docks had the ability to read and understand its context and act promptly, however these types of experiences often unintentionally become gentrifying agents themselves since they combine some of the values of current economic production and signal with their presence the forthcoming enclosure of any pre-existing commons.<sup>179</sup>

One last remark as regards to the tension and the complex relationship between commons and space concerns the contingency of space itself. Although very small, a number of the examples taken into account have operated without a physical location as a result of clearing out or relocation. In the case of Isola Art Center this meant a dispersion throughout the district and the survival of the project after eviction, made possible by the close relationship developed with the residents over time.<sup>180</sup> Macao originally engaged in an itinerant struggle of occupations and evictions around pivotal buildings in Milan before settling in its current location<sup>181</sup>. The Museum of Arte Útil, once dismantled, continued its mission via the creation of an association and online archive<sup>182</sup>, and a series of physical meetings in locations related to the project called Broadcasting the archive. Also, Robin Hood Asset Management and Fondo Speculativo di Provvidenza rely on networks of people both on-line and on-site, and have a strong

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<sup>176</sup> Vaciador 34, 'NOSOTRXS', <https://vaciador34.net/index.php?pa=nosotros> (28/03/2017)

<sup>177</sup> S.a.L.E. Docks, 'Who we are', <http://www.saledocks.org/about/> ((28/03/2017)

<sup>178</sup> The art kilometer is the name given to an area of Venice in 2009 following the opening of numerous museums, commercial galleries and foundations, mainly private. See Zambon, M., 'Venezia inaugural il chilometro dell'arte', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 May 2009, [http://www.corriere.it/economia/italie/veneto/notizie/zambon\\_venezia\\_km\\_arte\\_bc13b34a-45e4-11de-8c01-00144f02aabc.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/economia/italie/veneto/notizie/zambon_venezia_km_arte_bc13b34a-45e4-11de-8c01-00144f02aabc.shtml) (28/03/2017)

<sup>179</sup> L. Grace Weber, 'Resisting Enclosure through Creative Commons in Kanaleneiland', *Utrecht Meent Het*, 1, 2015, pp. 22-28

<sup>180</sup> Isola Art Center, 'Storia', <http://isolartcenter.undo.net/index.php?p=1131987010&i=1131988392> (28/03/2017)

<sup>181</sup> Macao, 'History', <http://www.macaomilano.org/spip.php?article166> (28/03/2017)

<sup>182</sup> Asociacion de Arte Útil, <http://www.arte-util.org/> (28/03/2017)

immaterial component. The features of the network, flexibility, and individual empowerment and commitment inherent in the practice of the commons enable these projects to function even when detached from a physical place while maintaining a strong local dimension and a focus for social and spatial dynamics.

In conclusion, a further remark has to be made in relation to the spatial and material dimension of commoning. The coexistence of material elements such as infrastructures and facilities, and intangible assets such as art and social capital converge in the work of these organizations. The categorizations of natural and cultural commons merge in the values and discourse of these groups as they gather together to share their knowledge but also to manage and protect the reality and the places in which they live. The transition from the immaterial to the material, from the natural to the cognitive is thus not an expression nor the result of a linear process and it does not change and affect the premises on which the commons is based. Moreover, when engaging with commons it is not sufficient to only reorganize the issues addressed or the working method used, but it is necessary to rethink the concept of institution as a whole.

### 3.3 A reflection on terminology

Differently from the descriptive and the poststructuralist approaches, critical discourse analysis as conceived by Fairclough considers language-as-discourse as a socially and historically situated practice in dialectical correlation with other aspects of life.<sup>183</sup> In a family, the relationship between parents and children is partly discursively constituted on the basis of pre-existing practices, relationships, and identities. Similarly, “discourse is a form of social practice which both constitutes the social world and is constituted by other social practices”<sup>184</sup> as it mutually shapes and reflects social structures. Therefore, herein I will focus on the language and the terminology used as it contributes to their characterization within society. The most relevant findings are mainly two. Firstly, the ambiguity of the language, and secondly the existence of a shared theoretical framework.

Concerning the former, the vast majority of the cases make use in describing themselves and their work in a fairly vague language. This can be considered as the consequence of an open and flexible methodological approach that cannot be self-limited by means of a too clear-cut language.

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<sup>183</sup> M. Jørgensen and L. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis As Theory and Method*, London, SAGE Publications, 2002, pp. 61-62

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*

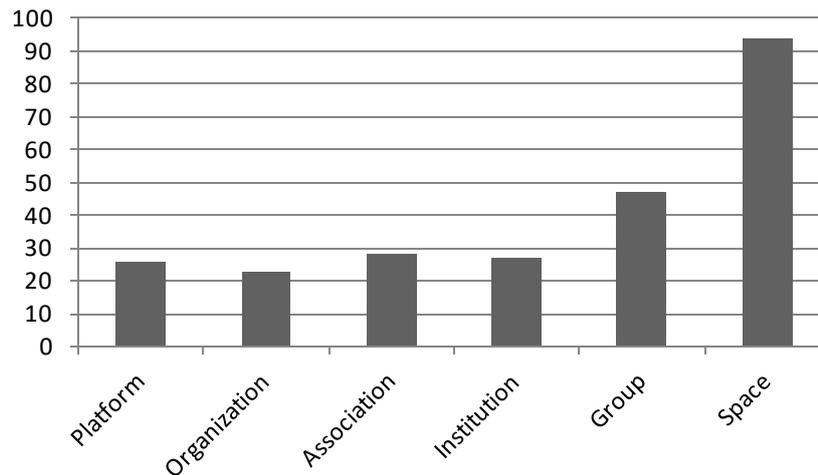


Fig. 6 The graph numerically represents the occurrence of the six words 'platform', 'association', 'organization', 'institution', 'group', and 'space' within of the analyzed texts. The words were then analyzed according to the subject to which they relate.

They also exploit the opportunity of using words with broad meanings [Fig. 6]. More than 30% defines themselves a platform and to a much lesser extent an organization (7%) and an association (10%). The terms 'association' and 'organization', however, are mainly used to indicate external parties or duties, while 'institution' which is widely adopted to indicate with a slightly negative sense precisely those cultural institutions recognized as top-down, hierarchically organized, and economically strong.<sup>185</sup> Two words with twice and three times the percentage are 'group' and 'space', both indistinctly used to indicate different places, elements, and agents. Ambiguity can represent an obstacle in the communication of one's work and mission to the outside, but it can also have a political significance as acknowledged by Thompson. According to the author, we as a culture do not trust anything and the only accepted truth is the unified disbelief of truth itself. Furthermore, he argues that meanings that are too patent and clear can be too easily absorbed and used by the capitalist system.<sup>186</sup> In this sense, the exercise of ambiguity in the public space can gain political relevance because of the very lack of clear intentions. Because of the discomfort ambiguity provokes and the impossibility to easily determine one's intentions, the ambiguous can represent a dynamic alternative to a coercive reality and a way to escape a socially manipulative context. Nonetheless, all these features also make the ambiguous easy to assimilate and sell as it can fit almost any ideology.<sup>187</sup> It is precisely because of the high commerciality of the ambiguous that many political artists nowadays tend to turn to a more didactic approach, proposing through their artistic practice well-argued and coherent messages with the aim to reach a wider audience and turn into an effective weapon.

Besides ambiguity, the terminology adopted is often evocative and tends to outline a shared theoretical framework mainly identified in the rhetoric of the creative

<sup>185</sup> For examples see Appendix B, pp. 96-97

<sup>186</sup> N. Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*, Brooklyn, Melville House Publishing, 2015, pp. 46-47

<sup>187</sup> Thompson, op. cit., p. 51

city and in post-Marxism<sup>188</sup> and Italian Autonomism<sup>189</sup>. However, a critique in this respect may concern the misuse of concepts such as innovation, participation, or community which in some cases keep being repeated without a deeper degree of awareness to point where they become empty signifiers functional to the construction of an atmosphere more than to the definition of a programmatic manifesto. If on the one hand these empty signifiers may provide a hideout, on the other they open a possibility for collective negotiation and re-conceptualization, as for the notion of right to the city<sup>190</sup>. Moreover, in a limited number of cases, like F.A.C.K.<sup>191</sup> and 'Υλη[matter]HYLE<sup>192</sup>, I observed the creation of neologisms and the imaginative juxtaposition of very distant words to convey one's own identity and alterity. For example, in its description F.A.C.K. is primarily defined as an "open mobile interdisciplinary collaborative transient (con)temporary platform"<sup>193</sup>. These adjectives are implemented without a further explanation or characterization of what is means for an artistic organization to be interdisciplinary or transient. The use and combination of these adjectives within the context of F.A.C.K. is mainly aimed at producing a sense of alienation and to open up to a variety of meanings and possibilities beyond the canons of the art sector.

A further observation concerns the two core subjects of the research, namely the commons and the museum. It is interesting to notice that the term 'commons' is overall barely stated, precisely 51 times of which 80% relates to description of specific projects<sup>194</sup>, while the term 'commoning' only 8 times. Moreover, in the case of Casco the word 'commons' often matches with the notion of tooling thus emphasizing the idea that working with the commons does not represent a practice for its own sake but that it

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<sup>188</sup> Post-Marxism is a trend in philosophy and social theory that elaborates on the work of Karl Marx in relation to the current cultural climate. Differently from traditional Marxism that focuses on the priority of class struggle, Post-Marxism aims at highlighting the sexual, racial, and class divisions occurring in modern Western societies. Post-Marxism main exponents are Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. To know more, see S. Sim, *Post-Marxism: An Intellectual History*, London, Routledge, 2000

<sup>189</sup> Italian Autonomism is a set of anti-authoritarian, left-wing political and social movements and theories primarily emerged in Italy in the 1960s on the wave of the riots of the workerist movement in Turin. Despite the many similarities with Post-Marxism, Italian Autonomism rejects political parties while focusing on the power of self-organization outside traditional political and social structures. Accordingly, people should be directly involved in the the decision-making process, thus expanding democracy and freeing the individuals from external political regulations. In this sense, Italian Autonomism aims at defining a practical political alternative to both authoritarian socialism and contemporary representative democracy. Principal theorists as concern Italian Autonomism are Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, and Franco "Bifo" Berardi. To know more, see H. El Kholti, S. Lotringer and C. Marazzi, *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2007

<sup>190</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London, Verso, 2012, pp. xv-xvi

<sup>191</sup> F.A.C.K. is a mobile artistic and collaborative platform founded in 2012 in Cesena (Italy). By means of its practice, F.A.C.K. aims at experimenting with alternative bottom-up organizational and production models in the field of arts and culture, and at questioning the dominant art system and the role of the artist within society. F.A.C.K. is based on self-managements and includes artists, curators, and researchers. See Facebook, 'FACK > Forum di Arte e Cultura Kontemporanea', <https://www.facebook.com/fackfestival/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>192</sup> Started as a virtual platform in 2013, 'Υλη[matter]HYLE established its physical center in Athens in 2015. It is described as a "semipublic, semipersonal space" and its main goal is to bring together art, politics, and sciences under a new undisciplined field of thought. See 'Υλη[matter]HYLE, 'About', <http://hyle.gr/about.html> (28/03/2017)

<sup>193</sup> Facebook, 'FACK > Forum di Arte e Cultura Kontemporanea', <https://www.facebook.com/fackfestival/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>194</sup> For examples, see Appendix B, pp. 98-99

should aspire to a greater and long-lasting end. Therefore, even if within the language the theoretical component appears to be strongly present, it does not necessarily enter the everyday communication, if not when communicating and presenting this way of working and conceiving art, work, and social relationships to the outside. A further observation in regard to the thirteen spaces that have engaged with the commons only on a project-based approach it is that it largely concerns institutionalized locations. This means that actual museum institutions or even commercial galleries such as Tenderpixel<sup>195</sup> and The Showroom<sup>196</sup>, demonstrate on the one hand how the use of the commons actually entered the mainstream, but on the other the willingness to experiment with the commons. It is generally more difficult however to experiment with alternative methods and systems on a larger scale rather than in the limited temporal and spatial dimension of a project, where the influence of external factors is reduced and communication is more immediate.

Finally, it is significant to point out the strategic use of the museum concept. The term museum is hardly present except in the case of actual museums such as MNCARS and MG+MSUM and in respect of three specific situations, namely Macao, MAAM, and Museum of Arte Útil. These three experiences are united in their diversity by the decision to purposely include the word museum in their names with critical and political intentions. First, both Macao and MAAM<sup>197</sup> adopted acronyms as names with the intention to mimic this broad trend in the field of contemporary art museums and challenge the branding process connected to it.<sup>198</sup> With this act while they both distance themselves from the prototype of the museum of contemporary art, they recognize its historical background and the importance and the strategic role it has within society. On the other hand, the Museum of Arte Útil is a project with a different nature and premises. For the duration of four months it was installed in the old Van Abbemuseum building in Eindhoven the Museum of Arte Útil, a meta-museum aimed at testing art's use value and social function. The structure was organized around ten thematic rooms (i.e. *Space Hijack*, *Reforming Capital*, and *Legislative Change*) proposing and dealing with ten different activities and strategies related to the broader concept of *Arte Útil*<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Tenderpixel is a contemporary art gallery in Central London. It mainly deals with projects addressing the creative positions within culture, economy, and politics. Its programme focuses on curated exhibitions and events of emerging artists, as well as research based solo presentations, both in London and abroad. Within the frame of this research, I focus on the research project Spatial Practices and the Urban Commons carried out between April and June 2016. See Tenderpixel, 'Spatial Practices and the Urban Commons', <http://www.tenderpixel.com/exhibitions/urban-commons> (28/03/2017)

<sup>196</sup> The Showroom is a contemporary art space based in London that focuses on collaborative approaches to cultural production and projects that engage with the locality. Moreover, among the various projects carried out by the gallery, here I focused on Communal Knowledge, a programme of collaborative projects between artists and designers, and community groups and organizations from neighbourhood. See The Showroom, 'About', <http://www.theshowroom.org/about> (28/03/2017)

<sup>197</sup> It mainly goes both in the media and in its own communication with its acronym.

<sup>198</sup> Macao, 'History', <http://www.macaomilano.org/spip.php?article166> (28/03/2017)

<sup>199</sup> Tania Bruguera has been teaching and researching the concept of Arte Útil for a long time, also through international residencies and exhibition. The criteria of Arte Útil state that in order to be recognized as such, projects and initiatives should:

(useful art) as outlined by the artist Tania Bruguera, and of which the museum was just one of its various forms. Instead of displaying more traditional artworks, the Museum provided visitors with archives, case-studies, books, and facilities to use according to their personal or collective needs and purposes.<sup>200</sup> Due to the opportunity to employ an already established institution and its facilities and staff, and due to its enclosed temporality, the Museum of Arte Útil had the chance to be a more experimental and structured project, and to actually perform a new model of museum. Therefore, going back to the dichotomy presented by Mouffe, even if the Museum of Arte Útil acknowledged and challenged the museum institution as complicit with capitalism, it did not withdrawal from but engage with it by means of counter-hegemonic practices.

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- 1- Propose new uses for art within society;
  - 2- Challenge the field within which it operates (civic, legislative, pedagogical, scientific, economic, etc), responding to current urgencies;
  - 3- Be implemented and function in real situations;
  - 4- Replace authors with initiators and spectators with users;
  - 5- Have practical, beneficial outcomes for its users;
  - 6- Pursue sustainability whilst adapting to changing conditions;
  - 7- Re-establish aesthetics as a system of transformation.

See Museum of Arte Útil, 'What is Arte Útil', <http://museumarteutil.net/about/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*

## 4. The institution of the commons: two case-studies

So far, the research has been structured on the basis of a recurring tension between theory and practice, which so far has resulted in a dialectical connection with no definite solutions. The commons is neither merely a concept nor just a practice, but it is represented as a socio-political construct deriving from the combination of multiple and contingent elements. In addition to the basic elements outlined in its own definition, it is possible to identify further features and patterns. Besides a widespread feeling of urgency, trends show an inclination for post-industrial environments, a high degree of experimentation, and a preference for bottom-up horizontal organizational structures.<sup>201</sup> Moreover, it is evident that there is a very close connection between art and politics that overcomes the categories of participatory art to rethink the conception of art in itself.<sup>202</sup> Art is considered political not only because of its content but also because of its own nature and its adhesion to a specific symbolic and cultural system. Within this framework, the meaning of an artwork is in continuous negotiation and in open relation with multiple and changing discursive layers and degrees of action and interpretation as other cultural signs. In this sense, an artistic organization can decide to opt for the crystallization and fixation of rigid meanings in the name of the eternal and universal values of art and culture, or the creation of devices that sustain multiple evolving narratives.<sup>203</sup>

However, in order to move beyond an outward analysis concerning one's values and motivations, and analyze the actual implications and the results of such a method, it is necessary to investigate further. In this chapter I am going to focus on two major case-studies that through their work are able to include and reflect on issues and obstacles faced by many others, and which enable us to better evaluate the commons effective feasibility and functionality. The selected case-studies are the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid and the Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove (MAAM) in Rome [Fig. 7]. They were selected as representative of many of the instances previously examined. The MNCARS is a national public museum of Spain and it shows the implications and needs of such a model in the context of a large institution, rigidly and bureaucratically structured. The MAAM is an artistic project located in the suburbs of Rome, and besides questioning its own museum status in open conflict with the institution, it also functions to 'protect' the place in which it is located and of instances external to the art field. The two selected examples are reported separately in the thesis, but there is a specific tension between the two revolving around the name museum itself. While the MNCARS is a state public museum, symbol of the national identity; the MAAM is an illegal art project aimed to protect an housing occupation. Herein, the word museum embodies all its contradictions and social and political potential.

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<sup>201</sup> See for examples chapter 3, paragraph 3.1

<sup>202</sup> See for examples chapter 3, paragraph 3.2

<sup>203</sup> M. Borja-Villiel, '¿Pueden los museos ser críticos?', *Carta. Revista del Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*, n. 1, 2010, p. 1



Fig. 7 Edificio Sabatini, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía © Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (above)  
Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove main entrance (below) © Fabiola Fiocco

#### 4.1 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía: “towards a new institutionalism”<sup>204</sup>

The Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) was founded in 1988 by Royal Decree, with the aim to create a modern and contemporary art museum with an international scope. The Museum was recognized as an autonomous organization depending on the Spanish Ministry of Culture, and in 1992 its Permanent Collection was inaugurated by the Spanish Royal family. It is also registered as a Spanish Property of Cultural Interest and it is considered a national museum. In 2001, a new building was commissioned to the architect Jean Nouvel. The expansion, that increased the area of the museum by more than 60%, opened in 2005. This expansion not only increased the internal capacity of the building to host an expanding collection and a number of activities, but also the district as well by creating a new public square.<sup>205</sup> Additionally, the Museum handles two external exhibition venues, namely Palacio de Velázquez and Palacio de Cristal. In recent years, the Museum’s attendance has been constantly growing. In 2016 the museum was visited by 3.646.598 people, making it the 11<sup>th</sup> most visited museum in the world.<sup>206</sup> Also, it represented an improvement in attendance of 12% with respect to 2015 and of 14,5% with respect to 2013.<sup>207</sup> As for this 2017, the museum has scheduled sixteen temporary exhibitions including *Piedad y terror en Picasso: el camino a Guernica*, a major exhibition organized in conjunction with the celebration of the eightieth anniversary of the artwork Guernica and the twenty-fifth anniversary of its acquisition by the Museum.<sup>208</sup>

The museum is located in the city of Madrid, Spain’s capital city and largest municipality. It is positioned within the Golden Triangle of Art, together with the Museo del Prado and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, and within the informal neighborhood of Lavapiés, a very socio-economically diverse area in a process of rapid gentrification<sup>209</sup>. Madrid is a metropolis with a particular evolution. Between 1979 and 1986, it affirmed itself as an alternative path to democratic consolidation in conflict with the neoliberal model that was being established in the rest of the country. By encouraging active cultural participation, the government tried to foster a feeling of civic commitment and foster individual and collective democratic habits. Nevertheless, Hamilton M. Stapell

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<sup>204</sup> M. Borja-Villiel, ‘Hacia una nueva institucionalidad’, *Carta. Revista del Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*, n. 2, 2011, p. 1

<sup>205</sup> ‘History’, *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*, <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/museum/history> (28/03/2017)

<sup>206</sup> ‘List of the most visited art museums’, *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_most\\_visited\\_art\\_museums#cite\\_note-13](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_visited_art_museums#cite_note-13) (28/03/2017)

<sup>207</sup> Art Newspaper, Visitor Figures 2013: Exhibition and Survey Attendance Survey, Events, Politics and Economics Monthly, U Allemandi & Co Publishing Ltd, vol. 23, n. 256, 2014, [http://www.museum.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/TheArtNewspaper2013\\_ranking.pdf](http://www.museum.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/TheArtNewspaper2013_ranking.pdf) (28/03/2017)

<sup>208</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, ‘El Museo Reina Sofía suma 3.646.598 visitantes en 2016’, [http://www.museoreinasofia.es/sites/default/files/nota\\_visitantes\\_ano\\_2016.pdf](http://www.museoreinasofia.es/sites/default/files/nota_visitantes_ano_2016.pdf) (28/03/2017))

<sup>209</sup> To know more about the gentrification processes occurring in Madrid and Spain, see J. Sequera and M. Janoschka, ‘Gentrification dispositifs in the historic centre of Madrid: a reconsideration of urban governmentality and state-led urban reconfiguration’, in L. Lees, H. B. Shin and E. Lopez-Morales, *Global Gentrifications: Uneven Development and Displacement*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2015, pp. 375-393

argue it still represented a state-centered and elite-driven approach, an intermediate position between forthcoming radical citizen movement and demobilized representative democracy.<sup>210</sup> After years of conservative governments, today Madrid is again in a situation of radical change. The municipal elections of May 2015 have seen the success of *Ahora Madrid*<sup>211</sup>, a new political party arising and from the conjunction and collaboration of people from the autonomous movement of the *indignados*<sup>212</sup> and agonistic issue-based platforms. Practices and processes deduced from these experiences were combined to develop a framework for institutional change. *Ahora Madrid* represents a response to increasing privatization and precarious speculation taking place all over the city, privileging the public over the private and redesigning basic public goods such as transportation and housing programs.<sup>213</sup>

#### 4.1.1 A museum of the commons

With the appointment of Manuel Borja-Villel as the new director of the museum in January 2008, the MNCARS disclosed their intention to evolve from a public institution into one belonging to the sphere of the commons.<sup>214</sup> Borja-Villel had been a well known promoter and representative of the phenomenon of New Institutionalism<sup>215</sup> during his experience as director of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). In his vision concerning the MNCARS it is possible to find a similar tendency towards more discursive and inclusive practices and a focus on the socio-political function of the museum. The motivations are to be found within the Mission itself as despite remaining crucial in the format of the creative industries, the museum as public institution is believed to have lost its privileged position in shaping culture in favor of communications industries. In a context in which the public-private dichotomy has failed to exist, a valid defense and response for the MNCARS is “to rethink the institution in terms of communality”<sup>216</sup>, meaning the dissolution of franchise dynamics and traditional genres and canons in favor of a more plural and rhizomatic approach in which differences and singularities are not neutralized but threaded together.

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<sup>210</sup> H. M. Stapell, *Remaking Madrid: Culture, Politics, and Identity after Franco*, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 182-183

<sup>211</sup> *Ahora Madrid* is an ‘instrumental party without organic internal life’ formed by the citizen platform *Ganemos Madrid* together with the party *Podemos* in order to stand for the election in 2015. Despite not having won the majority of the council seats, it was possible for *Ahora Madrid* to install in the city government thanks to the alliance with the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE).

See B. García Gallo, ‘Carmena, a punto de ser alcaldesa de Madrid junto al PSOE’, *El País*, 25 May 2015, [http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2015/05/25/madrid/1432508579\\_965634.html](http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2015/05/25/madrid/1432508579_965634.html) (28/03/2017)

<sup>212</sup> On 15 May 2011, a spontaneous camp was erected in the Puerta del Sol in Madrid following a major protest taking place in various cities around Spain. The people involved were named *indignados* and spent over a month in the square engaging in debates and experimenting new processes of participation and direct democracy.

<sup>213</sup> S. Gonick, ‘Indignation and inclusion: Activism, difference, and emergent urban politics in postcrash Madrid’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 34, n. 2, 2016, pp. 209–226

<sup>214</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, ‘Mission statement’, <http://www.museorinasofia.es/en/museum/mission-statement> (28/03/2017)

<sup>215</sup> See chapter 2, paragraph 2.3, p. 32

<sup>216</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, loc. cit.

Institutions have to be thought of as confederations of museums that pool and exchange collections, experiences, and narratives. In practice, the definition of an alternative cultural model is intended to go through substantial institutional changes in relation to multiple departments and functions. Concerning the MNCARS the process of transformation is structured around the three elements of the Collection, the creation of an archive of communality, and the formation of a heterogeneous network of partnerships aimed at questioning the museum and producing room for negotiation beyond representation.<sup>217</sup>

To rethink the Collection in the light of the commons means to question institutional and social pre-existing schemes and hierarchies. As argued by Hardt and Negri, Europe all is too often presented as homogeneous and unified thus failing to acknowledge its complex inner geographies.<sup>218</sup> The relational identity of the Collection therefore has to take into account its multiple roots so to create a sense of diversity and inclusion of the 'otherness' and outline multicultural representation.<sup>219</sup> As relations moved from the local to the global conceived in its plurality, the Collection presentation has gone under major changes so as to include and critically address Spain's colonialist past and history within a broader international context. Nevertheless, the Museum's program appears to not detach itself from those of other major art institutions, with a tendency for major solo and group exhibitions. Claire Bishop observes however that even though the museum conventionally presents art as modern in terms of periodization, its system of display reflects a dialectically contemporary approach. With the classification 'dialectically contemporary' the author defines the presentation and inclusion of artworks outside the established institutional settings and artistic circuits, and a shift of focus from conventional artistic media to experiences based on contemplation in order to allow for the representation of other modernities<sup>220</sup>. While remaining organized according to chronological criteria, artworks critically deal with linear progress deriving from modernist museum as for example in Collection 1 named *The Irruption of the 20th Century: Utopias and Conflicts (1900-1945)* in which is addressed the "conflicts between a dominant Modernity, understood as progress, and its multiple discontents, as an ideology under constant challenge both in the social and the political fronts, and the cultural and artistic ones"<sup>221</sup>. On the other hand, temporary exhibitions are conceived as laboratories through which experiment and rethink the overall museum collection policy.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 'Mission statement', <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/museum/mission-statement> (28/03/2017)

<sup>218</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 70

<sup>219</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, loc. cit.

<sup>220</sup> Borja-Villel uses the term modernities in its plural form to indicate an art history that no longer exclusively promotes Western art and its avant-garde originals to the detriment of what is conceived as "its peripheral derivatives" thus ignoring the relevance and value of these artworks beyond their own context. See Bishop and D. Perjovschi, *Radical museology: Or, What's 'contemporary' in museums of contemporary art?*, London, Koenig, 2014, p. 43

<sup>221</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 'Collection 1. The Irruption of the 20th Century: Utopias and Conflicts (1900-1945)', <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/collection-1> (28/03/2017)

<sup>222</sup> Bishop and Perjovschi, op. cit, pp. 38-41

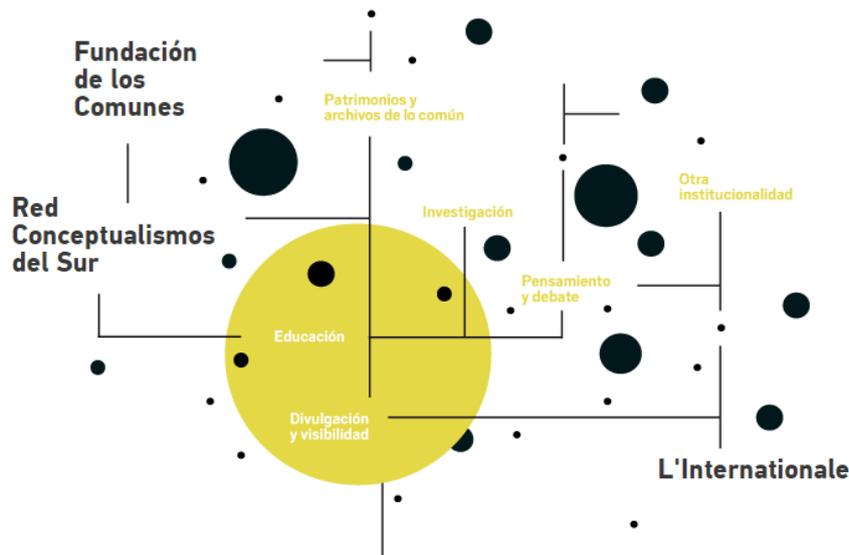


Fig. 8 Museo en red map. © Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia

The archive can be considered a recurring *topos* in contemporary artistic practice, characterizing a variety of socially engaged art projects of the late twentieth century. By means of the archive of the commons, the Museum rejects its role as the exclusive owner of memory in favor of a mutual and shared approach, to which members of various communities collect and preserve what they consider to be significant.<sup>223</sup> Within this framework, the museum function becomes making data available and accessible to the publics thus fostering negotiation and discussion around its content and meaning. Bishop highlights how in order for the Museum to become an archive of the commons, artworks have to acquire a documentary status. According to the author, this has two major implications. Firstly, it increases accessibility. Secondly, it challenges and escapes art's scarcity-based economic paradigm that allows artworks' value to grow exponentially.<sup>224</sup> Moreover, for the MNCARS the archive represented the main points of entry as regards to this re-conceptualization of the museum. In this sense it is one of the main projects represented by the *Archives of the commons*, a seminar organized and led in collaboration with Fundación de los Comunes and Red de Conceptualismos del Sur. The aim to reflect on issues of social, cultural, and political memory and on the new political rights and characteristics of the democratic sphere.<sup>225</sup>

Finally, the Museum engages with a range of political and cultural agents and networks [Fig. 8] who are recognized as peers in the process of allocating resources and designating the institution objectives.<sup>226</sup> Through these networks it is possible to

<sup>223</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 'Mission statement', <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/museum/mission-statement> (28/03/2017)

<sup>224</sup> Bishop and D. Perjovschi, *Radical museology: Or, What's 'contemporary' in museums of contemporary art?*, London, Koenig, 2014, p. 44

<sup>225</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 'Archives of the commons', <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/activities/common-archives> (28/03/2017)

<sup>226</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 'Mission statement', <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/museum/mission-statement> (28/03/2017)

experiment and shape alternative legal forms and structures suitable for the reproduction of the commons outside the mainstream sphere. An example in this sense is the experience with *Archivo CADA*<sup>227</sup>, whose realization was promoted by the Museum in collaboration with Red Conceptualismos del Sur. According to a respondent, “many museums were chasing the work of CADA, many museums were involved and they wanted to purchase, offer a big amount of money for these documents. Then, the MNCARS, that was working with Red de Conceptualismos del Sur, instead of negotiating the acquisition of the archive as other museums were doing, engaged in a conversation with the groups involved to achieve a way of having and not having the CADA Archive at the same time. The archive was kept inside the museum according to a shared-stewardship agreement, and it had to travel compulsory to Santiago de Chile during the year, and the important thing is that the Museum did not purchase the archive but supported its digitalization so to make it public and accessible from everywhere.”<sup>228</sup>

Therefore, even if the display activities still appear as the most visible and symbolic part of the museum program, they are part of a larger system aimed at addressing the authority and the agency of the art institution. As Bishop points out, on the basis of a triangular diagrams depicting the dynamics underpinning the modern, the postmodern, and the contemporary museum [Fig. 9], the MNCARS model of the museum of the commons distances itself both from the modern narrative of the white cube (ie. MoMA) and the postmodern values of marketing and financially quantifiable audiences (ie. Centre Pompidou).<sup>229</sup> Instead, Borja-Villel has established a holistic approach by which to re-conceive the museum institution linking together all the different museum functions in the name of radical education<sup>230</sup> and “non-authoritarian and non-vertical forms of cultural action”<sup>231</sup>. Comparing the MNCARS with the institution of the commons as outlined by Raunig<sup>232</sup>, parallels can be drawn with regard to the deconstruction of the traditional artistic canons and a unbiased relationship with the publics. On the contrary, as determined from the interviews, the institutional rigid organizational structure remains largely unaffected concerning modes of production and working relations.

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<sup>227</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, ‘Archivo Cada’, <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/biblioteca-centro-documentacion/archivo-de-archivos/archivo-cada> (28/03/2017)

<sup>228</sup> Comment extrapolated from an interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>229</sup> C. Bishop and D. Perjovschi, *Radical museology: Or, What's 'contemporary' in museums of contemporary art?*, London, Koenig, 2014, pp. 42-43

<sup>230</sup> Radical education is defined by Bishop as a new approach to art as a relational object whose main aim should be that of physically, psychologically, socially, and political liberating its users. See <sup>230</sup> Bishop and Perjovschi, op. cit., p. 43

<sup>231</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, ‘Mission statement’, <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/museum/mission-statement> (28/03/2017)

<sup>232</sup> See chapter 2, paragraph 2.3, pp. 33-34

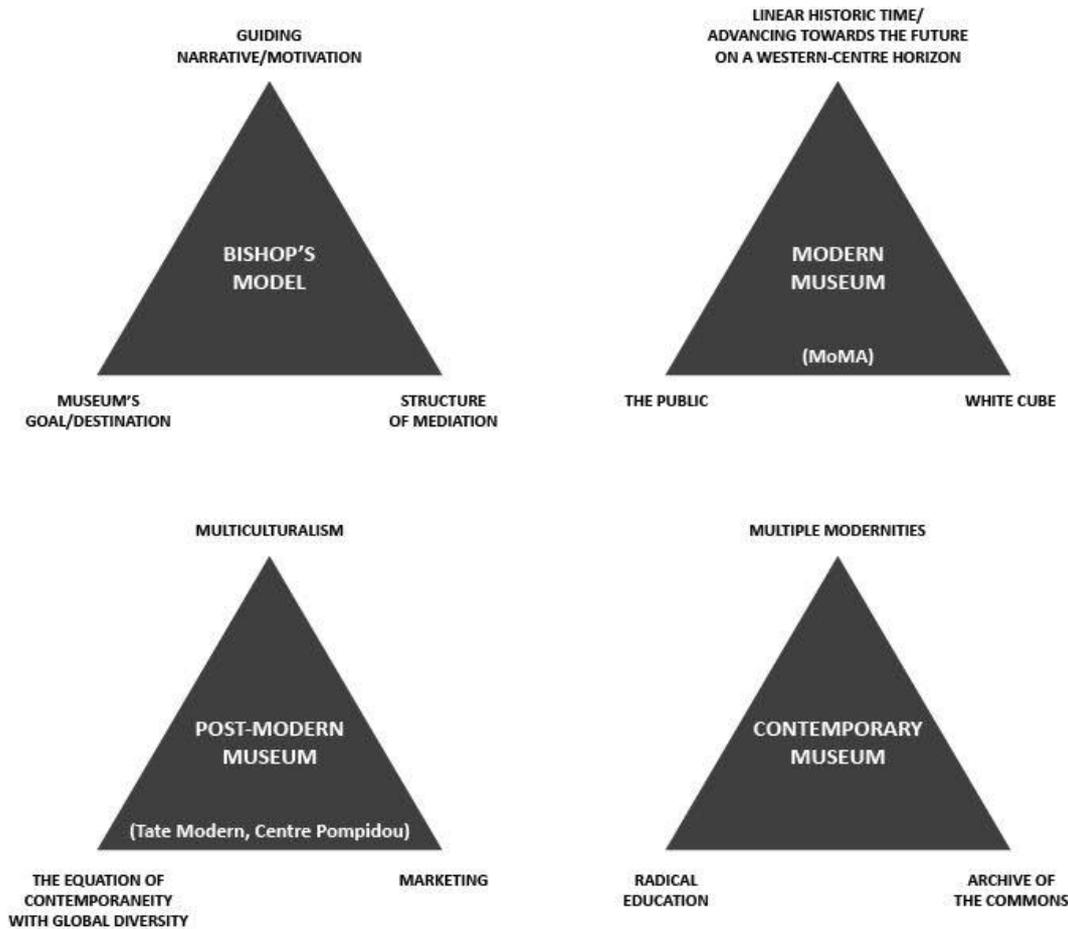


Fig. 9 Graphical representation of the model presented in *Radical Museology* by Claire Bishop, which differentiates between modern museum, post-modern museum and the contemporary museum as understood by the author.

#### 4.1.2 A museum on the border

The picture that emerges from the interviews with the museum employees<sup>233</sup> highlights the degree of complexity of bringing such a broad concept as that of the commons to an institution with a pre-existing structure and history. The first major remark is that none of the respondents defines or acknowledges the MNCARS as a museum of the commons when directly asked.<sup>234</sup> Two respondents plainly deny this recognition arguing that in the practice the Museum is not yet a museum of the commons despite the efforts in this direction, while others prefer to address specific projects that exemplify the will to experiment and engage with the commons but without taking a clear stand. I will discuss and reflect further on this issue in the conclusion. However, I do feel that further research as concern this specific standpoint is needed in order to properly evaluate and understand any related motivations and

<sup>233</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>234</sup> See Appendix C

implications. Therefore, this establishes the frame from which to read the following findings.

Overall, responses reveal a sort of ‘critical agreement’ concerning most of the aspects of the Museum activity. I deliberately use the term ‘critical agreement’ because despite agreeing on many issues on the basis of their working experience, respondents demonstrate a high degree of (self-)criticism when reflecting on and addressing their context. Nevertheless, this is mainly true regarding the external relations of the museum. Concerning the museum organizational structure and inner social and working dynamics, answers are conflictual. The respondents generally agree on the meaningful role of the museum institution, especially “in an economic and political context in which representative democracy seems to have failed and information is being enclosed as a powerful and lucrative good.”<sup>235</sup> The urgency of the real, as described, corresponds to the urgency presented in the literature review and at the foundation of many of the cases analyzed in the previous chapter.

Furthermore, the contrast between the inside and the outside of the institution is also one of the detected issues. One of the respondents actually questions this idea according to which the museum is a closed environment in which the outside is allowed to enter and look at its representation. The separation is considered an historical construct that has lost its legitimacy and significance in the current environment. Therefore, he thinks that the barriers between the museum and the publics should be overcome in order to create a museum that effectively influences and is influenced by society.<sup>236</sup> In this respect, he also affirms that the MNCARS is actually a privileged site as it can be considered a borderline museum because of its scope and capacity. The Museum is central insofar as it is a public institution and a national museum with an international scope and a great number of visitors. However, it is not comparable to major institutions such as the MoMA or the Guggenheim in regard to its financial assets and the authority it may have in the industry. Similarly, Madrid is seen as a more suburban city compared to many other international capitals, meaning that it is perceived to have a weaker political influence and a more marginal position compared to European political and economic power centers. Therefore, the respondent considers the MNCARS a strategic institution as it can play with its own position by being simultaneously in the center and the periphery, and both outside and inside its own field.

Despite its strategic position, the MNCARS remains a public institution of national relevance. This is felt by all the respondents as a major limitation to the extent that every potential change or accomplishment has to align and respect a number of bureaucratic guidelines thus making the museum a slow and overly complex institution.<sup>237</sup> Moreover, in 2012 the Fundación Museo Reina Sofía was founded with the aim to promote a network of artistic and academic partnerships, to foster and encourage society’s participation in the Museum, and to improve the Museum’s management

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<sup>235</sup> Comment extrapolated from an interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>236</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>237</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

system.<sup>238</sup> According to one of the interviewees<sup>239</sup>, while the Foundation has taken over many of the Museum's duties, the Foundation finds itself having to deal more and more with paper work. Such a high degree of bureaucracy contrasts with the flexibility required for an institution that aspires to be open to external contamination and influences, and who wants to prove itself by working together and balancing different groups and stakes. The holistic approach and the related need for transdisciplinarity identified as foundational by both the Director and the respondents thus do not coincide with the rigidity of the organizational structure.

#### 4.1.3 The issues of horizontality and transdisciplinarity

An additional concern, that has been expressed by multiple respondents, is that the museum staff is mainly hired on the basis of public exams for state level employment or by relocating civil servants within the public sector. Despite ensuring transparency with regard to the selection and placement process, this meant that people who work inside the Museum are not always selected on the premises of their role or background but according to higher civic criteria. For this reason it becomes even more difficult to ensure a good level of internal communication and to keep all employees on a same page. In order for the Museum to become more horizontal and democratic, it has to deal with and address its own institutional context and assets so to effectively respect and include all the expectations of such a diverse staff. As highlighted by one of the respondents, "it is unrealistic for an institution to aspire to full horizontality."<sup>240</sup> Rather, it is necessary to assess one's options, and in this sense responses seem to agree that a predilection for a mosaic structure based on team-work and inclusion is a more valuable and realistic resolution, and that this should be considered as the cornerstone for an effective museum of the commons.

Similarly, all the respondents agree that it is not always possible for the Museum to guarantee also a high degree of transdisciplinarity. It is however necessary to aspire to as much permeability as possible both between departments, functions, and within its own program. Employees should be able to access information and communicate more easily, and to choose their degree of involvement within the decision-making process. Moreover, while for some such changes are already slowly taking place within the institution organogram, according to one respondent from the Education department the ideas and the openness the Museum tries to communicate to the outside do not correspond to current inner working environment, wherein different professional figures have different levels of awareness and power.<sup>241</sup> Whereas one of the curators<sup>242</sup> emphasizes how among the objectives pursued by the Museum there is the ambition to produce new protocols and behaviors as new contracts that regulate working relations

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<sup>238</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 'The Foundation', <http://www.museorainasofia.es/en/museum/fundacion> (28/03/2017)

<sup>239</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>240</sup> Comment extrapolated from an interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>241</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>242</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

more fairly. The aforementioned respondent challenges this approach stressing how power relations within the institution are still tied up in traditional hierarchies.<sup>243</sup> Furthermore, she expresses the need to re-name some of the roles in the institution in order to redistribute power through the symbolic value of language. In this sense the curator becomes crucial, perceived by more than one interviewees as a privileged professional figure.<sup>244</sup>

#### 4.1.4 The museum and its partners

The public museum can be understood as a “golden prison”<sup>245</sup> as stated by a respondent<sup>246</sup>. Despite the ongoing, monitoring it still offers a privileged space for social and artistic creation and experimentation. In this sense, it is significant to address the collaboration between the MNCARS and a variety of groups. While other respondents do not make a clear distinction between the publics and these groups by considering the two categories intertwined, two respondents assess these collaborations as an important aspect of the Museum work but which at the same time presents a number of flaws. Working with groups and in networks in fact is considered a necessary and extremely rewarding experience both for those involved and for the Museum program as a whole. Moreover, according to a respondent, in order to define a more equal relationship between the museum and the groups, the latter are not always put under contract by the institution, “working agreements between the museum and the groups are drafted and signed by both sides together with the intention to establish not a one-way, but a two-way obligation between peers.”<sup>247</sup> Nevertheless, these groups have completely opposite logics and timeframes in comparison to institutional ones because of their mission, size, and composition. In this regard, neither of the two respondents during the interview distinguishes between different types of groups. Their remarks therefore refer to the experience in its entirety and not to specific cases. According to one respondent, establishing and maintaining long-term relationships requires a considerable amount of time and human resources. Also, groups are often unstable in regard to their organization and working methods. These reasons make it difficult for the museum to find and account for enough resources and to develop these connections beyond the short-term. The relationship thus becomes unsustainable and mainly project-driven.<sup>248</sup> Furthermore, as was previously pointed out time management and self-exploitation are key features when establishing an institution of the commons, and even then the rigidity and structure of the institutional schedule often clashes with the fluidity of these organizations. As pointed out by another respondent “not everyone has enough time to engage in similar processes, especially as regards to the groups. While on the side of the museum there may be someone explicitly assigned to this task” - although

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<sup>243</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>244</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>245</sup> Comment extrapolated from an interview with a MNCARS partner conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>246</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

this has proved to not always be true nor effective - “groups are generally made up of volunteers.”<sup>249</sup> According to his argument not everyone has the ability and the opportunity to participate and make themselves heard. The critique in this sense is that the museum “seems to foster the creation of lobbies more than meaningful and sustainable networks.”<sup>250</sup> Therefore, the problem according to the respondent is not only a matter of time but also of representation.

Within this framework, a specific category that needs to be addressed separately is the art sector as a whole. With only one highly favorable opinion, the majority of those interviewed agree in assessing the reaction from artists and cultural professionals as skeptical and reluctant not only in relation to the fruition of their work, but especially with regard to the notions of authorship and ownership. As outlined more thoroughly by one of the respondents, radical ideas concerning alternative artistic and cultural practices have been circulating for a long time and with highly positive feedback within the art system. However, in the practice there persists a very low degree of autonomy and a strong feeling of corporate guilt and fear. According to him, the art sector is still mainly characterized by a strong tendency towards careerism, promoting the values of individualism, subordination, and “feudal obscurity”<sup>251</sup>. Nevertheless, he argues this should not prevent a process of reflection and improvement since despite its negative structural condition, the museum is a place for dialogue and confrontation, and the stakes are too high to overlook the current demand for change.<sup>252</sup>

#### 4.1.5 The museum and its publics

Both the agents from the field and the groups working with the Museum can be enclosed in the category of the publics. However, a different evaluation has to be made with regard to the relationship between the institution and its publics as a whole. First, it should be noted that there has been no evaluation plan concerning the perception of visitors as regards the new direction taken by the MNCARS and that there has not been any information campaign about it. Consequently, responses primarily touch on two points, namely how being a museum of the commons affects the Museum relationship with its publics and whether and how they actually perceive the change. Concerning the former, the importance of testing and translating an idea and a methodology into everyday practice has been stressed by all of the respondents. It is through practice that you can assess the impact and feedback of new systems and protocols. For this reason, one of the respondents suggests that it is important to focus on establishing relationships that go beyond the single visit by means of debates, events, and mediation activities.<sup>253</sup> Moreover, she argues that the term mediation acquires significant implications when understood as a legal term with a remedial and an educational role.

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<sup>249</sup> Comment extrapolated from an interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>250</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> Comment extrapolated from an interview with a MNCARS partner conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>252</sup> Interview with a MNCARS partner conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>253</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Within museum practice the term mediation is often believed to have a patronizing connotation, thus making it necessary to reactivate the notion in a more political sense when questioning values such as the universality and the authority of the museum itself.<sup>254</sup> She also relates to the concept of the commons itself which has been embraced in the museum context in its antagonist connotation in order to foster improved critical thinking and commitment. The interviewee therefore concludes that both terms must be analyzed and questioned, and then adds that the potential of the commons is precisely in its being “an arrow that points at something that cannot be reached but that keeps pushing towards it”<sup>255</sup>. Furthermore, a more interdisciplinary approach should be pursued in the program as much as in the idea that the museum has of its users. Therefore, on the one hand it becomes crucial to exceed and overcome canons and the to break the boundaries between the various activities and between high and low culture. On the other, it is necessary to go beyond targets when looking at visitors. Two examples in this sense presented by one interviewee<sup>256</sup> concern a dance project within the museum Galleries that occurred in December 2016, and the joint work of staff from the archive and the library for the project *Documentos*<sup>257</sup>.

The second point concerns whether and how visitors perceive the change. On the one hand according to one interviewee the change would be too slow and circumscribed in order to be actually perceived outside the circle of employees and collaborators of the Museum.<sup>258</sup> On the other hand, another respondent argues that although the change has affected the program and the collection in a very subtle way, the publics’ response is slower but by and large positive. However, he highlights that the response is not a acknowledgment of the Museum transition on a theoretical level but an unconscious, less analytical reaction<sup>259</sup>. As supported by a third respondent the idea of becoming a museum of the commons can be considered more a museological concept and an institutional and theoretical tool that functions for the research and work of museum employees<sup>260</sup>. Furthermore, she emphasizes that the intention and the vision of the Museum often does not take into account the pre-existing expectations and demands of visitors. She reports that according to an evaluation concerning the guided tours, it resulted that people expect to receive and listen to information from trained professionals rather than having to talk and share their own ideas, and when this does not happen the museum experience can become very frustrating.<sup>261</sup> Therefore, participation as much as collective work should not be looked at as universal panaceæ, and a museum should also consider the preparation and approach of its different publics and how to react and behave when a given set of expectations are not met or visitors end up feeling overwhelmed. Finally, she also argues that a further obstacle encountered

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<sup>254</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>255</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>257</sup> Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, ‘Documentos 2. Zines of the Zone’,

<http://www.museorainasofia.es/actividades/zines-zone> (accessed 02/03/2017)

<sup>258</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>259</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>260</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>261</sup> *ibid.*

within everyday practice is the museum building itself. The interiors of both the original palace that the new Nouvel building are in fact considered unsuitable for activities other than the exhibition. Basic infrastructure is felt to be lacking. For example a larger space where people can gather without causing obstruction or an adequate number of chairs and benches where people can sit and discuss in larger groups.<sup>262</sup> In the same way contemporary art museums adapt to accommodate increasingly large installations or seek a greater visual and symbolic impact relying on iconic structures, the museum of the commons should be a flexible space able to adapt and respond to the needs of the people and its surroundings.

#### 4.1.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, all the interviews start with a positive opinion as regards the museum institution as a place of creation and negotiation of subjectivities and meanings. Comparing this institution with the organizations previously taken into account in Chapter 3, MNCARS is both larger in size and has a higher attendance. Its organizational and management structures follow that of any public institution, being thus shaped and managed according to state regulations and bureaucratic procedures. The change in this case starts from the inside of the museum, from its contents and from a reflection regarding the context in which it is located. While not using a highly complex language, the communication remains especially vague with respect to the concrete actions and objectives of the institution, both from the inside and the outside. In general, all respondents have a very critical approach concerning themselves and their work and believe that while pointing in the right direction, the change has not been big enough yet. It still has an elitist and like-minded approach. In this sense it is interesting to remark that evaluations change depending on the personal professional experience depicting a very top-down structure. The theoretical and political purity desired by some activists, artists, curators, and other professionals clashes with a far more complex reality in which according to one respondent "it is often required to be politically impure in order to reach wider publics."<sup>263</sup> The implementation of the commons within the art and the academy work at a faster pace than that of an institution like the MNCARS. Also, the potential of the commons cannot be adequately exploited without fostering and nurturing a strong sense of shared trust among the different internal and external stakeholders of the museum. Therefore, while agreeing and supporting the Museum in the definition of a museum of the commons as a genuine and relevant alternative in the current political context, it is not really perceived by its employees as ready to re-conceptualize itself.

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<sup>262</sup> Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

<sup>263</sup> Comment extrapolated from an interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

## 4.2 Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove (MAAM): "LA LUNA AL POPOLO"<sup>264</sup>

The Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove (MAAM) was founded in 2012 in an occupied former sausage factory in Rome. Its name that literally translates into Museum of the Other and the Elsewhere points out three key features of the project. First, the name 'Museum' is used with precise theoretical and political purposes as will be explained later. The term 'Other' points out how everyone in the Museum as well as in society is in a position of alterity in respect of someone else. Finally, the term 'Elsewhere' is a reference to Space Metropoliz, MAAM's prequel, whose stated goal was that to reach the moon conceived as the ultimate utopia and the last true commons, and therefore it refers to MAAM's ambition to bring that utopist elsewhere back on Earth. MAAM has four main objectives. The first is to create a barricade of art with which to protect the inhabitants of Metropoliz. The second is to avoid the enclave effect by means of the Museum initiatives. Therefore the Museum opens its doors to everyone and allows people to live as well as visit the space together with the people who live there. The third objective is to propose and experiment with a different museological model in parallel to a new housing model informed by the pervasive presence of the art. The final objective of MAAM is creating a choral work of art, that is a "super-object"<sup>265</sup>. In 2009, Blocchi Precari Metropolitani<sup>266</sup> occupied the factory together with Popica Onlus, a non-profit organization that deals with the education of Romani children, and a group of people in need.<sup>267</sup> This new village was named the "mestizo city of Metropoliz"<sup>268</sup>, a



Fig. 10 *Big Rocket*, Space Metropoliz, 2011  
© MAAM

<sup>264</sup> "LA LUNA AL POPOLO (The moon to the people)" is the message recited by the work *Scritta Politica* realized in 2011 by Santino Drago for the MAAM and it recalls the core idea of the project Space Metropoliz which then evolved into the Museum.

<sup>265</sup> G. de Finis, 'Il primo museo abitato del pianeta terra della luna', in G. de Finis (ed.), *FORZA TUTT\*. La barricata dell'arte*, Roma, Bordeaux Edizioni, 2015, pp. 8-9

<sup>266</sup> *Blocchi Precari Metropolitani* (Precarious Metropolitan Blocks) is an organization born in Rome in 2007 with the aim to assert and defend the right to housing. It is also part of a wider national network named *Abitare nella Crisi* (Living in crisis). The notion of the right to housing refers to the right for an adequate and fair housing and shelter. It has been ratified in many national and international constitutions, and it is acknowledged as an international human rights instrument. One example is Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whereby the right to housing is recognized as part of the right to an adequate standard of living, which also includes food, medical care, and necessary social services. To know more about the right of housing in Europe, see B. Edgar, J. Doherty and H. Meert, *Access to housing: homelessness and vulnerability in Europe*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2002

<sup>267</sup> Space Metropoliz, 'Il Metropoliz', <http://www.spacemetropoliz.com/film/metropoliz/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>268</sup> Metropoliz. Mestizo autonomous zone, <https://metropoliz.noblogs.org/> (28/03/2017)

particularly significant name considering the context. In 2011, Giorgio de Finis and Fabrizio Boni proposed to the inhabitants to set up a cinematographic and artistic worksite so to create the documentary film *Space Metropoliz*. This was not only a collective art installation and anthropological research project, but also an experiment in participatory planning and regeneration.<sup>269</sup> The plot of the documentary revolves around the project of the inhabitants to collectively construct the *Big Rocket*, a sky missile to finally get to the moon. The moon is considered to be the ultimate existing commons, and also a symbol of the conquest of the impossible.<sup>270</sup> The documentary voluntarily uses a utopian target and uplifting tones to frame the stories and ambitions of Metropoliz inhabitants and it becomes a tool for aggregation and transformation, while contributing to the collective socio-environmental regeneration of the area. This first project enabled the two authors to come into contact with the inhabitants of Metropoliz and its daily reality. As the shoot progressed, many artists decided to get involved as well by creating site-specific works like *L'hotel sur la lune* by Gian Maria Tosatti, a large telescope made of oil drums realized together with the inhabitants, and *Uscita* by Hogue, a 30m tall new urban landmark. All these works together with Metropoliz collective artwork the *Big Rocket* gave rise to what it is now considered MAAM's permanent collection. As a result of this experience, in 2012 the MAAM was established. In this regard, it is important to stress that the suggestion to continue the collaboration between Metropoliz and the two authors came from the inhabitants of Metropoliz themselves, and that it was only later embraced by de Finis who then became the curator of the project. Therefore, through active initiative and participation, and mutual understanding trust built over time. The project that to some extent started as top-down managed to bring into being a new bottom-up experience. Today in the MAAM live more than 200 people together with more than 400 artworks. The Museum organization is based on a weekly assembly that includes all the participants together with inhabitants and activists, who discuss the programming, any political activity, and other practical, legal, and managerial aspects. Originally the Museum opened only during solstices and equinoxes, in which occasion the new works created during the season were introduced. Currently, it is open every Saturday for anyone to visit while on other day visits can be arranged by appointment so to maintain a balance between the museum and the residential side.

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<sup>269</sup> Space Metropoliz, 'Il Progetto', <http://www.spacemetropoliz.com/film/metropoliz/> (accessed 04/03/2017)

<sup>270</sup> Formally known as the *Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies*, the *Outer Space Treaty* forms the basis of international space law. According to the Treaty, the moon is a place where any form of ownership and private property as well as any type of weapon are banned. Promoted by the Governments of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America, it became law on 10 October 1967 and was later ratified by China in 1971. Up to February 2017, there are 104 States Parties and 89 Signatory State. See United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, 'Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies', [http://disarmament.un.org/treaties/t/outer\\_space](http://disarmament.un.org/treaties/t/outer_space) (accessed 04/03/2017)

Before delving into the analysis of the Museum theoretical background and actual practice, it is necessary to consider the socio-political context in which it operates. The former factory is in the eastern suburbs of Rome, namely Tor Sapienza.<sup>271</sup> In the neighborhood are located three centers hosting political refugees, residences assigned to emergency social housing, three apartment blocks occupied by squatters, a Romani camp<sup>272</sup> and a mosque.<sup>273</sup> This not only creates an environment characterized by a high degree of social and religious diversity, but also by multiple situations of emergency and discomfort that impact upon the daily lives of all the inhabitants. In 2014, Tor Sapienza hit the headlines due to a number of racist episodes against immigrants living in the area that resulted in arsons and violence, and which often required the intervention of the police.<sup>274</sup> In three years there has been no concrete action by the municipalities to improve the area or to bridge the various claims. At the time of writing this thesis, minor demonstrations continue to occur against refugees hosted in the area and in the camp.<sup>275</sup> This case is emblematic of a situation shared by many of the other City's suburban neighborhoods, and this is considered to be the results of various factors, among which the two key ones are rampant urban sprawl<sup>276</sup> and Rome's political instability. On 2 December 2014, as a result of the operation Mondo di Mezzo, around forty people were accused among others of Mafia association, extortion, and bribery. In June 2015, another forty-four people, mostly former managers and Cabinet members and advisers, were arrested as part of the same investigation. Although the investigation concerned events that occurred in 2008 and people mainly related to previous city councils, as a consequence of the inquiry the Opposition demanded the resignation of the mayor Ignazio Marino and the dissolution of the city government, which occurred on 30 October 2015. After a period of compulsory administration, in June 2016 the new city

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<sup>271</sup> The following description of Rome socio-political context can be looked at as a highly simplified report of the structural and historical problems of the city and its suburbs, which are far more complex and old. However, within the framework of this research the argument will not be further deepened as the overview is considered only as functional to a better contextualization of MAAM character and work.

<sup>272</sup> Italy is the only country in Europe where Romani camps have been created by the authorities to solve the housing crisis of the Romani citizens on the basis of the common prejudice that Romani people like to live in the camps because of their nomadic history, which has been widely demonstrated as groundless. In Italy, four out of five Romani (around 130 thousand people) live in normal houses, work, and live a fully integrated life. See 'I rom rubano i bambini e gli altri stereotipi sulla minoranza più discriminata d'Europa', *Internazionale*, 29 May 2015, <http://www.internazionale.it/notizie/2015/05/29/rom-rubano-bambini-stereotipi> (28/03/2017)

<sup>273</sup> According to a study by the Pew Research Center, 85% of Italians have unfavorable opinions as concern the Romani living in the country, while 63% have unfavorable opinions regarding Muslims minorities. In both cases, Italy ranks as European most intolerant country. PewResearchCenter, 'Chapter 4. Views of Roma, Muslims, Jews', <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/05/12/chapter-4-views-of-roma-muslims-jews/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>274</sup> R. Frignani, 'Tor Sapienza: auto e cassonetti in fiamme, protesta anti-immigrati', *Corriere della Sera*, 11 November 2014, [http://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/14\\_novembre\\_11/tor-sapienza-nuova-protesta-anti-immigrati-basta-crimini-f19f71bc-69dc-11e4-96be-d4ee9121ff4d.shtml](http://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/14_novembre_11/tor-sapienza-nuova-protesta-anti-immigrati-basta-crimini-f19f71bc-69dc-11e4-96be-d4ee9121ff4d.shtml) (28/03/2017)

<sup>275</sup> 'Roma, nuovo corteo a Tor Sapienza "contro campi nomadi e clandestini"', *Repubblica.it*, 18 February 2017, [http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/02/18/news/roma\\_nuovo\\_corteo\\_a\\_tor\\_sapienza\\_contro\\_campi\\_nomadi\\_e\\_clandestini\\_-158641053/](http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/02/18/news/roma_nuovo_corteo_a_tor_sapienza_contro_campi_nomadi_e_clandestini_-158641053/) (28/03/2017)

<sup>276</sup> Here the term urban sprawl is used to define the uncontrolled spatial growth of cities resulting from a growing population, rising incomes, and lowering commuting costs. Therefore, despite acknowledging that cities have to grow in order to accommodate an expanding population, the claim too often it occurs on the basis of financial speculation and lacking of adequate public policies. See J. K., Brueckner, 'Urban sprawl: diagnosis and remedies', *International Regional Science Review*, vol. 23, n. 2, pp. 160–171, 2000

council is elected. Yet, the new mayor immediately came across multiple issues and legal scandals.<sup>277</sup> Within the framework of this research, the scandals and legal procedures are relevant because they highlight how complex and unstable the urban and political governance of Rome is. The City is often considered a testing ground of National government policies, rather than a city with its own economic and social needs. This hinders the development of inclusive practices and the definition of adequate social policies in the suburbs that would enable them to cope with their own highly complex and sometimes explosive situations. In this sense it is significant to report and reflect on the words used by curator of the MAAM, according to whom Rome is governed by means of "strategy disguised as calamity", meaning the use of disaffection as a management and control tool. By weakening the physical and mental endurance of its people, de Finis believes we as society are reduced to a crowd of depressed and angry individuals, and above all we become unable to act as a social body. The individual is treated as a resident and not as a citizen, and as a result it becomes increasingly difficult to activate dissent.<sup>278</sup>

#### 4.2.1 A legal recognition for the MAAM?

Despite being included among the city tourist attractions on the official website<sup>279</sup> of the municipality of Rome, the Museum has never been officially regulated by the government thus remaining an illegal occupation. Since the date of the occupation in 2009 there have been several attempts to evict MAAM which culminated in a trial against Metropoliz. This affects not only the inhabitants but also the artists who have donated their works. Even in these cases art has become part of the protest by means of auteur posters and flyers.<sup>280</sup> An outcome, as pointed out by de Finis, has required a process of negotiation between artists, activists, and residents. Art does not occupy a subordinate and functional role in relation to the struggle, receding to the position of communication and propagating organ. Art has its own autonomous agency that attempts to communicate with others. This is an important concept because often in situations of political uplifts, art has often been marginalized to an exclusively celebratory role. MAAM from the beginning established itself as a political museum but not a museum of identity only aimed at self-promotion in line with the Soviet tradition of Socialist realism<sup>281</sup>. Following confrontations with the Blocks regarding the different

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<sup>277</sup> S. Kirchgassner, 'How Rome's mayoral crisis could hurt Five Star's national chances', *The Guardian*, 20 September 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/20/rome-mayoral-crisis-could-hurt-five-stars-national-chances-italy-virginia-raggi> (28/03/2017)

<sup>278</sup> G. de Finis, 'L'invivibilità di Roma. E l'impossibilità di porvi rimedio votando Tizio Caio e Sempronio', *Operaviva*, 30 May 2016, <http://operaviva.info/invivibilita-di-roma/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>279</sup> Roma. Sito turistico ufficiale, 'MAAM - Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove', <http://www.turismoroma.it/cosa-fare/maam-museo-dellaltro-e-dellaltrove> (28/03/2017)

<sup>280</sup> F. Sanvoisin, 'Processo a 'Metropoliz', protesta d'artista in Tribunale', *Dire Lazio*, 10 May 2016 <http://www.dire.it/10-05-2016/53146-processo-a-metropoliz-protista-d-artista-in-tribunale-video/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>281</sup> Socialist realism is a style of realistic art developed in the Soviet Union and considered as the dominant style in many socialist countries. By means of realistic imagery, Socialist realism glorified communist values, the socialist state, and the emancipation of the proletariat. To know more, see A. Ellis, *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920–1970*, Milan, Skira Editore S.p.A., 2012

roles and methods of participation, and misunderstandings with the people about the nature of the interventions, MAAM responded with mediation and constant negotiation between these different worlds who are encouraged to meet and interact in accordance with each one's own nature.

Recently, the new Councilor for Culture and current Deputy Mayor Luca Bergamo visited in an official capacity the MAAM, thus demonstrating an interest in the model proposed by the Museum. It is also the first institutional recognition of the project and a first institutional opening towards the project despite the ongoing trial. As reported by de Finis, this visit is seen as a very positive sign but that clashes with a much more complex situation and that does not affect the project carried out by MAAM. While agreeing that the MAAM can be an actual alternative management model for the cultural growth of Rome, de Finis argues that the stakes involved are too many to easily take a stand regarding the situation. In order to adapt the structure to institutional standards, the municipality should negotiate with everyone involved and deal with all the legally ambiguous areas arise over time. In addition, the project should use public money, an further element that makes it even more difficult to address the situation.<sup>282</sup> Interestingly, in this respect the Museum stands as a peer to the municipality of Rome since the MAAM is neither economically nor politically dependent on it.

#### 4.2.2 The 'other-institution' and the exhibition as participated device

The MAAM was naturally born with the aim to contrast this idea of government by connecting the two extreme points of the metropolis, namely the contemporary art museum, a symbol of culture and innovation, and the suburbs. It can be looked at as a political museum, closely linked to the struggle for housing rights but also for the right to unreservedly make and enjoy the art.<sup>283</sup> This idea relies on three premises. First, the artworks donated by the various artists during the filming of Space Metropoliz became the first nucleus of 'space hulks' of the Museum's permanent collection. Secondly, the museum topic had already been dealt with during the process together with artists and participants. Thirdly, is shared understanding of the contemporary art museum as embodying a new cathedral of the metropolis.<sup>284</sup> Based on this suggestion, the MAAM aims at bringing the highest place in the lowest location that is the slum, and calling itself an 'other-institution'. As argued by de Finis, the MAAM asserts as a museum and its professional roles like that of the curator and the artist because it relies on the idea that if the institutions do not work, they can and must be re-invented.<sup>285</sup> Furthermore, in this

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<sup>282</sup> Interview Giorgio de Finis, conducted on-site by the writer, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2016

<sup>283</sup> G. de Finis, 'Il primo museo abitato ~~del pianeta terra~~ della luna', in G. de Finis (ed.), *FORZA TUTT\*. La barricata dell'arte*, Roma, Bordeaux Edizioni, 2015, p. 9

<sup>284</sup> See J. Updike, 'Invisible cathedral. A walk through the new modern', *The New Yorker*, 15 November 2004, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/11/15/invisible-cathedral> (28/03/2017); C. Jencks, 'New museums: the rise of cryptic cathedrals of the cosmos', *The Art Newspaper*, October 2016 <http://theartnewspaper.com/features/new-museums-the-rise-of-cryptic-cathedrals-of-the-cosmos/> (28/03/2017); J. Fargo, 'Why museums are the new churches', *BBC*, 16 July 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20150716-why-museums-are-the-new-churches> (28/03/2017)

<sup>285</sup> Interview Giorgio de Finis, conducted on-site by the writer, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2016

sense the MAAM questions the pietistic institutional rhetoric based on the lack of resources and the inevitability of surrender by operating and growing in a horizontal, participated, and no budget approach.<sup>286</sup> Internally, MAAM's economic system is based on the principles of the gift economy<sup>287</sup>.

Artists participate on a voluntary basis and they are asked to produce and donate an artwork on the basis of a connection to the project and a direct relationship with the structure. For this reason, site-specific works tend to be preferred, even if existing artworks are not rejected *a priori*. Any new potential artwork or acquisition is discussed during the weekly assembly together with the artist.<sup>288</sup> Initially in case of expensive production costs, they were partially funded by the galleries representing the artists, but since this created misunderstandings within the assembly, it was decided to reduce their role within the Museum. Residents in turn autonomously run an internal café<sup>289</sup> and ask for a subscription at the entrance, but as underlined by de Finis all these activities are detached by the MAAM operations and the money is mainly intended to sustain structural works for Metropoliz. The decision to exclude the money from the Museum process of production was undertaken in order to avoid ambiguous financial situations. While believing that work should always be paid, de Finis believes that integrating the element of money in a system as experimental and precarious as the MAAM could hinder the evolution of the project and generate external issues and critiques even after years of operation.<sup>290</sup>

In this sense, within the Museum collaboration is privileged over competition, in opposition to the capitalist model pursued by the art market. Every artist has to individually decide one's personal contribution and how to position themselves within the process in a subjective way. Moreover, the relationship between art and space is organic since the artworks are located in rooms that also have additional purposes such as the playroom for the children or the praying room used by the inhabitants.<sup>291</sup> In this sense, understanding and interacting with the needs of a space also in terms of its function becomes an integral part of the production of the artwork. The idea behind every artwork should be to claim back the public space and to improve the life of the Museum and its inhabitants. Therefore, there is a tendency for compromise and collective work, and to conceive the exhibition as "participated device"<sup>292</sup>. As a result, these works are often considered as relational not so much in the strict sense of

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<sup>286</sup> G. M. Tosatti, 'Il tempo degli eroi', in G. de Finis (ed.), *FORZA TUTT\*. La barricata dell'arte*, Roma, Bordeaux Edizioni, 2015, p. 21

<sup>287</sup> A Gift economy is an economic mode of exchange based on the idea of giving without expecting any rewards or goods in exchange. It contrasts with barter or market economy insofar it is regulated by means of social norms and customs and not on the basis of exchange values. Some defining features as concern a gift economy are the creation of qualitative relationship between people instead of objects, delayed exchange, and inalienability of goods. To know more, see D. J. Cheal, *The Gift Economy*, New York, Routledge, 1988

<sup>288</sup> Interview Giorgio de Finis, conducted on-site by the writer, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2016

<sup>289</sup> See Appendix E

<sup>290</sup> Interview Giorgio de Finis, conducted on-site by the writer, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2016

<sup>291</sup> See Appendix E

<sup>292</sup> Interview Giorgio de Finis, conducted on-site by the writer, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2016

relational art<sup>293</sup>, but because of the upstream mechanism of the project that turns into a relational creative process the artwork itself. The only limit established by the MAAM besides the necessary presence of the artist is that of feasibility, against the monumental and expensive artworks privileged within the art system. Feasibility becomes a synonym for economic and social sustainability.

### 4.2.3 The issue of money

The money is used within the Museum only as a weapon in the outside, but on the inside it is banned in all its forms. Also, an additional reflection regards conservation and documentation functions.<sup>294</sup> The MAAM is located within an old abandoned factory that operates on a voluntary basis. It follows that it was not possible to actually do the required structural compensation and to secure and guarantee not only an adequate preservation of the artworks but also the visitors. Perishability however is not considered a weakness, but rather a strength. It tends to overturn the urge to collect and preserve that is manifest in other institutional practices.<sup>295</sup> Similarly, after two years of rigorous documentation using pictures, videos, and interviews, today activities are documented purely through MAAM's Facebook page. In addition, while the first catalog of MAAM<sup>296</sup> wanted to emphasize and legitimize its work by focusing on documenting all the artworks, by means of the second catalog *de Finis* wants to reflect on the ways and the tools by which it becomes possible to represent not only the life of an artwork but of a place and a living process which is still in the making.<sup>297</sup> The upcoming second catalogue therefore can be looked at as a narrative experiment concerning the life of Metropolis and how this is interwoven with the artworks thus breaking the boundaries between life, art, and work.

Within the framework of MAAM, art is understood not as a profession but as a common experience and a space of freedom that goes beyond the idea of being useful, and by which one can actually imagine something new. While Space Metropolis willingly aspired to the impossible, the MAAM seeks to find real solutions and transform the space by means of artistic practices in line with the active and stubborn attitude of its inhabitants. Art is understood as a barricade, simultaneously representing hope and protection. The MAAM indeed boasts the participation of emerging but also recognized artists and even if an alignment to the art market may seem a contradiction, *de Finis* argues higher market value corresponds to higher protection.<sup>298</sup> Money is used in a

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<sup>293</sup> The idea of relational aesthetics or relational art was theorized by Bourriaud in respect to the art production occurring in the 1990s. He defined relational art as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space". Relational art seeks to establish potential intersubjective encounters and it is interested in the capacity of the artist to foster the creation of a temporary community with its own set of values and meanings. The artwork therefore is no longer conceived as autonomous but as contingent to its environment and audience. To know more, see N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon, Les presses du réel, 2002

<sup>294</sup> Interview Giorgio de Finis, conducted on-site by the writer, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2016

<sup>295</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> G. de Finis (ed.), *FORZA TUTT\*. La barricata dell'arte*, Roma, Bordeaux Edizioni, 2015

<sup>297</sup> Interview Giorgio de Finis, conducted on-site by the writer, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2016

<sup>298</sup> *ibid.*

strategic way since art market's values and mechanisms are hijacked and made compliant to the project objectives.

#### 4.2.4 An example of radical education

It is relevant to stress that the relationships between art, inhabitants, and participants are meant to not be based on necessity, exploitation, or subordination. All agents have their own dignity and importance, and they are all encouraged to co-exist in a situation of mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation. Beyond compliance and collaboration, which have been both widely discussed, it is significant to reflect on the educational function of MAAM. Findings show that the education at the MAAM works in a number of directions. On the one hand, the Museum's aim to create a barricade of art acknowledges art not only aesthetic but also on economic terms. Such mechanisms have to be further explored and explained in order to take any decision in this sense. On the other, artists are urged to work with and according to the Metropoliz context. Therefore, it is crucial for them to understand the reality but also the cultural background of the people who live there. Furthermore, one of the objectives of the Museum is to avoid the enclave effect for its residents by fostering mutual discovery.<sup>299</sup> Thus, the encounter with the other also occurs in the encounter with the outside visiting the MAAM, while visitors in turn are encouraged to understand and respect the place they are visiting as being a museum as well as someone's house. While in the previously analyzed cases education is often understood as being top-down and notion-based, or as a collective reflection around a shared topic, in MAAM it simultaneously is collective and personal, but primarily multidirectional. This approach is particularly significant in a context like that of Tor Sapienza, in which there is a lack of social development and integration projects for the different groups who live in the neighborhood. In the MAAM people can find an alternative representation of themselves and the other. In this sense, the model proposed by MAAM may align to the notion of radical education presented by Bishop<sup>300</sup>. On the basis of a conception of the artistic practice as a relational practice, MAAM aims at liberating all the subjects involved from their own prejudices, fears, and mental patterns and facilitate the encounter and the exchange between with the 'other', whether he is an activist, an inhabitants, a visitor, a politician, or an artist. Furthermore, within this framework, the curator plays a crucial role representing the mediator and the crossroad between the different spheres that exist in the MAAM, these being the art sphere, that of politics, or human rights.

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<sup>299</sup> G. de Finis, 'Il primo museo abitato del pianeta terra della luna', in G. de Finis (ed.), *FORZA TUTT\*. La barricata dell'arte*, Roma, Bordeaux Edizioni, 2015, pp. 8-9

<sup>300</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 4.1.1, pp. 57-58

## 4.2.5 Conclusion



Fig. 11 Draft of FORZA TUTT\* catalog's cover featuring *L'ultima battaglia* (*The last battle*) by Stefania Fabrizi, 2013. © MAAM (left) ; One of Blu's artworks on a housing occupation in Ostiense. © Artribune (right)

Through its practice, the MAAM autonomously compensates for many of the things traditional institutions cannot come up with both culturally and socially. Using the language of reality in its aesthetic dimension, the MAAM defines a type of fruition that places the subject not simply in the museum, but in the body of the artwork itself. It redefines the relationship between artists, institutions, and the market, and also the relationship between the Museum and its publics by placing the visitor in a situation in which everyone is the other with respect of someone else. Finally, it is able to give a real response to the challenges, even those beyond the art sphere, of many precarious and marginalized people who do not identify anymore in the traditional public institutions. The example of the MAAM may seem impractical for many institutions in that it does not have to abide by the rules and criteria to which museum institutions are usually subjected to. Nevertheless, the Museum experience has been widely recognized and it was invited as a guest in several European institutions such as the Bozar in Brussels<sup>301</sup> or the Macro in Rome<sup>302</sup>. It has also been recognized as a partner by various national and international museums such as Castello di Rivoli<sup>303</sup>, and NGOs such as Medici Senza Frontiere Italia<sup>304</sup> with which it has collaborated on specific projects. Furthermore, the model of MAAM was taken up and re-proposed in other similar contexts. One example is

<sup>301</sup> Bozar, 'When the arts champion human rights', <http://www.bozar.be/en/activities/106484-when-the-arts-champion-human-rights> (28/03/2017)

<sup>302</sup> Museo Macro, 'Come rovesciare il mondo ad arte', [http://www.museomacro.org/mostre\\_ed\\_eventi/eventi/come\\_rovesciare\\_il\\_mondo\\_ad\\_arte](http://www.museomacro.org/mostre_ed_eventi/eventi/come_rovesciare_il_mondo_ad_arte) (28/03/2017)

<sup>303</sup> Castello di Rivoli, 'Abi-tanti. The migrating multitude', <http://www.castellodirivoli.org/dipartimento-educazione/progetti-speciali/abi-tanti-la-moltitudine-migrante/?lang=en> (28/03/2017)

<sup>304</sup> Medici Senza Frontiere, 'Osservatorio Fuori Campo. Richiedenti asilo e rifugiati in Italia: insediamenti informali e marginalità sociale', <http://fuoricampo.medicisenzafrotiere.it/> (28/03/2017)

the case of two occupied buildings in the neighborhood Ostiense which were covered by the murals made by Blu<sup>305</sup> with the aim to protect their inhabitants, and that have become today two landmarks of the area. A different example is that of the Ex Mira Lanza Museum<sup>306</sup>, a project conceived by the gallery 999 contemporary that aims at reproducing the idea and the hype of the MAAM, but without its instances and methods thus reducing it to a mere commodity. It may be argued that this success shows that there is something to be learned from such a radical experience, and that there is on the part of some museums and institutions an urgency to reflect and re-evaluate their own work.

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<sup>305</sup> Blu is an Italian street artist and his work is worldwide recognized. His murals are often characterized by political contents and aims. To know more, see Blublu, <http://www.blublu.org/sito/updates/001.html> (28/03/2017)

<sup>306</sup> 999 contemporary, 'Ex Mira Lanza Museum', <http://www.999contemporary.com/exmiralanza/> (28/03/2017)

## 5. Final conclusion, recommendation and discussion

Within the framework of this research, the commons has been defined as a complex concept consisting of a good, both material or immaterial; an action, namely that of commoning which implies collective management and commitment from all those involved; an idea of ownership that rejects property in favor of free access and care. The current concept and use of commons derives from a process of evolution that mirrored and reacted to the economic and political development of society itself. For this reason, it is important to highlight the political dimension of the commons as well. Nevertheless, it can be observed that despite the radical changes that occurred in the world between the sixteenth and the twenty-first century, the concept of the commons has always relied on these economic and political processes. As in the past the land was the commons to protect against the enclosures ordered by a monarch, today art can be considered a commons while commoners fight against a no longer viable production process or economic model. The flexibility of the concept of the commons relies in being able to adapt according to different contexts without necessarily being neutralized or weakened. Moreover, when it comes to cultural commons it has been stressed that by exchanging and using them, immaterial resources' value is enhanced.

The aim of this research is to analyze the motivations and conditions by which the concept of the commons is implemented within the cultural sector, with a focus on contemporary art organizations. What makes the commons relevant and potentially transformative as concern the fields of art and culture in this Western specific socio-economic context is its being both non-subtractive and non-excludable, and therefore not easily captured and valorized by capital.<sup>307</sup> While, on its part the museum of contemporary art represents an institution and an agent with a high symbolic significance and a strong socio-economic impact within the city.<sup>308</sup> Nevertheless, today its role is often questioned and consumed by crises of meaning, funding, and relevance. These crises are inscribed within a much broader one, which has been affecting the economy of several Eurozone countries for years and that has led to the dismantling of the welfare state, and to significant budget cuts in a number of areas, including the cultural sector.

Within this framework, it has been recognized the need to question the established neoliberal system, and to re-conceive existing infrastructures such as the museum institution in the light of more sustainable and alternative socio-economic paradigms. In this sense, the museum of the commons outlined by Raunig and the principles of New Institutionalism seek to establish new practices and values. These not only affects the institution itself, but its relationship with the publics, the artworks, and society as a whole. The spread of the commons as a cultural phenomenon, both inside and outside the art sector, resulted in increasing commitment and awareness of citizens and users communities.

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<sup>307</sup> See chapter 2, paragraph 2.1, p. 20

<sup>308</sup> See chapter 2, paragraph 2.3

## 5.1 Institutions of the commons: an overview

The MNCARS and the MAAM were selected as diametrically opposite and thus representative of the examples analyzed in the inventory review, and as a result of a closer evaluation corroborate many of the trends and pattern detected in the analysis. They are both located in two capital cities, the former in the center and the latter in the periphery, and both have a very close relationship with their local context, which in the case of MNCARS regards the national as well. While for the MAAM this results in a largely project-based program, in the MNCARS it mainly influences Museum's public program, whose activities largely rely on collaboration with a variety of groups external to the institution. The permanent collection, on the other hand, becomes for both an instrument through which to communicate a new conception of the museum institution and of its relationship with art by means of a more radical and politicized understanding of the contemporary. Moreover, from a comparison between all the experiences analyzed and the institution of the commons as outlined by Raunig<sup>309</sup>, it follows that there is a considerable correspondence of purposes and principles.

Firstly, all of the groups taken into account aim at deconstructing given artistic and institutional canons, and fostering long-term projects and political discussion beyond the realm of aesthetics. Artistic practice in some cases is the primary research subject, whereas in others it acquires a more functional role. It is however common the desire to push and bend traditional art boundaries. For example, experimentation is certainly more evident in the case of MAAM in which people and artworks live together, and to the extent that art overcomes established border and norms to produce a collective 'super-object' that transcends the very idea of authorship, conservation, and time. However, this can be considered a unrealistic and unsustainable model for museums that are controlled and organized according to international regulations and whose stakeholders are usually much more diversified, and with a range of expectations. Furthermore, from the evaluation as concern the work of MAAM and MNCARS, it appears that this different approach to art can have contrasting effects with regard to the relationship with the art sector. In MAAM each participating artist commits to donate an artwork, and to embrace the purpose and the spirit of the place. This results in a correspondence of values between the Museum, the artist, and often the visitor. As regards the MNCARS, reality is far more complex. Being a national and older institution, the Museum has to address and take care of its legacy, and it has to cope with its stakeholders, who are much more diversified and with a range of contrasting expectations. Within the framework, respondents while acknowledging a good predisposition on the part of many artists and contributors, they find it very difficult to balance the new mission and vision of the Museum and the expectations of the art and museum fields.

Secondly, as concern modes of management and production, the overall analysis depicts a by and large homogeneous landscape to the extent that they all come together as a plurality of singularities, thus without abolishing or hiding their differences and

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<sup>309</sup> See chapter 2, paragraph 2.3, p. 33

peculiarities. Despite the majority of the experiences taken into account are of small dimensions, each one maintains its peculiarities in relation to the people involved and the environment.<sup>310</sup> On the other hand, examples such as the MNCARS manages to place the commons within a broader and more articulated scenario namely the bureaucratic and institutional one, thus testing on a large scale advantages and limits. In this sense, I believe experiences on a larger scale shed greater light on the potential of the commons because of their affinity to the mainstream environment. The variety of social and political stakes embedded within these contexts makes them a privileged space for learning and experimenting on the basis of more complex and realistic variables, despite the difficulties highlighted by the MNCARS employers who do not recognize the museum institution as flexible and autonomous enough to achieve such a radical model.

While there are few groups that completely reject the institutional model inasmuch it is representative of hegemonic values incompatible with the practice of commoning, the majority seeks to re-conceive it in their own terms by hijacking existing working and social structures in the name of more equal and emancipating relationships. A higher degree of abstraction and radicalism has been observed as concern the language and terminology used.<sup>311</sup> In the realm of practice instead the focus is on the implementation of effective organization and management structures, which are generally handled autonomously and independently of each other, despite of the exchange and interaction within the networks. Also, from an organizational and structural standpoint, the research detects a number of shared and necessary features. Engaging with the commons requires a high degree of flexibility and adaptability so to manage to work in a precarious and constantly changing environment. Often, the work of these groups is marked by a holistic and interdisciplinary approach that connect different social spheres, and different activities and functions, and by an attention for more sustainable practices and methods.

Many organizations are located in former abandoned buildings<sup>312</sup>, a tendency that characterizes them aesthetically, and also allows them to take advantage of larger and structurally more mouldable spaces. Furthermore, particularly as concern large cities and metropolises, governments tend to embrace the rhetoric of the creative city and to thus allocate funds mainly in support of artistic and cultural projects that aim at urban regeneration and innovation. For this reason, it can be seen as more profitable to apply for funding if proposing projects that mimic this terminology.

## 5.2 The institution of the commons and its publics

Thirdly, most of the analyzed examples aligns to the idea of Raunig as far as they propose a new way to relate to the audience that is far from the traditional approach of the museum institution. This is especially true as regards more informal and experimental groups, according to whom the public is seen as a potential collaborator or contributor. In experiences such as the MAAM, Park Fiction, or the project *R for*

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<sup>310</sup> For examples see chapter 3

<sup>311</sup> For examples see chapter 3, paragraph 3.3

<sup>312</sup> For examples see chapter 3, paragraph 3.2

*Republic* as carried out by *mare cultural urbano*, the distance between visitor and personnel has to be reduced as much as possible so to foster creativity and active participation, and the domain of expertise is replaced by the exchange of individual skills and tools with the aim to make them increasingly available to society.

In institutions like MG+MSUM or MNCARS change is much more subtle. The institutional hierarchy based on different professionalisms and functions clearly separates the audience from the workforce. In this case, it becomes more important to try to hold together and represent all the expectations and demands of a socially diverse audience acknowledging its peculiarities and far from traditional marketing targets, and to make as available and accessible as possible the museum facilities and resources. Within this framework, it is important to look beyond the imperative of creativity and participation. As Bishop observes, considering creativity as automatically inclusive and socially productive is misleading.<sup>313</sup> Many participatory practices were born in the 1970s as a way to escape art market and commodification only to be later trivialized in the realm of entertainment and experience economy, and become an instrument to absorb and neutralize social conflicts. Moreover, the author argues that in a context of cognitive capitalism and immaterial labor, such practices have the purpose to promote a new culture of voluntarism aimed at filling the gaps left by government budget-cuts.<sup>314</sup>

In this sense, another issue is that of representation. Acknowledging the emancipating power of self-representation, most of the analyzed examples aim at challenging the mechanisms of representation implemented in the museum and the arts by means of their practice. For this reason, one of the objectives shared by a number of case studies dealing with the commons can be considered the need to establish new alternative representation parameters in contrast to those coming from mainstream media outlets. This can happen in different ways, by fostering increasing civic and social awareness, or by experimenting alternative working and living models.<sup>315</sup> Also, it can occur by directly claiming back the representation of one's own history and everyday reality as in the case of MAAM, by means of which *de Finis* together with the inhabitants and the artists involved go against the mainstream narrative as regards themes as the degradation in the suburbs or the Romani people.<sup>316</sup>

In the case of MNCARS, it is remarked that this shared sense of urgency as concern representation mainly derives from a political context of failure of representative democracy. According to the majority of respondents, the crises of meaning and legitimacy outlined as regards the museum institution is closely related to a crises of meaning and legitimacy concerning political institutions, and it is believed to underlie political dissatisfaction and a crisis of representation.<sup>317</sup> Despite the political environment analyzed in the cases of Madrid and Rome somewhat validates the idea of

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<sup>313</sup> C. Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, New York, Verso, 2012, pp. 13-

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<sup>314</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> For examples see chapter 3, paragraph 3.2

<sup>316</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 4.2, pp. 63-66

<sup>317</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 4.1.2, p. 59

an unstable socio-political context, such a claim certainly requires further study and research which fall outside the competence of this thesis.

### 5.3 The role of money

On the overall groups are mainly characterized as non-profit, and they are largely based on voluntary work<sup>318</sup> This is possible first and foremost because of the motivations that enable the foundation of certain institutions and the work of many groups. Some projects are carried out on the basis of personal initiatives, while several share a sense of social or political urgency such as in the case of Park Fiction or the MAAM. Volunteering however is not a necessary condition, and in the case of formal institutions or galleries labor is paid. Nevertheless, I believe that the core issue when it comes to such a kind of labor is the nature and timing of work itself. As concern the modes of production, immaterial labor exceeds the division between work and non-work time, thus outlining an environment tending toward increasing uncertainty and self-exploitation.<sup>319</sup> Moreover, the institution of the commons intensifies this expansion of time by incorporating typically social aspects such as trust and care, within the management of the institution itself. Engaging with commons requires a high degree of individual commitment, and relationships based on a high degree of trust and mutual support so to minimize conditions of uncertainty and conflict that would otherwise limit the possibilities and the evolution of a project. Furthermore, the definition of clear and shared management models very often requires a great amount of time and resources, particularly in the case of considerable sizes. As a result, from an economic standpoint all of these might make it more favorable for many organizations to continue operating according to hierarchical and traditional working structures. This would avoid any misuse of resources and operating costs associated with the implementation of such practices in the short-term. However, the investment of human and economic resources in such a project of transformation may also ensure even greater future returns. Therefore, when it comes to the institution of the commons I think it is necessary to re-think the time and the nature of work in order to better distribute and valorize the contribution of all the participants, avoid situations of self-exploitation and precarization in the field, and potentially find an alternative and more sustainable working model within the realm of immaterial production.

Moreover, in the case of MAAM the decision to completely leave out money had been consciously made in order to avoid any ambiguity or problem, both internal and external.<sup>320</sup> Economy, however, is an integral part of society and I think it is not a forward-looking attitude to avoid confronting and reflecting on the role of money when engaging with the commons. In general, there is a lack of clarity as regards both the funding system, and the management and the allocation of resources of most of the organizations taken into account. Even in the case of formal institutions such as the

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<sup>318</sup> For examples see chapter 2, paragraph 2.3, pp. 33-34; chapter 3, paragraph 3.1, pp. 37-38; chapter 4, paragraph 4.1.4, pp. 60-61

<sup>319</sup> See chapter 1, pp. 6-7

<sup>320</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 4.2.3, pp. 71-72

MNCARS, it is particularly difficult to obtain and legitimize funding for such projects because of the lack of evaluation parameters on the basis of which to assess effects and outcomes. For these reasons, I believe further research is required in order to deepen the economic and financial aspect of working with the commons as regards the enhancement and remuneration of work, fundraising and financing, and possible implications associated with the use of money.

#### 5.4 The issue of transition and legal recognition

By recognizing and reasserting control over old and new commons, new space for negotiation and public discussion is produced. However, as remarked by Negri in conversation with Pascal Gielen & Sonja Lavaert<sup>321</sup>, the question today concerns more the transition from public to common, rather than its definition or reproduction. The author argues that while the transition from public to private has been widely established, the core issue nowadays should be to define the commons institutionally and administratively. The problem of transition is also presented by Negri and Hardt in *Commonwealth*. In the book the two authors argue that emancipation itself can be only considered as the beginning of a longer-term process<sup>322</sup> aimed at turning the insurrectional momentum into a process of liberation and transformation, that would consolidate and develop the multitude's democratic power, and the new practices and values arisen from insurrection. In this sense, none of the examples taken into account is legally recognized as an institution of the commons. Not even in the case of the MNCARS, whose recognition is limited to the Museum's mission. Many organizations choose to adapt existing legal forms in order to position themselves and legitimize their work within its social and political context. Yet, it is not very easy and useful to try and enclose the commons into pre-existing categories since they fail to encompass all the complexity and socio-political meaning inherent in the practice.

Hardt and Negri recognize in the current global governance an effective model for these new institutions because of an affinity of principles and practices.<sup>323</sup> This same proximity, the authors argue, makes it possible to hijack and transform governance in a subversive model based solely on constituent powers and democratic decision making. The role of these new constituent institutions should be that of the facilitator and custodian as regards the reproduction and access to the commons, and to define an open and shared plan for social and democratic experimentation and innovation. Therefore, in order for the commons to represent a viable alternative, further research is required as

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<sup>321</sup> P. Gielen and S. Lavaert, 'Art and Common. A Conversation with Antonio Negri', in P. Gielen, P. Bruyne and T. Björnfors, *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2011, pp. 181-182

<sup>322</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 361-362

<sup>323</sup> According to the authors global governance is a post-democratic system that rejects the model of the nation-state in favor of more innovative structures and regulations, often controlled by means of external forces such as property. As a consequence, governance is characterized by highly flexible mechanisms, able to interpret and adapt on the basis of changes taking place in the biopolitical context, and a network-based system for conflicts resolution. This similarity of practices and tools between contemporary global governance and the commons primarily derives from the fact that in a context of Post-Fordist production, governance has to register and represent the claims and needs expressed by the multitude. See Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, pp. 371-372

concern the definition on institutional and constitutional forms able to govern and articulate “the singularities of the multitude along with its diverse instances of revolt and rebellion in a powerful and lasting common process.”<sup>324</sup>

A powerful example in this sense is the experience of Naples. In July 2016, the current city government by means of the resolution 446/2016 recognized seven local experiences of occupation and self-government as spaces of civic and collective interests because of their value as commons.<sup>325</sup> This new regulation was formed on the basis of the rules independently produced by the communities of reference, and represents a brand new model of government of the commons within the Italian legal system. Within the regulation, the commons is associated with the exercise of personal fundamental rights and to the collective and direct participation of the community based on the principles of impartiality, inclusiveness, accessibility and self-government. Therefore, the importance of Naples’ example lies in the formal recognition of the direct administration carried out by the various communities by means of participatory democratic models and of the value they produce for the city social development. On a practical level this means that the resolution not only ensures access but above all self-government and autonomy, and also a limited participation of the City in the management costs.

In terms of legal recognition, I think it would be also necessary for a museum to define new professional interdisciplinary figures able to mediate and facilitate the process of transition, both internally and externally. On the one hand, as expressed by one of the interviewees<sup>326</sup>, due to the symbolic value of language by re-naming or creating professional roles, power would be partially redistributed within the institutional organogram. On the other, I believe that the designation of specific professional figures would enable an internal redistribution of work and time, thus counteracting phenomena such as self-exploitation.<sup>327</sup>

## 5.5 Conclusion

While engaging with the commons appears as a widespread practice for many European contemporary art organizations, it is not adequately regulated yet, and this proves to be a major issue especially in the case of museum institutions, who are not completely autonomous as concern the transformation of their organizational and working structures. A first necessary step in this sense would be that of gaining and securing greater autonomy to museums, and currently the problem of autonomy is often solved by setting up parallel Foundations, thus in line with forms deriving from the private sector and whose main task is to predominantly deal with museums’ economic aspects. Furthermore, the research shows that the implementation of the commons does not head directly to a complete destruction of roles and regulations. Many of the

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<sup>324</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 375

<sup>325</sup> Ex Asilo Filangieri, ‘Per una nuova mappa dei beni comuni in autogoverno. Uno, sette, otto, centomila!’, <http://www.exasilofilangieri.it/napoli-7-spazi-liberati-diventano-beni-comuni/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>326</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 4.1.1, pp. 60-61

<sup>327</sup> See chapter 2, paragraph 2.3, p. 29 and chapter 4, paragraph 4.1.1

examples analyzed still maintains a traditional hierarchical structure while acknowledging it and questioning their own practice.

Within this framework, although it has not been possible to detect a definite shared model as concern the organization and functioning of an institution of the commons, I believe that the commons might actually become an effective alternative tool if conceived as a museological concept. Even before the economic crisis, and in response to a broader crisis of meaning, the reaction of a number of curators and directors has been to rethink the museum as a socially engaged institution as in the case of New Institutionalism, and to turn to its local communities as the main constituent agents of the museum. However, I believe that the change focused too much on questioning and improving the museum's artistic offer in a more participatory sense, without actually reflecting on the power relationships among museum employees, and between the museum and its visitors. In this sense, the hierarchical rather than formal distance between the museum and the public ensured that the museum continued to be seen as too patronizing and elitist because the socio-political issues addressed through temporary exhibitions, seminars, and events did not translate into a more tangible spatialization and distribution of power, as it can be observed in the MAAM instead.

Alternative institutional models as outlined by Raunig and Bishop presents parallels that highlight significant features of the new institutions. The idea of going beyond established artistic canons directly relates to the notion of multiple modernities advocated by Bishop<sup>328</sup> and implemented within the MNCARS permanent collection<sup>329</sup> with the objective to promote a no longer exclusively Western-centered conception of art history. Similarly, with respect to the relationship with the visitor, the two authors stress the importance of the emancipator role of the museum. On the one hand, within the contemporary museum model Bishop represents an institution in which the separation between the museum staff and its users is still very definite, and to a certain extent the educator seems to be the one primarily designated to foster this change. Raunig, on the other hand, exceeds this relatively patronizing approach, and indicates the individual subject and the collectivity as those who have to take on an active role in their own emancipation. Moreover, Raunig detects inner corporate analysis as an integral part of its institution of the commons.

In this sense, I think the re-conceptualization of the museum in the light of the commons would lead to a greater change in perspectives and approaches primarily because it relies on different premises. The need for collective management is still founded on individual commitment, thus fostering a diffuse sense of ownership and reducing disaffection and detachment. In addition, in opposition to the private market, relationships are not based on profit and competition but on collaboration and mutual support, also within the various networks. While limiting a museum institution in terms of financial resources and possibilities, such a system has the advantage of proposing a more sustainable idea as concern the management and organization of the museum itself. Finally, the definition and negotiation of shared rules and the inclusion of more

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<sup>328</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 4.1.1, pp. 57-58

<sup>329</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 4.1.1, p. 55

reproductive tasks could potentially lead to a fairer distribution of work and time, and to a new and more autonomous idea of flexibility that would enable the immaterial worker to regain possession of his time. In this sense, such a re-conceptualization of the museum foundations in the light of the commons is likely to gradually affects all aspects of the institution, from the permanent collection as already occurs in the MNCARS, to the relationship with the visitor, or the distribution of spaces and facilities.

The MNCARS is to a certain extent a result of this shift of perspective from a strictly curatorial approach to a more intersectional one. Nevertheless, many are the identified limits, precisely because despite having acknowledge the museum as a common resource (the museum), it has not worked yet on its inner dynamics and on the implementation of the commons as regards the creation of a community of subjectivities, and the definition of shared regulations, outside the institutional field. For this reason, employees do not have all the same information and they are not all on the same level of awareness, and it has not been possible to work on the required degree of commitment and trust toward the institution itself. On the other hand, this situation has been far more easily verifiable in the bottom-up examples observed in the Inventory review, in which artistic and interpersonal hierarchies are continuously and critically deconstructed and transformed. Or in the case of Casco, in which by means of artistic practices they seek to act directly on the institutional and personal working relationships and behaviors. By fostering a collective (self-)reflection and recognition of the power dynamics rooted in the museum and their influences and ramifications within society, the commons today might actually represent a concrete working tool, and a push for change like that arrow “that points at something that cannot be reached but that keeps pushing towards it.”<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Comment extrapolated from an interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

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## Appendix A - The inventory

<u>Name</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Typology and name of the project*</u>
3 137	<a href="http://www.3137.gr">http://www.3137.gr</a>	Athens, Greece	
Υλη[matter]	<a href="http://hyle.gr">http://hyle.gr</a>	Athens, Greece	
ARTfactories/Autre(s)pARTs	<a href="http://www.artfactories.net">http://www.artfactories.net</a>	Toulouse, France	
Brunnenpassage	<a href="http://www.brunnenpassage.at">http://www.brunnenpassage.at</a>	Wien, Austria	
Casco	<a href="http://cascoprojects.org">http://cascoprojects.org</a>	Utrecht, Netherlands	
Cavallerizza Irreale	<a href="https://www.cavallerizzareale.org">https://www.cavallerizzareale.org</a>	Turin, Italy	
CAC Brétigny	<a href="http://www.cacbrétigny.com">http://www.cacbrétigny.com</a> [temporary website]	Brétigny-sur-Orge, France	
CCA: Centre for Contemporary Arts	<a href="http://www.cca-glasgow.com">http://www.cca-glasgow.com</a>	Glasgow, Great Britain	Public Engagement program
Centrum	<a href="http://csw.art.pl">http://csw.art.pl</a>	Warsaw, Poland	
Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto	<a href="http://www.cittadellarte.it">http://www.cittadellarte.it</a>	Biella, Italy	
Contemporary Art Showcase Athens - C.A.S.A	<a href="http://c-a-s-athens.squarespace.com">http://c-a-s-athens.squarespace.com</a>	Athens, Greece	
Cultural node Stanica	<a href="http://www.stanica.sk">http://www.stanica.sk</a>	Zilina, Slovakia	
Diasporas críticas	<a href="http://cargocollective.com/diasporascriticas">http://cargocollective.com/diasporascriticas</a>	Spain	
Die Bäckerei	<a href="http://www.diebaeckerei.at">http://www.diebaeckerei.at</a>	Innsbruck, Austria	
ExRotaprint	<a href="http://www.exrotaprint.de">http://www.exrotaprint.de</a>	Berlin, Germany	
F.A.C.K.	<a href="http://fackfestival.blogspot.nl">http://fackfestival.blogspot.nl</a>	Cesena, Italy	
Fabra i coats	<a href="http://fabraicoats.bcn.cat">http://fabraicoats.bcn.cat</a>	Barcelona, Spain	
Fondo Speculativo di Provvidenza	<a href="http://thespeculativefund.org">http://thespeculativefund.org</a>	Italy	

Isola Art Center	<a href="http://isolartcenter.org">http://isolartcenter.org</a>	Milan, Italy	
Kunsthalle Athena	<a href="http://www.kunsthalleathena.org">http://www.kunsthalleathena.org</a>	Athens, Greece	
La Invisible	<a href="http://www.lainvisible.net">http://www.lainvisible.net</a>	Málaga, Spain	
La Tabacalera	<a href="http://latabacalera.net">http://latabacalera.net</a>	Madrid, Spain	
La Galleria Nazionale (LAGN)	<a href="http://lagallerianazionale.com">http://lagallerianazionale.com</a>	Rome, Italy	<i>Sensibile Comune – Le opere vive</i> , exhibition
Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers	<a href="http://www.leslaboratoires.org">http://www.leslaboratoires.org</a>	Aubervilliers, France	
LUNIK	<a href="http://www.lunik9.org">http://www.lunik9.org</a>	Bordeaux, France	
Macao	<a href="http://www.macaomilano.org">http://www.macaomilano.org</a>	Milan, Italy	
Klub MaMa	<a href="http://www.mi2.hr">http://www.mi2.hr</a>	Zagreb, Croatia	
Manifatture Knos	<a href="http://www.manifattureknos.org">http://www.manifattureknos.org</a>	Lecce, Italy	
mare culturale urbano	<a href="http://maremilano.org">http://maremilano.org</a>	Milan, Italy	
Moderna galerija - MG+MSUM (SI)	<a href="http://www.mg-lj.si">http://www.mg-lj.si</a>	Ljubljana, Slovenia	<i>glossary of common knowledge</i> , series of seminars
Museo Diffuso di Formello	<a href="http://difmusediffuso.altervista.org">http://difmusediffuso.altervista.org</a>	Formello, Italy	
Museum of Arte Útil**	<a href="http://museumartutil.net">http://museumartutil.net</a>	Eindhoven, Netherlands	
Nástupšte 1-12	<a href="http://www.nastupiste.sk/news">http://www.nastupiste.sk/news</a>	Topoľčany, Slovakia	
NSK State	<a href="http://www.nskstate.com">http://www.nskstate.com</a>	Slovenia	
OT301	<a href="http://www.ot301.nl/page=site.home">http://www.ot301.nl/page=site.home</a>	Amsterdam, Netherlands	<i>4bid</i> , in-house gallery
Park Fiction	<a href="http://park-fiction.net">http://park-fiction.net</a>	Hamburg, Germany	
POGON	<a href="http://www.upogoni.org">http://www.upogoni.org</a>	Zagreb, Croatia	
Robin Hood Asset Management	<a href="http://www.robinhoodcoop.org">http://www.robinhoodcoop.org</a>	Tampere, Finland	

Cooperative				
Sale Docks	<a href="http://www.saledocks.org">www.saledocks.org</a>		Venice, Italy	
TAAK	<a href="http://taak.me">http://taak.me</a>		Amsterdam, Netherlands	
Tenderpixel	<a href="http://www.tenderpixel.com">www.tenderpixel.com</a>		London, Great Britain	Urban Commons, exhibition
The Showroom	<a href="http://www.theshowroom.org">www.theshowroom.org</a>		London, Great Britain	Communal Knowledge, long-term program; COHAB, touring program
Tranzitdisplay	<a href="http://www.tranzit.org">http://www.tranzit.org</a>		Multiple locations (AT / CZ / HU / RO / SK)	
Tensta Konsthall	<a href="http://www.tenstakonsthall.se">http://www.tenstakonsthall.se</a>		Stockholm, Sweden	<i>The Paths to the Common(s) Are Infinite</i> , exhibition and public programme; COHAB, touring program
Vaciador34	<a href="http://vaciador34.net">http://vaciador34.net</a>		Madrid, Spain	
W139	<a href="http://w139.nl">http://w139.nl</a>		Amsterdam, Netherlands	
What, How & for Whom / WHW (HR)	<a href="http://www.whw.hr/novosti/index.html">http://www.whw.hr/novosti/index.html</a>		Zagreb, Croatia	
Wolke	<a href="http://www.w-o-l-k-e.be">http://www.w-o-l-k-e.be</a>		Sint-Pieters-Woluwe, Belgium	
Zavod P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E.	<a href="http://www.zavod-parasite.si">http://www.zavod-parasite.si</a>		Ljubljana, Slovenia	
ZAWP	<a href="http://www.zawp.org">http://www.zawp.org</a>		Bilbao, Spain	
Zemos98	<a href="http://international.zemos98.org">http://international.zemos98.org</a>		Sevilla, Spain	<i>Culture, the City and the Commons</i> , international meeting
Zesde Kolonne	<a href="http://www.kolonne.nl">http://www.kolonne.nl</a>		Eindhoven, Netherlands	

## Appendix B - Inventory Review Excerpts

- 'platform', 'association', 'organization', 'institution', 'group', and 'space'

"ExRotaprint rents a third of its overall **space** to each area of "work, art, community." Working on site are businesses, community outreach **organizations**, and independent creatives. What emerges is an overall community image—one that challenges the imposed dreams of investment return monocultures, and instead promotes togetherness and exchange. The profit of the project lies in the stability it offers and the ways it is used—today and in the future."<sup>331</sup>

"We are developing a **space** and resource tools for mutual help and co-operation. This is designed to help these experiences to develop, to get away from their precarity and to create new professional links and solidarity with those structures that share an ethic and common objectives in the world. These 'New Art Territories' (NAT) with multiple realities are initiatives carried by artists and **associations** who breathe new life into abandoned **spaces** (industrial and trading wastelands and other deserted areas)."<sup>332</sup> ArtFactories

"As a community center, MaMa is a Zagreb's alternative "living room" and a venue free of charge for various initiatives and **associations**, whether they are promoting minority identities (ecological, LGBTQ, ethnic, feminist and others) or critically questioning established social norms. As an open and non-commercial venue in a very center of Zagreb, MaMa is a place where you can socialize and immediately experience cultural production that encourages diversity."<sup>333</sup>

"How can artworks and other activities taking place through art **institutions** be shared as knowledge—embodied and practical—for the commons? How should art and art **institutions** act if they intend to practice the commons, rather than only reflect on it? More specifically, how can an exhibition, the most prominent form of public sharing by art **organizations**, work toward building—and sustaining—the commons?"<sup>334</sup>

"Contemporary Art Showcase Athens (C.A.S.A.) is a not-for-profit, independent, collaborative cultural **platform** from Athens, Greece. The activities of C.A.S.A. involve contemporary art curation, **organisation** of seminars and workshops, contextualisation and facilitation in the development of individual and collaborative projects. C.A.S.A. is the result a broad alliance between independent artists, curators, and cultural **organizers**, with the common purpose of building bridges between art venues, **institutions**, and the public."<sup>335</sup>

"Kunsthalle Athena will offer a new way to experience art in Athens, providing an alternative to that of the conventional art museum and related art **institutions** while aiming to complement them. The aim of Kunsthalle Athena is to emphasise the constant transformation of 'the poli s'

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<sup>331</sup> Exrotaprint, <http://www.exrotaprint.de/en/exrotaprint-ggmbh/> (28/07/2017)

<sup>332</sup> Facebook, 'ARTfactories/Autre(s)pARTs', <https://m.facebook.com/artfactories.autresparts> (28/017/2017)

<sup>333</sup> Klub MaMa, <http://www.mi2.hr/en/mama/net-kulturni-klub-mama/> (28/03/2017)

<sup>334</sup> Casco, 'We Are the Time Machines: Time and Tools for Commoning , Project', <https://cascoprojects.org/we-are-the-time-machines-time-and-tools-for-commoning> (28/03/2017)

<sup>335</sup> Contemporary Art Showcase Athens, <http://c-a-s-athens.squarespace.com/> (28/03/2017)

(Athens) as a symbolic location for the production and dissemination of contemporary culture worldwide.”<sup>336</sup>

“Macao is an independent center for art, culture and research. Avoiding the creative industry paradigm, and trying to innovate the old idea of cultural **institutions**, we started to consider art production as a viable process for rethinking social change, elaborating independent political critique, and as a space for innovative governance and production models.”<sup>337</sup>

“A precarious, extremely local project amidst a situation of global, conflictual transformations. Isola Art Center has chosen not to repeat pre-established **institutional** models, as in NYC, Paris or Berlin, creating instead a new form of Art Center apt for a prolonged cultural, social, economical and political crisis. It still remains a ‘no-budget’ project, functioning only through energy, enthusiasm and solidarity.”<sup>338</sup>

“F.A.C.K. is open mobile interdisciplinary collaborative transient (con)temporary **platform**, launched in 2012 in Cesena (Italy), for experimentation and research in alternative organizational and production models for arts and culture.”<sup>339</sup>

“In collaboration with a group of sympathizers and future users, cultural and social **organizations** and private initiatives, a project plan will be developed with the intention to acquire and maintain the property. The final proposal will include a business plan, an **organization** and management structure, a program design and plans for a sustainable use of the tower. This plan will be submitted at the end of August the current owner of the tower and the city.”<sup>340</sup>

“Since 2003, the **association** Isola dell’Arte started working towards a Center for contemporary art, while other **organizations** autonomously developed social activities.”<sup>341</sup>

“We use common criteria, applicable to both the social center as a whole and to each activity, collective or **space**. Horizontality all management spaces and activities are required to foster cooperation amongst equals, to search for democratic means of participation, **organizations** and decision making.”<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Kunsthalle Athena, ‘About’, <http://www.kunsthalleathena.org/about.php> (28/03/2017)

<sup>337</sup> Macao, ‘Chi siamo’, <http://www.macaomilano.org/spip.php?rubrique44> (28/03/2017)

<sup>338</sup> Isola Art Center, ‘Who we are’,

[http://isolartcenter.undo.net//index\\_eng.php?p=1131987010&i=1131987022](http://isolartcenter.undo.net//index_eng.php?p=1131987010&i=1131987022) (28/03/2017)

<sup>339</sup> Facebook, ‘Fack > Forum di Arte e Cultura Kontemporanea’,

<https://www.facebook.com/fackfestival/?fref=ts> (28/03/2017)

<sup>340</sup> TAAK, ‘The Commons’, [http://taak.me/?nk\\_project=the-commons&lang=en](http://taak.me/?nk_project=the-commons&lang=en) (28/03/2017)

<sup>341</sup> Isola Art Center, loc. cit.

<sup>342</sup> La Tabacalera, ‘About’, <http://latabacalera.net/about-la-tabacalera/> (28/03/2017)

- 'commons', 'tooling'

"*The Commons* focuses on two unused sites near the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague during the art manifestation Yes Naturally (March 15 to August 31, 2013). One is a small wooded area, a remnant of the former dune forest, bordering the garden of the museum and, a short distance away, an empty tower, built by architect JJP Oud in 1969, considered a monument of modernist architecture. The strip dune forest is synonymous for nature commonly shared since centuries and the tower for enormous potential of vacant buildings in the current economic crisis. *The Commons* takes the two sites – one is part of nature, the other a cultural artefact – and mirrors them by constructing a platform in the woods that is the same size as the footprint of the tower. This physical platform is intended as a conceptual platform for the exchange of knowledge by participants and visitors to the exhibition. Together with visitors and locals alike *The Commons* experiments and works out ideas for the functioning of a 'commons' in current times. The spatial interventions developed will focus on the unique qualities and potential of the Tower of JJP Oud. The Tower of JJP Oud, being temporarily renamed the *Commons Tower*, functions as a conceptual framework and engine for the development of a new public function for this building. In collaboration with a group of sympathizers and future users, cultural and social organizations and private initiatives, a project plan will be developed with the intention to acquire and maintain the property. The final proposal will include a business plan, an organization and management structure, a program design and plans for a sustainable use of the tower. This plan will be submitted at the end of August the current owner of the tower and the city."<sup>343</sup>

"*We Are the Time Machines: Time and Tools for Commoning* (*Composing the Commons*)

How can artworks and other activities taking place through art institutions be shared as knowledge—embodied and practical—for the **commons**? How should art and art institutions act if they intend to practice the **commons**, rather than only reflect on it? More specifically, how can an exhibition, the most prominent form of public sharing by art organizations, work toward building—and sustaining—the **commons**?

*We Are the Time Machines: Time and Tools for Commoning* responds to these questions by "**tooling**": an active form of composing **tools** for, about, and of the **commons**. It experiments with ways to develop and present **commoning tools** by reworking, recreating, and reenacting artworks alongside research projects and other encounters. This experimentation includes making time—especially "reproductive" time for things like study and conversation—which are considered a fundamental condition for **commoning**. As such, the exhibition runs for an extended period of five months and includes rooms that accommodate open processes of such time-making hinging on the embrace of different life rhythms in common. It thereby marks the culmination of *Composing the Commons*, the research trajectory for Casco's program since 2013, and articulates Casco's position after its first 25 years.

We embark on the **tooling** process with a selection of artworks, research, and other past moments from Casco, focusing on the last three years. For this undertaking, a Study Group is formed, consisting of members of the Casco team and its communities, with other collectives and individuals invited to contribute. [...] *We Are the Time Machines: Time and Tools for Commoning*

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<sup>343</sup> TAAK, 'The Commons', [http://taak.me/?nk\\_project=the-commons&lang=en](http://taak.me/?nk_project=the-commons&lang=en) (28/03/2017)

also implies the actual transformation of how Casco as an organization works. Inspired by *Site of Unlearning (Art Organization)* Casco's ongoing engagement with Annette Krauss, the exhibition intends to shift the notion and function of the office, along with rethinking the exhibition space. Production and management tend to make up the brunt of any office's activity, including Casco's. Through the exhibition, Casco works toward the abolition of this type of office. Instead, it creates a space that cuts across both office and exhibition where the activity of collective study, reproductive labor, and co-management are encouraged. [...] Common resources as non-proprietary and those co-managed by communities form a basis for the **commons**.<sup>344</sup>

#### *"Spatial Practices and the Urban Commons"*

In the view of the recent unparalleled scale of urban expansion, issues of living together, the urban **commons**, and how to create discursive, agonistic, democratic spaces have become subjects of outstanding importance. In the past century, we have seen an ever-growing number of people move to the cities: more than half of the world's population live there now, and continuously add to the sprawling margins of the urban settlements while also creating new ways of living. [...] The **commons** will be one of the most important principles we will keep coming back to during this project. Many urban movements today have lost confidence in The State. The concept of the **commons** has been developed from an anti-capitalist standpoint, and against the effects of neoliberalism. It promises participatory self-governance, regaining control over the means of our own reproduction, and offers an alternative in a wide range of areas, including food and water supply, housing, public places, health-care, child and elderly care, and even scientific knowledge, climate change, wikipedias, cultural treasures, and so on.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Casco, 'We Are the Time Machines: Time and Tools for Commoning , Project', <https://cascoprojects.org/we-are-the-time-machines-time-and-tools-for-commoning> (28/03/2017)

<sup>345</sup> Tenderpixel, 'Urban Commons', <http://www.tenderpixel.com/exhibitions/urban-commons> (28/03/2017)

## Appendix C - Interviews, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

The interviews were conducted on-site, and anonymity was requested by some of the respondents. Audio can be shared on request. 1-2 hours length.

- Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10th November 2016
- Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 10th November 2016
- Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Female, 10th November 2016
- Interview with a MNCARS partner conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 11th November 2016
- Interview with an employee of MNCARS conducted on-site by the writer, Male, 11th November 2016

### Main questions addressed during the interviews

- Could you explain the institutional asset of the Museum and how it affects its operation and management?
- What do you understand as the background of this new development, both economically, politically and culturally? How do you locate the museum institution within those crises?
- The Museum presents itself as a museum of the commons. What are the characteristics related to this new paradigm? How does it affect the practice? Is an external recognition needed or not?
- How is the commons implemented in the collection presentation?
- How has it being perceived? Does it affect the visitors' experience?
- What about the temporary exhibitions?
- Why was the paradigm of the commons chosen as a tool to rethink the Museum?
- Why was the archive chosen as the first field of experimentation?
- The seminar Archives of the commons was held in December 2016. After almost an year, how would you evaluate the process so far?
- What does it mean for an institution to internalize and commit to a long-term to critical and experimental ways of working as concern its relationship with artists, publics and itself?

## Appendix D - Transcript Interview Giorgio de Finis

Main interview, conducted on-site by the writer, 19th August 2016. 1 hour length.

- Can you briefly explain the creation, the motivations, and the initial objectives of MAAM?

MAAM is the acronym of the Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove (Museum of the Other and the Elsewhere) in the mestizo city of Metropoliz. A pretentious name like all other museums, since it was founded with the specific intent to compete with the MAXXI and MACRO. It took thus an acronym of the same level. The MAAM was born from a project carried out the previous year together with Fabrizio Boni and hundreds of participants called Space Metropoliz, an ethnographic and cinematic construction site. The film was a bit a Trojan horse that aimed at going inside this former factory occupied by migrants and precarious workers, to tell their need and to trigger a sort of dreaming process, to create through art, through this Situationist device a moment that was not directly related to survival and profit. We aimed at creating a place of freedom, like the one artists have, and at sharing it with the inhabitant of Metropoliz. We wanted to make a non-useful activity, not directly dependent on the fulfillment of a need but rather a more open and free device. The game was to try and live a common and collective experience. For a year we did this very unnaturally, a top-down project. We initially knocked on the factory door and proposed our crazy idea to build a rocket to go to the moon. We explained the motivations regarding the moon, the rocket, and the references in the project. The moon is the largest public space of the earth system, perhaps the only public space left. According to international treaties, on the moon private property is prohibited and it is not allowed to carry weapons. It seemed a good place to start, a blank sheet where everyone is encouraged to write their own rules, to rethink the behaviors imposed by society. A utopian space, to a certain extent. While the Metropoliz more than a utopia represents an heterotopias, a place where to make things happen. The project required much of hard work but the rocket was finally built, and together with the moon they became a dream of the inhabitants as well. At the beginning they couldn't care less. Even if everybody likes the moon, the idea of escaping is not so much in their strings. The inhabitant of Metropoliz are fighters, they are people who resist and have no fear, they violate the law serenely certain of their right to survive, which I agree with. So the idea of take everything and leave was not for them. They accepted the game and understood what we wanted to do, even if it slightly bothered them. In the film you can see all the process but the most problematic and difficult aspects were left outside given that the idea of the project was to tell a story with a happy ending, which actually was. It deliberately had to be an edifying tale thus it represented the extract of all the good and successful things occurred. In the end, however, after a year of work and effort on the rocket came out and we were both asked to stay. Fabrizio after a year of free

labor and an additional year and a half of editing, decided not to stay, while I proposed this new game that focused not anymore on the cinema but on the situation of the contemporary art museum. A museum of contemporary art that started from the trivial observation that after a year of work we already had a first collection of space hulks, including the rocket. Moreover, the museum in the contemporary city the highest place, the excellence that the city built to celebrate itself. The slum instead is the lowest point, the dust that you want to hide under the carpet, that the city does not want to see and does not want to be seen. Combining these two extreme points seemed like a very interesting thing. What's more, in the previous experiment art proved to be discipline that had given better results. I think the struggle of art and of many experiences similar to the MAAM is to infinitely multiply the number of alternatives against the unique thought that governs the entire world with the same rules. To me this is art at its best, creating and multiplying diversity. Since Space Metropoliz aimed at the moon, which at least for us is by definition unattainable, it did not give rise to hopes that could have been betrayed. It was thus free from any possible disappointment. After the first year of working together, I had the heart to take more risks and start a project that aimed at transforming the space and give some hope. In this sense, the museum was conceived as a barricade, as a tool to defend the occupation and the rights of its inhabitants, because we know that if one evicts two hundred people from an occupied space it will come out in the media as a footnote, while if you destroy five hundred artworks is different. The idea so is that these walls can protect by bulldozers. It is true that you can evict the people anyway and keep the walls, and this was also one of the proposals made by Salini, the owner of the building. But it is not a viable option for us. The constructor additionally is denouncing everyone. In May the trial against Metropoliz has began and according to court records it will soon come up to all the artists involved. For me, it is a time bomb what they are bringing into their house, because I think to denounce five hundred artists, including bug names such as Pistoletto, is not a smart move. Then one's decides. It is also a matter of responsibility. If you are the owner of an occupied space and someone dies there, and you have not reported anything, you can be accused of connivance with that situation. So let's say that on one hand is more than understandable that the owner decides to undertake a series of legal steps to remove at least the responsibility from him. However, the trial now is in a more serious phase. Salini is always in the court and he is keen to reclaim his space. It's money.

- How would you describe the relationship between the MAAM and the city of Rome?

No, there have never been any negotiations. The municipality of Rome has the MAAM among its touristic website. There is the MAAM along with all the other museums. But in practice, the municipality should evacuate the space. So there is a contradiction, as always happens. The recognition comes from the art world, however, and from the fact that the MAAM is known worldwide. We have documentaries that have been made about the MAXXI-MAAM comparison. The Castello di Rivoli donated an artwork to the Museum, and has signed a two-year agreement of cooperation with the MAAM. There is

a recognition but councilors still visit the MAAM only after being discharged. We do not knock on any door of politics. As well as organizations such as Blocchi Precari Metropolitani, we are here because we think the State and the institutions do not meet the needs of the people who live here, and do not respond to the cultural demands of the city. I think the MAAM is quite a sting for a museums like the Macro, which is currently defining its cultural offerings by subcontracting its activity to external galleries. Since it does not have money anymore, dealers have to pay exhibitions and catalogs. The Macro which should be a public good, a public institution is now run like a private gallery or a shop. So much so that many galleries in Rome also ended their physical stores to only rely on the online presence. In my opinion this represents an interesting dilemma. Can it still be considered a public museum when is by and large funded by privates? To me it's a little a fraud. Besides being no longer public, it cannot offer a more objective reflection of what the art world has to offer. If they let gallerists in, who obviously have their own interests to pursue, it is evident that this is a bit fraudulent, and it is clear that there will never be room for a young emerging artists or exhibitions that take into account experiences and concepts that have not been recognized yet by the market . So this is anything but marginal reflection that the MAAM aims at tossing at the outside world from its home. We still are an urban device, it is not that we are making the interests of only that two hundred people, although there is of course very much to heart. A project like the MAAM wants to talk to everybody, talk to the city of Rome first, and then somehow to society. The MAAM is born with the desire to remind everyone that if institutions do not work, it doesn't mean that we cannot reinvent the. On this purpose, the MAAM is a self-appointed museum, firstly named by me as its curator, a role that I recognize precisely because I consider the MAAM an art project, and then it was embraced by hundreds of artists, activists, residents, and all those who now support it.

- Do you think that with the settlement of the new municipal council this situation might change?

Now we will see what happens with this new administration. Luca Bergamo knows the MAAM and invited us to the Bozar when he worked there. Let's see if now that he is the Councilor for Culture, he will have a slightly different eye towards this experience than during the previous administrations. However, these are things that we will evaluate. He may also embrace the project ideally, but it still remains a private property, so in order to solve the problem the city should negotiate with the owner.

- How would you describe the people that visit the MAAM?

The audience that participates to the activities of the MAAM is heterogeneous, but not too much. It's definitely made of artists, collectors, professionals, and art enthusiasts but then there is also a small part of the people and activists from the other curious occupations, or people from the neighborhood who heard that there is a museum nearby their home. Of course, the artistic nature of the project affects the audience composition. If one is not interested in contemporary art, he may come and visit once or twice, but then he wouldn't come back again. The people that come to the MAAM to see the art are

by and large the same people who go to Biennales, museums, and galleries, and it is not obvious that they had already been in an housing occupation or even in certain parts of the eastern outskirts of Rome. So coming here they are able to discover the art but they may also discover what the housing crisis is. Nevertheless, it is a particular audience. Inhabitants in turn may look at someone as an enemy but within the MAAM framework they interact, there is a mutual discovery. There is an encounter. I always say that this is a bit like the Star Wars café, where everyone leaves the gun out and looks at the other benevolently. This of course does not break down all the boundaries that exist. However, it allows the people to leave their social roles and talk and interact with the other without worrying about the in its pocket, as it frequently occurs on public transport. Also, that's someone's home. Some of the residents have artworks inside the houses. There is a group of people who has organized their kitchens to welcome the visitors, others ask for subscriptions to raise funds for Metropoliz.

- What kind of economic structure has the MAAM?

Within MAAM the use of money in all its forms has been banned. Then, the residents can ask for subscriptions, a micro-economy also for legal fees and in-house works. It could be managed better. Maybe with time it'll get better, we could reflect on this aspect. All the artists and us who work at the project work voluntarily, not because I think that artistic and cultural work should not be paid or that they are not entitled to receive funding but because in this situation to seek and obtain public funding would put us all in an ambiguous situation.

- Even after five years of work?

Always. Even after five years there are still people trying to understand why we are here wasting out time, what is the hidden agenda, without understanding that the very fact that this project proves to be successful and that it is able to present a range of different solutions is already a success, and makes us very happy. Money pollutes everything, it does not help. So we stay away. But this does not mean that we do not use it otherwise. The museum is surely open to anyone who claims to be an artist, everyone can bring his artwork, which will then be discussed at the weekly meetings. It is also true however that I try to bring in artists with a high value in the art sector, because this is the protection. The protection against the real estate market is the symbolic and material value of the artworks on the walls. In this way we can quantify many artists' market value and then also quantify potential damages. We are interested in this artworks' value because it represents our protection, but none of them can actually enter the market. When entering the MAAM, works are dead for the market. This is like using money as a judo wrestler uses his opponent's anger to make it fall. We need this to fight the logics that transform the city into what it is today. We have given ourselves this rule.

- How is the MAAM structured?

There is a permanent call for artists to come and give their contribution. The artwork has to be as much site-specific as possible. The MAAM is not an empty basement. The

main idea is to come and confront its everyday reality, the fact that on one hand it is urban wreck, an abandoned sausage factory, and on the other a multiethnic housing occupation, and an art project. The artist comes here, discusses, and then of course works with its own language, media, and themes. But the MAAM is not a neutral place. It is therefore more useful to have a site-specific approach. Then on Tuesday we have an assembly with the artists, activists, and residents. Assemblies are never attended by hundreds of people, those are for larger and more important political issues, such as the trial. Usually there are ten to fifteen inhabitants, together with the artists and the activists. There is a permanent group, but people also change every now and then. And then there are artists who come just once in order to pass the 'evaluation' of the work and talk about their gift. Because at the end the gift must also be accepted, it cannot be imposed. It was a bit difficult to explain to the inhabitants that one cannot accept or modify an artworks on the basis of on his personal taste, that the artist has its own language. It was a bit hard but now these are old times. So there is the will to welcome and understand the artist and its work the works, and the meeting is also the occasion to listen to his personal and artistic motivations. Then the artist comes to the MAAM and realizes it. Initially, the artworks presentation took place every three months during solstices and equinoxes, so for example the first day of spring a party was made to present all of the works done during the winter. Now, with the weekly openings it became less evident, because everyone comes and sees what is there.

– How is it organized the museum's documentation?

At first, it was very rigorous. I did it myself. I used to document and film everything, because I wanted to narrate the experience in a documentary form, as I always do since I am also a director. After two years of laborious work, I realized that such a documentary would have never happened, that it would have been an infinite boredom. Just Imagine listening to five hundred different artists talking about their work while visually watching their realization. So now I take pictures and collect the materials that the artists donate. We use the Facebook page as a diary. Then we produced a first catalog and soon a second will be released. The first catalog focused on the artworks because I wanted to emphasize the idea of the collection and make it clear that this was not a museum just because we named it so, that there is an actual collection. Life disappeared from the images in this catalog. However life is a characterizing element of the MAAM, a living and inhabited museum. So now that we have passed this stage, in the second catalog there is no need to emphasize this aspect and we will be able to have a catalog with the people, the life, the artists backstage. There will be represented the life beyond the artworks. Then we also did many other books, like Space Metropoliz, which had many theoretically dense contributions, or Exploit, a big book published on the occasion of the last Expo in Milan. I still have an idea on how to make a movie out of MAAM, a single story filmed with a steady-cam, still very staged, and played by the inhabitants and the artists. But I'm not really working on it, it's an idea that sooner or later I'll put into practice. Now we have a daily routine and more urgent issues to address.

- How would you describe the relationship between the MAAM and political movements in the city?

At first it was quite tiring, but without the approval from the activist we would have never entered Metropoliz, nor with Space Metropoliz, nor with the MAAM. At first we were welcomed with open arms and a little mistrust by some, while there was so much enthusiasm coming from others. With the MAAM initially there were problems regarding the fact that it was an art museum and that artists were involved, together with their egos. A thing that was also appealing to a certain extent. Moreover, another issue was that the MAAM was not an identity museum. The MAAM did not want to talk about the struggle, we wanted to defend those rights and those struggles but not celebrate them. We didn't want to be didactic or at service of the political movement as in the past. To me the artist is the power that one has to be able to use even when he says inappropriate things, or thing one does not like. When an artist comes along and offers you to make a praying room, even if one is against all religions or if he thinks religion should be a private thing, he must also accept the artist's vocation, the theme he wants to address. So let's say there were a lot of fights in the assembly, lots of discussions and negotiations. It is always a triangulation: Metropoliz, the housing movement, the MAAM. It has always been a very challenging reality, but there is always the desire to overcome conflicts. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. Lately, however, I think some major steps were done and we live together in love and harmony. I think everyone understands the reason why we are here, the artists were able to take part to the protests with their artworks, a thing that in the past would have never been possible. But once we start communicating and make things clear, then we work in agreement. Artists are there to help both the inhabitants and the activists, and I appreciate their work. I often think political movements should be more fluid. Art can also help in this regard, making them more flexible. The MAAM is shocking. No one both from the State that from the movements would have expected such an instrument. They have entered the point of being amazing, and I think this is a triumph of art rather than the MAAM.

- How sustainable is in the long term a project like the MAAM?

The projects are based on the fact that they are made together, thus the MAAM has the potential to be sustainable for life. If one wants to make a dinner and everyone brings something, this could be organized every day. But if one has to always cook everything alone for a hundred of people, the third night will stop doing it. The MAAM is a collective project so it just works, it has no problems in this regard. Then as we support us individually it is another thing, even delicate. In my case, for years I have spent my days here, without a salary, it can be exhausting.

- Do you think that at this point of the process there may be room for a discussion concerning the remuneration and organization of work?

No, not here. There cannot be. I think it would be even wrong. Perhaps it is also wrong that it occurs in places such as the Macro. I'm not talking about one's individual destiny and struggle, this is of course legitimate. Each one finds its way and its compromises. I'm talking about the public good. The Macro has no chance to get money from the State. It has passed the idea that culture is useless, or even that it may be too troublesome since it promotes critical thinking. So it is clear that the only way to go on is to collectively organize to make it work. I am sure that if the Macro was run as the Valle or the MAAM, thus giving the keys to artists, and even with a committee, a shared direction, and other experts since it obviously is a public museum, it will work. Even with the will of the individual artists. Major temporary exhibition costs, so why do not prefer groups exhibitions, seminars, meetings, and try to shoot down costs, try to choose a different way of doing things. I don't think that art to be valuable has to cost billions. Now the Macro is dead, it is a place that produces nothing. Even the café has been closed because there are no visitors, do you understand what I mean? It's a contradiction. In the Valle there were always lots of people. I think a place such as the Macro would explode as well. I'm sure. Artists, curators, professionals today almost go into strangers' basement because it works, because it is honest, because it does not follow the logics of the system. There is a great desire to go out from these stifling structures, even just to re-embrace them later. What's more, artists are pushed to look at each other as enemies because, while in the MAAM the artists share their space, their tools, they work collectively. In a gallery this won't be as possible, it is a different dimension of freedom. Then if an artist had to choose between working in the MAAM or being crowned as the best artist of the planet, probably he would choose the second option. Maybe not everyone, but many I think would. But at the end this is not possible. Moreover, the artists that support the MAAM do not form a collective that has to reflect on its own dynamics or how to and not to enter the market. We had contributions from people like Pistoletto a well-established artist. I think that everyone has to reflect on this in a personal way. There are artists who totally reject the market as the Guerrilla SPAM collective, or who prefer to leave their works around the city for people to find, and artists who perfectly fit into the system. They make exhibitions in major museums but still have the desire to participate because they believe that people should not die or disappear because they are poor. These are personal choices. Everyone autonomously decides how to position himself in the art world. The important things are that the MAAM mission and principles are clear and respected. At first we also let two galleries support two artists as regards their works expenses, but then inhabitants and many others didn't like it and we stopped. In this sense, to think that an artist should autonomously support all his expenses even when he does not have the possibilities, I think is problematic in its own way. There many elements to think about. Should we only invite established artists who can afford to work for free? On the other hand, it is also true that it is possible to produce artworks that costs less. I think it is important to face reality. In the end it is a matter of feasibility. I believe we should not suppose that everyone should be willing to support and finance everything an artist wants to create. At MAAM one can do whatever he wants and reach whatever he can. This is also a good lesson.

## Appendix E - Additional images from MAAM



Fig. 12 Metropoliz entrance. The yellow sign is *Premio Città Etica 2018* by Già Crick Piacentini. It recites: "Touristic signal. Metropoliz. Winner of contest Città Etica 2018 (Ethical City 2018) On the walls artworks by Alice Pasquini and Borondo © Fabiola Fiocco



Fig. 13 Some of the rooms of the MAAM © Fabiola Fiocco



Fig. 14 The play- and study-room for the children living in Metropolis with artwork by Gio Pistone, Saandrino Drago, Alice Pasquini, and Veronica Montanino. © Fabiola Fiocco



Fig. 15 Above, a guided tour led by one of the artists of the MAAM. Below, the praying room realized by Gianfranco D'Alonzo © Fabiola Fiocco



Fig. 16 The MAAM café run by the inhabitants. Artworks on walls by Lucamaleonte and G. Scriboni. Among the others, in the pictures there are some bright baskets by Giovanni Albanese (above), and *Scemo che legge* by Mario Cuppone (below). © Fabiola Fiocco