

Introduction, by Margarita Fernández Mier

I'd like first to thank all the speakers and attendants to this meeting. We should have met in Oviedo and also visit some of the communal use areas of the Cantabrian Mountains in Spring, but couldn't do so due to the global health emergency. We hope the next meeting we hold will be in person, so we all can enjoy more serenity and tranquility.

So, why a second Workshop on the Archaeology of commons? Two years ago, the first meeting on the archaeology of commons was held in Genoa, organized by Anna Stagno. Since then, we have continued working on the subject in recent years, while these kind of studies are becoming gradually relevant at the European level. We deemed important to give them continuity, changing the venue —although we now are forced to do it online through Microsoft Teams—, and contribute with reflections from archaeology to a subject of growing interest in the last years.

The necessary changes in rural policies have brought back reflections on the steps to take with these slightly used rural areas and the fate of their economic future, especially in southern Europe. Aware as I am of the different realities between the North and South of Europe, it is very difficult for me to dissociate from the complex reality of the South, so my perspective is always informed by that point of view. Some initiatives propose an economic reorientation based on new industries and new ways of resource utilization of an ecologist-productivist nature or linked to emerging energy sectors, similar to the agrarian industrialism that seeks the valorization and profitability of the country. However, these new guidelines can have a high environmental cost.

These proposals are opposed by a growing number of initiatives that emerge from rural communities denouncing how the aggressive policies of agrarian industrialism erode the landscape and the traditional forms of land utilization, new proposals that look back to their own ways of managing the local spaces, based on a bond with the land and on the cultural and ecological values related to the territory; the outcome is a reaction to current ways of life, that liquid modernity defined by Bauman, characterized by the instability of the relationships between individuals and places or landscapes.

These proposals are often based on the enhancement of old local governance formulas; some of them were deactivated by the liberal State in the 19th century, but others endured until the 21st century or have been reinvented. This reassessment of old formulas does not seek a return to the past; instead, it does value management models that favor a greater

involvement in territorial politics and the relationship with state institutions, relying on traditional values and an ethnoecological knowledge of local populations.

The problem of the “commons” sits amidst a growing political, social and environmental concern about the rural environment, encompassing under its denomination a wide diversity of resources used in a collective or semicollective way, like pastures, forests, water, and marine resources.

The studies on the commons have got under way in recent years with the emergence of the concept of *New Commons*, an idea designed to theorize about the new role of citizens in a globalized political framework and their relationship with shared goods such as water, air, the oceans, biodiversity or the internet. Elinor Östrom's work has been key to questioning private property as the ideal form of government over natural resources. Her work is a harsh criticism of the arguments defended by Hardin: the overexploitation of jointly managed spaces, the breakdown of sustainability, the decrease of economic profitability and, lastly, collapse. Instead, Östrom focused on the institutions, associations and rules activated by the communities to regulate and control the use of the commons; free access is controlled through them and with it, overexploitation, using local knowledge as a tool to define rules that take into account the ecological capacities of the territory. The success of Östrom's approaches started a significant series of studies from the historical perspective that delved into the conditions that favor the emergence, success, and durability of these institutions based on collective management.

Furthermore, historical studies have stressed the need to carry out long term works that point out the main moments of rupture and transformation, for it is in those moments when the problems of commons management emerge in the written sources. When the ownership and use management are seen as natural and free of conflict, they are often absent in the documentation.

The historical studies have also emphasized the need to understand the forms of property and the access rights to resources, since several types of rights can be used for the same resources at the same time. It is necessary to bear in mind the friction that may exist, on the one hand between the law and legal rights, embodied in the documentation, and on the other, custom, the management methods developed by the peasantry based on daily experience that produces a detailed empirical knowledge, like geographical and climatic conditions and soil types, that inform decision-making on utilization and management. It

also has an important symbolic significance that casts the identity and the past of the group onto this space, practices that could be characterized as a “moral economy” as defined by E. P. Thompson.

The reflections made from Anthropology on private/individual and collective/public rights are also relevant, as well as the definition of semicomunal ownership. The combination of the three forms of ownership within communities has been explained, generally in terms of balance, but also in terms of ongoing conflict and tension. The ownership rights of individuals, families and the community are crossed by individual, semi-collective and collective practices that require the definition of a standard that regulates the neighborhood.

That’s why it is necessary, in the study of the commons, to specify the “community” that manages and defines those rights, in order to understand collective action and cooperation between social agents; the peasant community, using Wolf’s definition, is made up of a well-defined social system, with clear boundaries that define who are its members and who is alien. These communities are defined by the existence of a set of collective practices with which the members of the group identify, related to the ownership and management of production spaces, but also to the history, codes, symbols, and knowledge about the managed territory.

An important aspect of the community is “territorialization”: the territory shapes the local areas over which the communities have decision-making power, issuing a standard, privileges and obligations. These communities can be diverse: from the villages that have exclusive utilization of a territory, and the councils that control wide areas of pasture and forest, to the parishes that jointly share many communal spaces; or communities that reach agreements to utilize certain territories under the joint system of *faceria*. This means there are different types of communities, with different access rights to resources, that superimpose and overlap into dialectical relationships: horizontally, with other homologous communities, and vertically with higher social actors in the hierarchy that try to control the utilization of the commons.

The archaeological approach to the commons and all these related subjects is recent. Archaeological studies have focused on understanding the agrarian system, the forms of utilization and the chronology, analyzing the changes in the landscape through biology and geoarcheology. A long time settlement of mountain areas has been documented

thanks to the interest of the prehistorians, producing data for all historical periods. For instance, the interventions in livestock buildings provide a broad chronology that goes back to recent prehistory and shows the reuse of the same places over time. Furthermore, the archaeological methodology applied to agricultural structures (agricultural terraces, farmlands, irrigation systems, enclosures, and so on) allows us to delve into the design chronology of agricultural units, both those located in communal spaces, and those close to places of habitat and semi-collective use, providing us with qualitative information on the chronology of the formation of these places that have been discussed at length, especially in the Anglo-Saxon bibliography.

So, all these perspectives will be present in this seminar. The title emphasizes the archaeological perspective, but we do not want to exclude approaches from History and Anthropology. This way we can advance, from a complex point of view, to understand the management of the commons, and likewise, to clarify their history. It should be an unavoidable start to propose future options based on a deeper understanding of the state of the rural environment.