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The ST campus: a common

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plan

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In this presentation, I propose to return to the notion of the Commons in economics, and to show how it seems to me to be useful for thinking about the governance of a decarbonizing campus.

1. I return to the difficulty that economics has in grasping the question of natural limits... the word "difficulty" is an understatement, because in fact it's more a question of a form of epistemological impossibility.
2. I define the concept of the "common" (revived by Elinor Ostrom in the 2000s).
3. I show how the ST campus is particularly well suited to being treated as a "common".

Economy versus Nature

Economics is in trouble with the question of nature for deep-seated reasons:

1- linked to the separation of nature and culture (which concerns the whole of Western modernity and all the social sciences)

2- linked to the simultaneous development of economics as a science and capitalism

3- linked to the very abstract construction in economics of what I'm going to call the "main stream", which is based on a disembodied approach to the analysis of the behaviour of an individual - homo oeconomicus - outside society and outside nature, and immersed in a strictly competitive universe.

Economy versus nature

(a) The question of disembedding

Our socio-economic system is characterized by a continuous process of economic disengagement from the social and environmental spheres.

The aim of the economic process is the unlimited accumulation of wealth: society and nature must, in a way, be bent to this goal of unlimited accumulation.

This is achieved by transforming the "factors of production" into commodities

In this way, we can say (with Karl Polanyi) that **land, labor and money are considered fictitious commodities**. This poses a major social difficulty, and presupposes the construction of institutions that allow us to act "as if" money, nature and labor were fictitious commodities.

This institutional fiction has disastrous political consequences: for Polanyi, liberalism leads to fascism (in opposition to the myth linking the market to democracy).

Economy versus nature

(a) *The question of disembedding*

“The crucial point is this: **labor, land, and money are essential elements of industry; they also must be organized in markets;** in fact, these markets form an absolutely vital part of the economic system. **But labor, land, and money are obviously not commodities; the postulate that anything that is bought and sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue** in their regard. In other words, according to the empirical definition of a commodity they are not commodities. [...] [But] **no society could stand the effects of such a system of crude fictions even for the shortest stretch of time unless its human and natural substance as well as its business organization was protected against the ravages of this satanic mill.**”

(Polanyi, 1944 (2001), pp. 75–77, emphasis added).

Economics versus nature

(b) *Homo oeconomicus* and the self-regulating market system

The discourse of economics has accentuated this phenomenon by **reducing economics to a pure economy of exchange.**

- The individual is seen as a *Homo oeconomicus*: a calculating machine guided solely by self-interest (instrumental rationality).
- Economic space = market system. The individual is conceived as outside society, outside nature... he never meets anyone else (atomization).

This **has two serious consequences:**

1. The pursuit of maximizing self-interest knows no limits by definition (known as the non-satiation hypothesis).
2. The only important point is the existence of private property rights: only private property gives existence to goods and services. **What is without property is free and considered non scarce.**

Consequently ... "Anyone who believes that exponential growth can continue indefinitely in a finite world is either crazy or an economist" (Kenneth Boulding)

Economy versus nature

(c) *Generalization of the "proprietary" ideology*

In this logic of accumulation through the competitive market, the aim of the productive system is to generate profit in order to accumulate the means of production.

The principle is therefore to produce efficiently, and to ensure this efficiency, individuals must have in mind the preservation of their property: **the principle of private property must therefore be generalized!**

Staying on the subject of natural resources, this presupposes the ability to extend property rights throughout society without limit.

It is the role of the state to ensure this "privatization" of the living.

This began with **the enclosure movement in England in the nineteenth century**, which aimed to abolish the "commons", i.e. communal grazing land, and provoked major social upheavals (rural exodus, the speenhamland system... the beginning of the proletariat).

This **continued throughout the twentieth century... particularly in the neoliberal perspective: Coase's theory, Alchian, Alchian and Demsetz, Jensen and Meckling ...**

The role of the neo-liberal state is to distribute property rights and thus make natural space marketable.

The economy versus nature

(d) externality, substitutability and carbon sinks : market extension

From this point of view, the problem of pollution, and in particular carbon emissions, is addressed through an extension of market logic.

This extension is based on two concepts:

- Externality
- technical-natural substitutability

Carbon emissions are considered as a negative externality of our energy consumption. It degrades the environment without affecting the well-being of any particular place. **So we need to better distribute property rights so that those affected can negotiate directly with the polluters (let's put a price on it!).**

This is the principle of Coase's theorem, adapted by **John Dales with the "pollution rights market"**. We assume that everyone is entitled to their quota of rights to pollute clean air. We can then buy/sell pollution rights in a flexible way.

This "market" logic extends to what can be used to "clean" the air – this is the principle of technical substitutability/environmental scarcity.

In an infinite extension of this market logic, carbon can be sequestered, land can be exchanged for additional rights to pollute.

The return of the commons

(a) *The crisis of proprietary ideology*

This limitless extension of the logic of instrumental rationality and economic calculation poses major difficulties:

1. Increasing dissolution of the idea of society, solidarity and community... rise of social violence and the extreme right...
2. Fundamentally unequal nature of this proprietary logic: it excludes from the market the majority of the population, the poorest, who often depended on non-privatized common spaces to live (forests, natural spaces, common agricultural plains...).
3. This proprietary logic is marked by short-termism: the logic of monopolization and calculation **is marked by a cognitive bias that limits the calculation of interests to one's own time horizon**. It is therefore highly ineffective in the fight against pollution, climate, extinction of diversity...

The return of the commons

(b) Crisis of the regulatory state

The other alternative is normally the regulatory voice which "withdraws" natural elements from the market, prohibiting their use...for example, prohibiting diesel vehicles...

This regulatory alternative, however, is :

- highly discredited in the eyes of mainstream economists, who see it as a step backwards for freedoms: how can we be sure that this spoliation does not diminish the general good, since individuals cannot exercise their preferences through the market?
- This alternative presupposes "fewer rights" and is immediately suspect and denounced by society (yellow vests, farmers.... and tomorrow, no doubt, diesel engines).
- This alternative would have presupposed strong nation-states, unaffected by the principle of free trade, which makes national standardization extremely difficult.

The return of the commons

(c) OSTROM's intuition versus Coase / Dales/Hardin

In her pragmatist-inspired work, **Elinor OSTROM** ("nobel" 2009) proposes starting again from the idea that there are common goods and a capacity to perceive common interests among players.

She is in direct **opposition to Coase, and more explicitly to Hardin (1968)**, an American ecologist, who asserted that when several users have access to the same valuable resource, the result is a "**tragedy of the commons**" to which no technological solution can be found. Using the example of grazing land to illustrate his thesis, Hardin argued that each herder will add one more animal to his herd as long as **it maximizes his personal interest**, neglecting the costs of this activity for the other herders with whom he shares the commons. **The consequence is the depletion and eventual destruction of grazing land. This tragedy can only be avoided by dividing the land into private plots or by state regulation.**

Against Hardin, Ostrom try to proof, on the **basis of empirical, very local studies of solutions based on the reasoned, collective use of resources, and of actors who have resisted the unlimited extension of property rights as the sole solution** to resource preservation: fisheries, common grazing lands, etc., but also the information commons (wikipedia) or the computer commons (free software).

The return of the commons (d) defining the commons

A common can be defined by the existence of three characteristics for a :

1. A "resource" to be preserved, at the heart of exchanges
2. A bundle of rights and duties linked to the use of this resource
3. A collective and democratic system of Governance of the commons

In this sense, **a commons is neither a common good** (such as open air or the ocean) nor a global public good (such as health care), **since it refers to a collective organization.**

The return of the commons (e) *the revolution the commons*

The idea of common management represents a form of revolution / proprietary ideology.

A common **connects several things that had been separated:**

- Political commitment and production
- Consumption and production: sobriety perspective
- The question of **rights** and these of the **needs** ... unlike proprietary ideology, which reserves rights for those who have them and not for those who need them.

This form of organization departs from both a private/merchant solution and one based on public intervention. Not a Market solution, not a state solution.

Above all, **it's a political form that makes the anthropological bet that actors are capable of perceiving the collective interest, that they form a society, and that we are not condemned to the dystopian nightmare of a "society" of homo oeconomicus.**

Common and Cumin

(a) *the science campus as common*

What characterizes *the Cité Scientifique campus*:

- We can consider that the resource to be saved is precisely the open air, and therefore, more pragmatically, (to be defined collectively). **we can minimize our carbon emissions to a strict minimum**
- We can establish **bundles of rights on campus**, based on a study of the constraints of the various users (existence of alternatives in terms of travel, choice of residence, delivery activity, etc.)... and devise systems of assistance and sanctions.
- Finally, we can establish **campus governance around these issues**, based on a collective mobility office.

It's a place with **physical characteristics** (a circumscribed, isolated campus), **political characteristics** (there's a community of users who are undoubtedly committed) **and informational characteristics** (there's a good level of knowledge and technical capabilities) that **make it possible to work together on these issues on a "common base" view.**

Commun and Cumin

(b) interest in the Cumin project: governance and data management

The link with the Cumin project is fairly easy to make:

1. The need to link the construction of a **common ground** with the creation of the database. There is indeed a capacity here to build a knowledge system based on commitment to a common project.
2. A link **needs to be made between the production of data and the willingness of stakeholders to take ownership of the study**. Construction of technical solutions adapted to users' needs; Identify what is needed, including a change in mobility behavior. So without considering that we're talking about technical substitution (it's not just a question of getting around in the same way without polluting, but of getting around in a different way without polluting).
3. Possibility of devising a set of rights - in conjunction with the university - to make this change acceptable and understandable (***for example, we can remember the autonomous bus - a top-down solution that is totally misunderstood***).

Common and Cumin (c) *transferable experience*

The technical and political innovation here is interesting and duplicable:

- A way of asserting that the technological devices that will be needed to move towards decarbonized transport **do not imply replacing carbon with electricity without a change in behavior.**
- However, **behavioral change presupposes that we are very quick to make assumptions about the governance of this change**, and therefore about the link between this governance and technological innovations. A way of demonstrating the close link between technological innovation and political innovation. Technological innovation requires a kind of democratic form if it is to be effective and widespread (unless we rely on the market solution... with its exclusionary effects). Off-ground technological innovation misses its target (e.g. autonomous vehicle CS campus).
- Possible **redeployment to other campuses, industrial sites, cities or neighborhoods...** with the identification of what a common ground implies. And it's a very profound movement to rediscover the local political capacities of a community or group. Very strong experience in Italy (**the beni comuni movement**)

The Socio-Economics of the Commons Chair



- The University of Lille has decided to fund chairs around the SDGs.
- This chair study the production/consumption alternatives models and is directly linked to ***UNO Sustainable Development Goal 12***: sustainable consumption and production. Secondarily (through questions of production organization), it is linked to goal 8 - Decent work and sustainable growth.
- The Chair is associated with the HDF Social and Solidarity Economy Chair and the Institute for Territorial Renewal. Targets for 2023: (1) A research seminar on the commons, with contributions from national and international specialists (2) RIODD 2023 International Congress "Change or collapse" (3) Incubation of thesis/post-doc projects.

The Socio-Economics of the Commons Chair

- **Vendredi 23 Février (13/17 – Sdc SH2)**
 - Présentation projet Restez / Emiset
 - Carlo Verzelone : *le commun comme mode de production*
- **Vendredi 22 mars : Journée semaine des transitions (9/13 – espace culture)**
- (Tim Jackson, Alexandre Rambaud, Florence Jany Catrice , Hervé Defalvard, Arnaud Buchs, ...)
- **Vendredi 12 Avril (SDC SH2):**
 - Autour de Anr ETEWI
 - Equipe Segrestin autour de Entreprises à missions/ Modèles alternatifs / eco circulaire
- **Vendredi 24 Mai (SDC SH2) :**
 - Autour du projet PATE ou Cumin ? Ecrin ?
 - Discussion théorique autour de commun et pragmatisme discussion sur la notion de propriété (Sarah Vanuxem / Fabienne orsi)
- **Vendredi 21 Juin 2024 : journée étude « autour du Manifeste travail »**
- (*Meda, ferreras, Coutrot, Cukier, Favereau, De larquier, Guergoat- Larivière, Palier...*)

The Socio-Economics of the Commons Chair

- **Friday, March 22, 2023 - 9H/16h**

- **Espace culture (Cité Scientifique campus Towards a post-growth world**
 - **Count differently, produce differently, live differently**

If we are to succeed in taking a path compatible with the maintenance of authentically human life on earth, we're going to have to build institutions that enable us to know what we value and want to preserve. This is what we'll be discussing at the launch of the "Socio-Economy of the Commons" chair, which will be dedicated to the study of these upheavals in our mode of production and their socio-political implications.

We will open up two perspectives : a reflection on the commons and a reflection on what a post-growth society would look like, notably by taking advantage of the visit of Professor Tim Jackson (<https://timjackson.org.uk/>).

- **9H- 10H30**

- **Alexandre Rambaud** - Care accounting and the philosophy of an anti-capitalist ecology **Florence Jany Catrice** - Towards an ecological and social territorial health index

- **10H45- 12h15**

- **Arnaud Buchs** - (Im)material commons **Hervé Defalvard** - The commons society
 - 12H30 - 13H30 - Cocktail and lunch break

2PM - 4PM

- **Round table discussion on "POST-Growth, living after capitalism".**
 - **With Tim JACKSON**
 - *Director of the [Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity \(CUSP\)](#)*

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