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(Article begins on next page)

# Green Areas: How to Avoid the Tragedy of the Commons

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## Abstract

The growing importance of green spaces in evaluating a city's quality of life and sustainability has prompted us to delve into this topic in this paper. Specifically, we aim to clarify two key distinctions: the difference between public and common goods and the distinction between collectives and aggregates. The first distinction relates to whether a resource is open to all and managed by the state (public goods) or managed collectively but with limitations (common goods). However, we can also examine this differentiation by considering the type of entity utilizing these resources. In the case of public goods, it involves individuals forming an aggregate, whereas for commons, a plural entity must be assumed to effectively manage the resource collaboratively. By exploring these distinctions in detail and examining their implications, this paper seeks to apply them to a common public resource—the green areas within cities. We aim to demonstrate the potential benefits of shifting our perspective on such resources from being considered public to being viewed as common goods.

Keywords: commons; public goods; plural subject

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent decisions to restrict citizen travel have triggered a reassessment of living situations and environments, and, as a consequence, cities. Specifically, there has been significant attention given to green areas (Ingaramo, Negrello, and Robiglio 2020). The increased usage of these spaces during and after the pandemic, as they offer safety due to their openness and suitability for various activities, has prompted a reevaluation of their importance within cities, particularly in areas where apartments are very small. However, maintaining green areas also requires substantial effort and commitment from the cities themselves, often positioning them as public goods. It is precisely these types of assets that, along with private assets, shape the city and thus form its building blocks.

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Nevertheless, there is potential to rethink the management of green areas, viewing them as potential commons (Hardin 1968; Ostrom 1990; Shiva 2002). In this paper, we aim to distinguish common goods from public goods, highlighting the different criteria used to define them and the specific characteristics they must possess to be considered as such.

Rather than dwelling on the ownership-based distinction between the two types of property, which would focus on the question “who owns this property?”—a technical and straightforward matter determining the number of owners—we will instead concentrate on “who manages the good?”. While the definition of property may seem to encompass management, we find it useful to distinguish between the two concepts. The management relationship we wish to emphasize is not about an individual managing their own property or that of others (such as a managing director of someone else’s company) but rather the relationship among different individuals using a property, whether it be their own or that of a third party, and their relationships to places (de Certeau 2011).

We can also differentiate between public and common goods by considering this second aspect, which introduces subjectivity not provided by the classical paradigm of interpreting common goods. This recognition allows us to acknowledge that ownership can be public while management remains common. By doing so, we obtain a more comprehensive interpretation of the commons, applicable to the city context in general and green areas in particular.

To achieve this, we will focus on the subjects capable of managing and benefiting from various types of goods, utilizing the distinction between aggregate and plural subject proposed by Margaret Gilbert. This distinction enables us to explore the possibility of an alternative subject, genuinely collective and not merely the sum of its constituent individuals. This concept becomes instrumental in understanding the sustainable management of common resources and goods. Economic and sociological studies have already addressed the principles necessary for proper commons management (Ghorbani and Bravo 2016; Nordhaus 2014; Ostrom 2000). We will examine how many of these principles align with those used by Gilbert in defining her pivotal concepts of plural subject and joint commitment, which are of particular interest and assistance when considering green areas as commons.

As a premise, we should also clarify that our intent is normative, as we aim to describe a potential paradigm shift in the interpretation of common goods and their subjects—a shift that we believe is necessary for enhancing practices. Consequently, we do not intend to describe how individuals behave when faced with common goods; instead, we aim to provide a framework that, if adopted, could lead to changes in the behavior of people involved.

## 2. Public and Common Goods: Not Just a Question of Exclusivity

The distinction of goods within the discipline of economics is traditionally based on two criteria: rivalry and exclusivity (Blaug 1985; Musgrave 1959; Samuelson 1954; Sandmo 1989). A private good, also known as an economic good, is both rival and excludable. For instance, a bicycle is rival because only one person can use it at a time, and after purchasing it, the owner can choose to exclude others from using it. On the other hand, public goods are the opposite; they are neither exclusive nor rival. An example of a public good is night lighting, where many people can benefit from it simultaneously, and it is impossible to prevent anyone from enjoying it. Non-excludability can arise due to technical reasons, like with lighting where it is impossible to exclude certain users, or economic reasons, where exclusion may be technically possible but too costly—consider, for instance, a toll system for the use of public arcades in cities.

It's essential to note that a good can become public through political will. For instance, the health care system can be considered a rival and exclusive good, leading to the emergence of a health care market. However, through political choices, it can also be transformed into a public good, accessible to everyone without exclusion and at the same time—thus requiring the state to ensure an adequate number of hospitals, for example.

Common goods are a hybrid of these polarities: they are rival and not (totally) exclusive. The classic example is fishing on the high seas, in that the catch is a rival good (the fish in my net cannot be in someone else's net at the same time), but not excludable, in that everyone can go fishing. In fact, this "everyone" is delimited, in that those living near the fishing spot will mainly go fishing. This limitation comes across more as practical than theoretical, but it highlights the difficulty of using the yardstick of ownership alone to distinguish common goods from other economic goods. Given this definition of the commons and starting from an individualistic and maximizing anthropology as postulated in neoclassical economic science, but also from the perspective proposed by the so-called Austrian School of economics, the "tragedy of the commons" is inevitable. In fact, as Garrett Hardin (1968) states in his seminal article, each individual behaves rationally if he or she tries to maximize their share of the use of a finite common good by offloading the discomfort of scarcity onto everyone else, which leads the good itself to disappear in a short time: if it suits everyone to catch the most fish, the ending is already written (Feeny, Hanna and McEvoy 1996; Acheson 2003).

As pointed out by several critics, the limitation of this description of the commons and Hardin's approach to the problem is that the management of the commons can only take place through private or state initiative, *tertium non datur* (Ostrom 1990; Mattei 2011). We add, and we will show, that this limitation is due to economists' own lack of capacity to think of a plural subject capable of managing commons, and not to the nature of commons themselves.

The contemporary debate on commons has shown how their description by economists is insufficient. First, it should be noted that the notion of commons refers not only to consumption but also to the production and management of the commons itself. Common goods, as Ostrom (1990, 90) points out, are those goods that are managed by a community: more or less large, but never indeterminate. This characterization of commons is not foreign to or in opposition to liberal-capitalist economic thought. The latter is a system that is based on private property but does not say who and how many should be entitled to such property.

As Carlo Lottieri clearly shows, it is possible from the latter perspective to think of and accept commons not as an alternative to property, but instead as a specific form of property itself (Lottieri 2020, 11). The liberalist economic critique of the commons is that it requires inefficient management. For example, following the evolutionist approach by Friedrich von Hayek (1988, 40-64), it is possible to argue that the disappearance of medieval commons<sup>1</sup> is due to their inefficiency and inability to meet the needs of a community as opposed to an organization based on private property and assets—which, however, does not detract from the possibility that in the future cooperative management of property may again be successful (Burns and Dietz 1992).

The reference to property—that is, the question of defining owners—does not fully capture the essence of the commons. Instead, what these refer to can be deduced from the very origin of the term "commons". If one sticks to a strictly economic reading of the phenomenon of the commons,

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<sup>1</sup> The reference to the medieval commons is a classic that finds one of its greatest interpreters in Marx and his theory of enclosures, cf. Karl Marx, *The Capital*, ch. XXIV. For a liberalist reading of the enclosure phenomenon see Lottieri (2020, 65-74). For a reading of the commons in the Middle Ages, through a historical approach, cf. Grossi 1992.

their foundation is shared ownership. But, as Roberto Esposito points out in his work on the concept of *commune*, “the ancient, and presumably original, sense of *communis* must have been ‘one who shares a burden (an office, a charge)’. It follows that *communitas* is the group of people united not by ‘property’, but, precisely, by a duty or debt” (Esposito 2006, XXIII; our translation), which shows that the essence of the commune, and thus also of the commons, is not property, but the joint commitment in administering, managing, and consuming that property. What distinguishes the commons from other economic goods then is not the different answer to the question “to whom does it belong?”, but their reference to a duty, a charge, that different individuals have freely decided to share.

The difficult relationship between the commons and the discipline of economics is due to the latter’s simplistic view of human beings. As Ostrom (1990, 3) notes, “Hardin’s model has often been formalized as a prisoner’s dilemma game”. This means that the decisions to be made by the individual, regarding the commons, should be part of the explanation of rational behavior. What we would like to point out is how the human being postulated by this game, and consequently also by Hardin, is an individual on the one hand untethered from relationships, and on the other hand not autonomous, in the sense that he or she is incapable of expressing positive freedom: “the prisoners in the famous dilemma cannot change the constraints imposed on them” (Ostrom 1990, 7). What the commons instead requires to function is a totally different subject, relational, communicating with other “appropriators” to define management strategies, and autonomous—that is, able to give itself shared rules (Cox, Ostrom, Sadiraj & Walker 2013). The author’s choice to use the term “appropriators”, and not “owners”, goes in the direction we have indicated, emphasizing once again how for the definition of the commons the reference to the concept of ownership is secondary: if owners are those who own an asset, appropriators are first and foremost those who use and manage it. As we shall see, they are a plural subject.

Alternative schools to neoclassical modeling and Austrian evolutionism, such as civil economics, have also emphasized the crucial role of relationality within the economy. For instance, Stefano Zamagni’s work (Bruni and Zamagni 2015) exemplifies this perspective. To describe civil economy, Zamagni himself adopted the term “productivist” to define the inherent logic of the commons. According to Zamagni (2016), the concept of “sum” allows some addends to be null without resulting in a negative outcome. However, in a “produttoria” (multiplication), a single factor being null leads to a null result. This analogy applies to the management of common goods. While neoclassical or Austrian markets allow for totally asymmetric distribution and consumption of economic goods, which is then what is usually arrived at; and thus a summative logic is sufficient for the smooth functioning of the totality, as far as common goods are concerned this is never possible, since their productivist logic implies that the interest of one is always together with others’. Hence, it is no coincidence that Zamagni views the economy itself as a collective good, specifically civil, or in other words, the market should be considered a common good. The operating logic of common goods, therefore, is not based on mere exchange—“I give you something so that you give me something equivalent”—but on reciprocity—“I give you something so that you can give, according to capacity, to others or to me” (Zamagni 2016, 169).

This distinct logic of the commons necessitates a different subject compared to the one proposed by the methodological individualism used by economists. It calls for a pluralistic view of the subject, while still preserving the freedom and autonomy of the individual.

### 3. Aggregates and Plural Subjects: Social Interactions and Shared Values

Having clarified the distinction between public and common goods and highlighted some limitations in interpreting the latter, let's now focus on the subject that manages and utilizes these two types of goods. It is evident that their interpretation is not neutral; rather, it presupposes a specific conception of human beings—how we are and how we should be. Taking a further step, we can examine the individuals who interact with these different types of goods and view them as a single subject performing actions either directed towards public or common goods. In the case of public goods, those who manage and those who utilize the goods are distinct entities: the state (or its smaller delegates like regions or municipalities) acts as the manager and owner, while citizens utilize the goods. On the other hand, with commons, a single entity both manages and utilizes the assets in question.

To gain a better understanding of this concept, we can adopt a distinction within social ontology proposed by Margaret Gilbert (e.g., 1992; 1996). Gilbert differentiates between two types of subjects in her analysis of the social world, namely “aggregate” and “collective” or “plural subjects”. The former refers to a group of people who share one or more characteristics but are independent of one another due to a lack of what we can name “social interaction”, in accordance with sociological theories. For instance, Gilbert's example of a set of people named Susan illustrates this concept (Gilbert 2014, 59). These individuals might never meet, live far apart, and remain unknown to one another. Another reason why people with common characteristics may remain an aggregate is the absence of (explicit) shared values. In such cases, we might have social categories where individuals share socially significant traits, such as skin color, age, or gender, but without sharing values or necessarily interacting socially, they remain an aggregate.

The condition of plural subjects, also known as collectives, is rather different. According to Gilbert's definition, plural subjects engage in joint commitment, wherein individuals commit “as a unitary body to *X*”, with *X* representing various functions like shared values, beliefs, or coordinated actions. This joint commitment can change over time, allowing extended communities to become plural subjects. For instance, individuals who move to a new place and adopt the values and purposes of existing inhabitants exemplify this phenomenon (Gilbert 2014, 189ff). One crucial aspect of joint commitment is that it binds all involved parties, granting each member of the plural subject the right to express grievances or reprimand those who breach the covenant and deviate from the agreed-upon behavior. Gilbert has extended these concepts of joint commitment and plural subjects to explain collective actions in broader communities, like national ones (e.g., Gilbert 1996). Although there are some differences, especially in terms of complexity between, for example, two friends deciding to take a walk together (Gilbert's classic example from 1990) and a nation sharing a common value, this distinction can still be highly useful in analyzing public goods and commons.

When considering public goods, joint commitment is not applicable since each person can use the good individually without considering others. Additionally, using a public good does not create any constraints on other users, nor does it require mutual knowledge, except possibly the awareness of using a public good like street lighting. Hence, the group benefiting from a public good might resemble an aggregate, made of people walking down Fifth Avenue in New York City on November 22, 2005 at 3 p.m. (Gilbert 2014, 59).

Another element that could be added—although this feature is not made explicit by Gilbert—is that a joint commitment seems to imply that at least some people are not part of it. It is true that from

a theoretical point of view, all humanity could act as a single body committed to doing *X*, but this seems to have practical limitations precisely because of the stringent characteristics of the formation of joint commitment. This in turn seems to confirm Elinor Ostrom's observations about the fact that, while common goods refer, through non-excludability, to a theoretically infinite public, in their actual management they instead appeal to an always defined and never too large community. The latter would imply costs that are too high to combat certain inefficiency phenomena such as free riding. A plural subject enlarged to a potentially infinite community would thus be impossible, precisely because what gives meaning to the plural subject is a set of characteristics: namely the formation of social obligation, readiness, and openness of mutual knowledge, which according to us risk to lose meaning if attributed to too large a number of individuals. The definition of plural subject would be weakened to such an extent that it would become meaningless. People fail to join plural subjects when they unilaterally stop their commitment—that is, without the assent of all the individuals who are part of it (or those who have been delegated to give this assent, in the case of more complex groups). In a broad context, where control is made virtually impossible, it is equally impossible to maintain meaningful use of joint commitment and plural subject whose strength seems to lie precisely in the social sanction it entails. We believe it is helpful to explain some forms of social power such that we can expect people to conform to some social norms.

Different, however, seems to be the case with common goods. We have seen how in economics they are treated as not totally exclusive, but rival goods. Given this definition, lest we arrive at the infamous tragedy of the commons, it seems necessary to introduce a virtuous system: a system such that the rivalry of the good does not turn into rivalry among those who use it. One way to promote this conception of the commons seems precisely to focus on the subject who makes use of it, understanding it not as an aggregate but as a proper plural subject. Although individuals may enter the subject at different times, for one to be able to speak of a common good it is essential that those who use it are aware of the norms used to regulate it, are accepted by others as members of the group, and behave line with the accepted norms; essential that they act as a single body that manages and makes use of that good. Only in this way can the formation of a social (not moral) obligation to other appropriators of the common good be promoted (and justified).

In this regard, it is still interesting to note how Gilbert, while not explicitly opposing so-called ontological individualism—the position according to which only individuals exist—nevertheless argues that plural subjects are equally fundamental building blocks of social reality (Gilbert 1992, 427-36). This allows us to admit at least one other possibility in the roster of social agents, namely, not only individuals who act with a view to their own good as rational agents (albeit in the different ways in which it is possible to understand this locution), but also plural subjects: multiple individuals who act as one in conforming to a goal and coordinating their actions to achieve it, even opposing their own immediate desires in order precisely to pursue a goal that would be impossible to reach individually.<sup>2</sup> A relevant example given by Gilbert (2014, 263) is that of two parents who, although they have different individual ideas about their children's upbringing, decide to commit themselves to a common line: the children will not, in the example, be allowed to come home later than midnight. Now, if one of the children transgresses this rule, both parents, including the one who would have liked to adopt a less strict upbringing, are obliged to reprimand him or her, otherwise they would break the joint commitment themselves. The plural subject, therefore, takes on

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<sup>2</sup> On the idea of the community as a central element in order to foster commons see for instance Kohn 2016; Firth, Maye & Pearson 2011.

the shared values and makes them their own. This is the main feature we must keep in mind, along with the possibility of sanctioning those who stray from sharing, which follows directly from it.

But perhaps the best way to understand the usefulness of Gilbert's theory for explaining the commons is to compare some of the principles identified by Ostrom in her explanation of the management of common goods with the characteristics that define the plural subject according to Gilbert's account.

### 3.1. Comparing Gilbert's and Ostrom's principles

When considering the subject who makes use of the commons, an interesting aspect to consider is the rules for proper design and management of common resources (Baland and Platteau 1996). In her analysis with respect to the resources' common management, Elinor Ostrom (1990, 88ff) notes the importance of eight design principles that she calls speculative. By inciting and promoting certain individual actions, those principles make community institutions possible. Ostrom points out that *long-lasting* commons resource management institutions are only possible if certain design principles are adhered to: the more principles adhered to by the institution, the stronger and longer-lived it will be. We report some of these principles, which we believe are of relevance to the specific discourse we are addressing.

The first principle states that the limits of the resource and management must be clearly defined. In our terms, the appropriators must be aware of the object of the joint commitment and this object, as well as its knowledge, must itself be common knowledge among them. There can be no joint commitment without common knowledge, although the reverse is not true. Which implies that it must be well clarified within the management of the common green area what the duties and limits of the appropriators are. For example, the city government in ceding the management of the green space to the citizens of the neighborhood makes it clear from the outset what area it is responsible for, what facilities it can use, and who are those who will participate in the management. Regarding the latter point, one could think of a call by the municipality of the residents of the area who can then voluntarily and freely decide whether to participate in the management of a particular asset.<sup>3</sup>

A second principle refers to collective choice agreements. According to the latter, those affected by the co-participatory rules can participate in the choice of the rules themselves. This, too, is interesting from the perspective of joint commitment because it is the plural subject itself that defines the content of the rules, in a collective choice. The manager(s) must be able to actively intervene in the management rules, which should not be imposed (or not only) from the outside. In our case this implies that the appropriating parties are not only free to meet with each other to discuss the best rules to give themselves, but more importantly that they have a wide sphere of autonomy to give themselves regulations. However, the limits within which management rules should move should be clear, so that in any case it would not be possible to exploit areas to the detriment of other legal norms, for example by making them places of discrimination of other ethnicities or religions. The management rules should concern the management itself and no other aspects such as the use of the area, which should be discussed in advance with the city administration.

Again, another criterion is that of monitoring: for proper management of the common resource, there must be someone to monitor its use and to hold others accountable. This task can be performed by officials or by the appropriators themselves, in the principle reported by Ostrom. Mon-

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<sup>3</sup> There are several case studies showing how this can be practically ruled out. See for instance, Bradley 2015; Coscarello 2012; Giacchè e Rezende Silva 2018; Olivi 2010, 2012.



itoring compliance with the joint commitment by all members of the plural subject is an equally significant element, since in Gilbert's view, the ones who unilaterally leave the joint commitment fail in their joint tasks. In addition, among the principles listed by Ostrom there is the possibility of sanctioning (gradually in proportion to the violation committed) those who violate management rules. We have already seen how (social) sanction is a key element in maintaining the plural subject. Even in the definition of the management of the commons, it would be sufficient to refer to a social obligation, avoiding the introduction of a moral evaluation that would make the bond established between the managers of the good too stringent and would require, at the same time, a justification of an entirely different kind, which we are neither interested in nor is from our point of view in any way necessary. These criteria imply that for proper management of the green area it is not necessary to give the appropriators any special sanctioning power, such as the power to fine those who litter, for example, with the legal problems this may entail. In fact, social pressure is a sufficient internal corrective to the proper management of a common good when all appropriators come to know each other and, for that very reason, can be controlled by every other appropriator. Any serious violations of common management, such as destruction of a part of the green area or use that violates existing legal norms, could be sanctioned by traditional channels, with which the appropriators would still have a constant and direct link.

All these elements reinforce, we believe, the possibility of using the notion of plural subject to understand the management of the commons from a perspective that is not necessarily proprietary, and hopefully show the advantages that can be drawn from a correct interpretation of the subject that can manage these commons and, consequently, from their theoretical relocation. The benefits that would follow would not, however, belong only to theory, but would have a practical effect through their application to specific concrete cases.

To better explain what we mean, we will now focus on the application of the two binomials elaborated, namely, public good/common good and aggregate/plural subject, to the concrete case from which we started in the introduction: green areas in cities. Only in this way, albeit only preliminarily, we will be able to verify the tightness of the interpretation we have provided in the previous two paragraphs.

#### 4. Green Areas: A Ground for the Commons

Green areas in cities are for the most part public assets: areas managed by the municipal government, which everyone can use. Sometimes they are private assets that can be accessed after making a payment: the classic case is condominium green areas that can be accessed only by condominiums, who pay for its maintenance.

What we are proposing here is to rethink the model of green area management starting from the administrative possibilities opened by so-called urban gardens or community gardens (Colding and Barthel 2013; Panzini 2021; Schmelzkopf 1996). On the one hand, these areas allow a declination of property rights close to that required to define an asset as common. They are publicly owned, usually by the municipality, but granted to a group of private citizens, usually to grow vegetables or plants<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, however, these areas demonstrate the fact that what characterizes them is not so much the owner, which in fact remains the public domain, but the pattern of management,

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<sup>4</sup> Urban gardens are a complex phenomenon. Born in the 19th century, it has had various realizations over the years, as gardens to support the poor and workers in industrialized cities, as school gardens, as war gardens, as an expression of the sustainability of cities. On this topic, see Panzini 2021. We, however, do

namely the appropriators who organize among themselves. The idea we propose, therefore, is to rethink green areas as commons managed directly by their users. Of course, we are aware that not all green areas can be treated as commons. However, a greater spread of them could have several positive effects in their maintenance by the users themselves, which in the city mainly implies the need to refer to the inhabitants of the neighborhood where the green area is located.

The inhabitants of a neighborhood, *per se*, can be considered as a simple aggregate, consisting of all those who in each period live in each area of the city. This same fact could, although it needs not, also lead to the formation of a social category, for example related to income. Cities, at least as we know them today, presuppose a division between rich and poor areas, central and suburban neighborhoods, and so on. As we have said, however, even social categories are not necessarily social groups, unless they explicitly share some form of value.

In the vision we are proposing, they might, however, share a joint commitment, consisting precisely in the management of the common good. This could result in a justified normative (and norm-setting) attitude toward those who deviate from proper stewardship of the asset and promote positive examples of common management. Of course, there is no causal correlation between the formation of a joint effort and its success. Rather, what we are asserting is that adopting an explanation such as ours, and assuming the possibility of a plural subject composed of people who can make common interests their own without solely looking out for the maximization of their individual interests according to the trivial meaning of this expression, may be a good way to understand the phenomenon of the commons and to promote a sense of belonging to the community identified by the joint commitment. Currently, the most common joint effort in the management of city green areas seems to be related to the action of volunteers who periodically meet to clean them up. But in this case, we do not reach the status we have described, in particular because of the lack of a fundamental element, that of duration, which is allowed by the formation of established norms suitable for managing the common good. But something different is possible and has been already done.

Our interest in this article was primarily theoretical: we tried to show the need for a paradigm shift that would bring the notion of management to the center and outline the characteristics of the subject that such management implies. But, in the last few lines, we would like to briefly refer to a concrete case that has arisen in the city where we live, Turin, namely Cascina Falchera<sup>5</sup>, which illustrates some of the characteristics we have identified in the previous paragraph. Through a participatory planning process and a 19-year concession entrusted to the Kairòs Consortium, this is a clear case of a commons, born by a lasting joint commitment. Established in the outskirts of the city of Turin, with the help of the city itself, Cascina Falchera is developing numerous agricultural and educational projects to promote environmental education and a closer approach to nature in a community composed mainly of the citizens of the neighborhood and the city. Thus, it can also be thought of as a meeting place for the members who manage it and those who contribute to its growth. Among the numerous projects that Cascina Falchera carries out, it is interesting for our topic an aquaponics cultivation greenhouse, i.e., a practice that combines cultivation (particularly of herbs and salad) without soil (namely hydroponic cultivation) with the breeding of fishes (aquaculture) that contribute to the cultivation itself. The cultivation is managed by the citizens of the Falchera neighborhood and is supported financially by both family training workshops organized by the citizens themselves and by public funds. Through these few lines we can see that Cascina

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not intend to retrace a history of urban gardens, but to propose a theorization of the subject that manages the commons that has a philosophical and economic value and that can find practical realization.

<sup>5</sup> <https://cascinafalchera.it>

Falchera presents the following features: it is owned by the municipality, but managed by the citizens; they are mostly the inhabitants of the neighborhood and they come to know each other, even though they are not established once for all, but can change over time; they form a plural subject in that they have shared interests and goals, and organize themselves in order to achieve them through a joint commitment; the joint commitment is long-lasting and not fully fixed, but can change together with community's goals and further specified.

As a consequence, this is a virtuous example of how it is possible to recover abandoned green areas and use them to promote shared values by individuals who, in participating in this common endeavor, come together to form a plural subject whose members may change over time, just as objectives may be adjusted and thus change over time, but whose existence is the basis for success in maintaining a green area as a common good.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper we analyzed two dichotomies: one internal to economics and law, and the other to social ontology. The first consists of the public good/common good dichotomy. We have seen how the public good is usually defined as non-rivalrous and nonexclusive, while the second as a rival but nonexclusive good, or one with limited exclusivity.

There are, however, different ways of understanding commons and it is possible to identify a critical line that opposes the pessimistic conception of the commons carried by what has been called their tragedy. This critical line is based on a definition of commons that can go beyond mere reference to the notion of ownership and can take on a different definition of the economic subject, not exclusively as an individual, but as a collective: something possible if we focus on the subject who manages and makes use of these goods. This is where the second dichotomy came into play, namely that between aggregate and plural subject. If the former is a collection of individuals who share insignificant features or which provides for neither social interaction nor shared values, the latter presupposes, at least in the Gilbert's view adopted here, the formation of a joint commitment with the assumption of the relevant common values and goals and, above all, with the formation of a real social obligation, which entails a form of sanction for those who, although fully part of the joint commitment, deviate from it, precisely by failing to meet the commitment or part of it, thus entitling the other members to complain about it.

We have used these two dichotomies to understand a valuable yet problematic element of cities: green areas. These, in fact, can be configured as the object of a joint effort that gives rise to a plural subject, with all the characteristics that this necessarily entails, or as public goods whose tragedy is well known to any of their users. Reinterpreting green areas not simply as public goods, but as commons in public ownership, but under the management of a plural subject makes it possible to give them a different reading and to move toward a different management of a part of the cities that is so relevant that it constitutes an element of its evaluation, as green areas are precisely.

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